

The Place of Learning and Literacy in Physical Education

by

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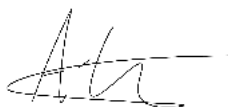
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Abstract

Background: Debates about the role and educational value of physical education have become a consistent feature in the subject's historical landscape. As a marginal subject occupying the lower strata of the traditional subject hierarchy, physical education has long strived for educational legitimacy, but with the spiralling downtrend of allocated time for physical education in the curriculum, these struggles are swiftly intensifying. Meanwhile, the physical education community seems oblivious to its own role as part of the problem, and proponents of physical education often declare with dogmatic certainty the subject's unique and vital contribution to the holistic development of children and young people. For instance, it is argued that physical education fosters not only the physical, but the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. However, insofar as these wider aspects of learning are either facilitated or evidenced, the rhetoric significantly outweighs the reality. In other words, the dearth of meaningful learning evidence emanating from physical education reduces many of its purported educational outcomes to unsubstantiated claims. In order to redress this incongruence, the physical education community must demonstrate a genuine commitment to these holistic educational claims through an integrative pedagogy of plurality. One way in which this might be achieved is through literacy. Literacy is a fundamental educational currency through which all subjects, apart from physical education, demonstrate that learning has taken place. Literacy is a vital conduit for learning and an invaluable vehicle for producing evidence of meaning-making. Therefore, pedagogical approaches underpinned by literacy could help to solve the 'PE problem' from within.

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to investigate the learning culture of physical education, to scrutinise the subject's supposedly holistic contribution to pupils' learning, and to explore the place of literacy for learning in physical education. By challenging the educational rhetoric of PE and by exploring the role of literacy in learning, this study has both iconoclastic and heterodox foundations - that is, the research interrogates cherished beliefs about the educational contribution of physical education and questions the lack of literacy in the subject. The research idea is that physical education is a goldmine of untapped educational possibility and this study hopes to go at least some way towards excavating it.

Methods: This research employs a qualitative methodology, drawing on a combination of methods pertaining to ethnographic visiting. More specifically, the study draws upon various ethnographic tools to collect data in educational settings that progress from primary

to secondary levels, including participant observations, field notes, interviews and focus groups. The inquiry occurred in three phases. *Phase one* presents a preliminary scoping exercise comprising postal surveys sent to pupils and teachers, interviews and focus groups with both primary teachers and secondary teachers of physical education, and a reflexive ethnodrama which illuminates a personal account of the researcher's lived experiences. *Phase Two* is informed by eight episodes of data collection: episode one comprises three focus groups with different primary and secondary teachers and school leaders; episode two contains a narrative account of a literacy coordinator in a secondary school; and episodes three to eight are informed by a twelve-week period of data collection using ethnographic tools in a primary school in the North West of England. Finally, *Phase Three* encompasses a nine-week period of data collection using ethnographic tools in a secondary school, also in the North West of England.

Findings and Implications: This inquiry revealed that the holistic educational claims made in the name of PE are, at best, overstated and, at worst, non-existent. Claims of producing wider educational outcomes might best be described as a set of rhetorical claims as opposed to holistic pedagogical realities. However, the use of literacy for learning in physical education has demonstrated how the subject's holistic, but hitherto invisible, learning claims can be facilitated and evidenced by producing tangible learning products born of the physicality of experience. Both the pupils and staff in the primary school were highly receptive to literacy for learning in physical education; the pupils seized upon the opportunity to engage in literacy relating to physical education and the staff fully embraced, supported and utilised it to their advantage. Pupils in physical education were enthused by, not resistant to, the widening of pedagogical practice. Moreover, this work helped to raise the profile of PE in the school. Contrary to this, the secondary physical education teachers in this study displayed strong resistance to what they perceive as the encroachment of literacy for learning in their subject. They tended to view literacy as either a burden on their workload or as the responsibility of other colleagues in the school. As a result, this study has exposed a chasm between primary and secondary teachers' attitudes toward literacy for learning in physical education.

Nevertheless, the learning evidence produced by the pupils in this study are testament to the learning power of the amalgamation of physical education and literacy. Therefore, one way in which to address the 'PE problem' is to embrace literacy for learning and, in doing so, recognise that this would not denote a conceptual abandonment of traditional physical

education. Instead, it would serve to bring about evidence of the subject's holistic contribution to learning and, in so doing, would enhance the educational status of physical education in schools. The physical education community would benefit from introspective practices and by revisiting the fundamental purpose of education, thus the educational purpose of physical education. This study calls for a conceptual recalibration of physical education, one which seizes upon the holistic educational value of literacy for learning in physical education. Literacy for learning in physical education presents new and fresh research opportunities, offering a new branch of inquiry exploring how literacy can enhance, not hinder, the educational value of physical education. The writing is on the wall, so to speak, but the decision of whether to read it lies with the physical education community.

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List of researcher's publications and conference presentations leading to and during the course of this study

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Conference Presentations:

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Preface

The origins of this inquiry stem from my lived experience as a teacher of secondary physical education (PE). Accordingly, whilst providing a rationale for the study at hand, this preface also serves as a methodological signpost. In other words, the initial motivations for this study are rooted in my own lived experiences as a teacher in the PE world and thus my personal experiences, both prior to and throughout the research, are not only acknowledged but are embraced and integrated from the outset. With a commitment to reflexivity, that is, my positionality as both an ex-teacher and now a researcher forms an integral methodological thread weaving throughout the study. This preface briefly explains the role of reflexivity in this study and outlines the context from which this research developed, while simultaneously introducing the reader to some of the more pertinent aspects of the researcher's background. The preface concludes with a philosophical metaphor which is intended to hover over the entire study.

The researcher's position – or *positionality* – is ascertained through a process of critical self-evaluation known as reflexivity which is now regarded as an important feature of qualitative inquiry (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003; Pitard, 2017). Positionality, as it pertains to qualitative research, is unperturbed by the elusive degree to which one's personal values may affect the research but instead draws attention to its inevitability and utility in research. Neuroscientist António Damásio (2006) proclaims that we are not merely thinking machines, instead we are feeling machines that think. Researchers cannot and should not be divorced from their lived experiences and embodied values. Foregrounding positionality, therefore, is a form of methodological disclosure but it should not be conflated with an apology. In fact, reflexive accounts within qualitative research demonstrate a commitment to openness and transparency as the researcher's personal experiences, presence in the field and their relationship to the researched are all laid bare to become an integrated part of the construction of knowledge.

My personal experiences within the PE world inevitably provide the backdrop for my philosophical beliefs in relation to the study. I intend therefore to position myself within the study and recognise that my pre-existing personal values are all-pervading throughout the research and will have both an impression on, and utility for, the study. This decision is based on my methodological alignment with Berger (2015) who contends that a commitment to

reflexivity and an awareness of one's own experiences is of paramount importance in qualitative inquiry. For these reasons, my previous and ongoing experiences will be shared.

I entered the teaching profession in 2013 with a conviction that PE – as proudly declared in my initial teacher training – makes a unique and valuable contribution to the holistic development of children and young people (Bailey, 2006; Bailey *et al*, 2009; Gray *et al*, 2021). Through PE, I was convinced, pupils could experience a breadth of learning opportunities to foster their physical, social, emotional and cognitive development (afPE, 2019). Within the first few months of teaching, however, it became unmistakably clear that the educational rhetoric espoused by the disciples of PE did not correspond with the reality of my experience. The so-called *wider aspects of learning*, such as intellectual pursuits, social goals or opportunities to nurture pupils' emotional development took a habitual backseat to the teaching of isolated sports skills and general game sense relating to a narrow selection of codified sports.

Still in my first twelve months of teaching, I sought to implement some apparently novel pedagogical approaches. These activities included a literacy-based homework task for a Year 8 PE class and a pupil-voice exercise which was later published as a chapter in *The Sports Monograph* (Palmer, 2014). A detailed reflective account of these experiences is provided in Chapter Three, but it is important to note that the negative departmental backlash to these learning activities served as the catalyst for this PhD research. Despite being widely regarded as a subject of marginal educational importance, the proponents of physical education seemed fiercely resistant to change (Kirk, 2011) and I became increasingly disillusioned with the state and status of PE. Furthermore, I was troubled by the apathy for change within the PE profession and felt compelled to break free from what, at the time, felt like the deliberate maintenance of self-delusion regarding learning in PE. That is, the holistic educational promises claimed by the PE community (afPE, 2019) were neither cultivated nor captured in practice and, despite being an undervalued subject, its teachers seemed averse to change. It appeared, therefore, that my PE colleagues were more concerned with maintaining a delusion of learning than with enacting pedagogical change. Ironically, these changes could bring PE into the fold of curriculum priorities and enhance the educational significance of the subject. Plato's Allegory of the Cave offers a useful metaphor for understanding this wilful ignorance and provides a philosophical backdrop to this inquiry.

The Allegory of the Cave (Figure 1) is one of the most famous passages in the history of Western philosophy. Presented by the Greek philosopher Plato in his work *Republic* (360 BCE trans: Waterfield, 1998), the Allegory of the Cave presents questions about the perception of reality or truth. Plato sets the scene by asking the reader to imagine a group of prisoners who have been shackled in an underground cave since childhood. They are unable to move as their hands, feet and necks are all locked into place. Their entire lives, therefore, have been spent facing the same way, being able only to see the wall in front of them. Behind them, in a space they cannot see, is a large burning fire pit and, in the space between the fire pit and the prisoners, there is a walkway on which passers-by will travel, carrying various objects and making different sounds. The light cast from the fire pit is obstructed by the passers-by, resulting in an elaborate show of silhouettes formed out of their shadows. Yet these silhouettes are the basis on which the prisoners' comprehension of reality exist; this *reality* is all they have ever known.

Eventually, one of the prisoners breaks free of his chains and is able to see the fire. Initially, the light hurts his eyes but eventually he makes his way out of the cave to learn that, until now, his interpretation of reality was inaccurate and incomplete. His newfound awareness makes him feel sympathy for his fellow prisoners, who remain shackled in the cave. Desperate to free them from their ignorance – by freeing them from their chains – he ventures back into the cave. Upon his arrival, he tries to convince the other prisoners about his discovery and implores them to break free and see it for themselves. Unaware of their state of delusion, however, the prisoners react with hostility and fiercely reject the possibility of an alternative reality. They are more comfortable in their state of ignorance, metaphorically shackled to their own version of reality and, like the PE community, demonstrate a strong resistance to change.



Figure 1: The Allegory of the Cave

Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis is organised around six chapters. Chapter One sets the scene in terms of providing the **background and context** to the state and status of physical education in schools. Discussing what is broadly termed the ‘PE problem’, this chapter draws upon existing literature relating to the historical and more recent debates regarding the place and purpose of PE in the school curriculum. Utilising relevant literature and theory, this chapter challenges the rhetoric surrounding the educational claims made in the name of physical education. The issues raised in this chapter, combined with the researcher’s lived experience as a teacher of secondary PE, serve to emphasise the rationale for this inquiry. The research aims, objectives and associated questions are then provided, and the chapter concludes with a critical discussion about the value of literacy for learning in physical education.

Chapter Two outlines the chosen **research paradigm and methodological principles** applied in the study. This chapter aims to explain the research paradigm (the *macro*), rationalise the methodology and methods (the *meso*), and justify the data collection strategies and data analysis techniques (the *micro*). The data collection strategies and their methodological congruence is then discussed (Richards & Morse, 2013), including a focus on data analysis techniques and sampling strategies. Ethical considerations are then discussed, and the chapter ends at the point of departure for the researcher.

Chapter Three presents the first of three *phases* of primary data collection. Phase One presents a discussion about the experiences and findings from a scoping exercise concerning the status of learning in PE. Drawing upon a combination of reflexive notes in conjunction with a variety of data collection strategies and presentation techniques, five episodes of data collection are presented, including personal reflections, postal surveys to pupils and PE staff, interviews with secondary PE teachers and a rapport-building visit to a primary school in advance of conducting fieldwork in that school. Chapter Three is therefore titled: **Phase One: Scoping the Field(s) through a Reflexive Lens**.

Chapter Four comprises eight episodes of data collection, including focus groups with teachers, the narrative account of a Literacy Coordinator in a secondary school, a twelve-week period of data collection using ethnographic tools in a primary school in the North West of England, an authentic focus group with pupils in the *learning moment*, the contribution of PE to a school magazine, an unstructured interview with a primary school

Head Teacher, a Celebration Assembly which communicated pupils’ learning across the school, and, finally, the primary school Head Teacher’s reflective comments about the fieldwork. Given the time spent in the primary school, Chapter Three is titled: **Phase Two: Researcher in Residence (Primary School)**.

Chapter Five discusses the experiences, data handling and findings of a nine-week phase of data collection using ethnographic tools in a secondary school located in the North West of England. Primarily drawn from participant observation field notes and one focus group, the data for Chapter Five is situated in one secondary school and is thus titled: **Phase Three: Researcher in Residence (Secondary School)**.

Chapter Six draws together the findings from the three *phases* of primary data collection in order to provide conclusions, implications and future opportunities.

Having relished the opportunity to undertake this PhD, it is fulfilling to reflect upon my own development as a researcher (Figure 2). Namely, from the mechanistic and procedural slavishness in the early parts of my MPhil research and Transfer VIVA – in which I gradually became a more confident social commentator – to the PhD level of synthesis and criticality. As a qualitative researcher, particularly in the context of ethnographic visiting, I have developed a genuine appreciation of finding the balance point between being “unmethodical” (Wolcott, 2005, p. 5) without abandoning “systematicity” (Greene, 2013, p. 253).

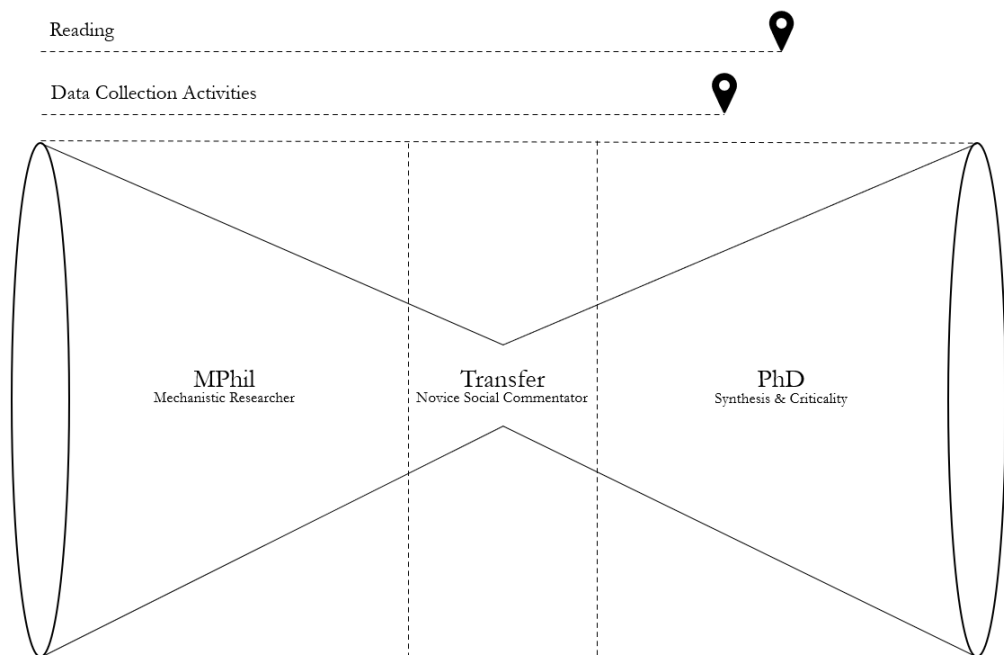


Figure 2: My Development as a Social Researcher

Chapter One

Introduction

We should not start with how physical education should be taught, or what teachers in physical education should teach in terms of activities. Rather, we have to start with the question of why – the educational purpose of physical education (Quennerstedt, 2019, p. 618).

Background and Context

Physical Education (PE) is a widely recognised feature of the compulsory educational landscape. According to a worldwide survey of school PE, 97% of countries either have a legal obligation or a general commitment to PE in schools (UNESCO, 2014). With such widespread and cross-cultural commitment, it might appear, at least on the surface, that PE is a highly regarded subject that enjoys a strong foothold in education. Contrary to this, however, the position and purpose of PE is a highly contested space (Smith & Parr, 2007) and, beneath the surface, PE is neither highly regarded nor in a secure curricular position. For instance, a cursory glance at the relevant literature reveals that both the value and function of PE have long been the subjects of fierce debate (Kirk, 1992; McNamee, 2005; Green, 2008) and PE across the world is generally perceived as having a lower educational status to other school subjects (Armour & Jones, 1998; Ozolinš & Stolz, 2013; UNESCO, 2014). At a local level, the relentless scrutiny of the what(s), why(s) and how(s) of PE has resulted in claims that both the ‘P’ and the ‘E’ in physical education are “under attack” (Quennerstedt, 2019, p. 612). For instance, concerns over the lack of *physical* in PE (Ofsted, 2013a) have been met with counterclaims regarding the lack of *education* in PE (Sprake & Temple, 2016). Notwithstanding the ideological commitments and educational preferences which underpin these contrasting views, the entire PE community is faced with the inescapable reality that curriculum time allocated to PE in schools has long been a matter of concern (Fairclough & Stratton, 1997; Hardman, 2009; Dudley & Burden, 2019). In recent years, however, curriculum time for PE has been spiralling downward (Youth Sport Trust, 2018). The increasingly vulnerable status of PE in school curricula signals a timely rationale to explore the potential factors associated with this issue.

This study will investigate the place and purpose of PE as a piece of the educational jigsaw, whilst being mindful of the overarching aims attributed to education. Neglecting the

wider role of education could result in the decontextualization of PE, which, in turn, might lead to an oversimplified view as to the role that PE plays, or should play, in learning. For instance, PE is often viewed merely as an opportunity for exercise, which significantly undermines its potential contribution to whole child development (Lear & Palmer, 2008). The *micro* analysis of PE, therefore, will occur against the backdrop of a *macro* appreciation for the broader educational context. Put another way, if PE is an impactful or meaningful school subject then it must be regarded as synonymous with learning.

Identifying and arranging the principal aims of education is challenging as they are invariably tied with the social, political, economic and individual contexts in which they arise (Haydon, 2013). Drawing on the work of Ryle (1949), Siegel (2003) presents the widely recognised assumption that, among other things, the role of education is to impart *knowledge*. More specifically, he outlines the perennial notion that pupils either develop propositional knowledge, learning *that*, and procedural knowledge, learning *how* (Siegel, 2003). There is a broader consensus, however, that the aims of education are interlaced with the holistic development of children and young people. For instance, Gross (1974, p. 56) states that the aims of education include “the transmission of knowledge, the instillation of values, and the development of intellectual, physical, social, and artistic skills and competencies”. The notion of whole child development is also captured in Steiner’s (1965) educational philosophy, which contends that all human activity falls under the tripartite of *thinking, feeling* and *willing*. More recently, Brighouse (2006) stresses the need for a learner-centred, not society-centric, education system which nurtures the development of the whole child. Such philosophies for education are increasingly prevalent. For instance, McGettrick (2005) argues that the purpose of education is to promote pupils’ holistic development and insists that learning should not be restricted to a narrow focus on cognitive development. Similarly, Ozolinš and Stolz (2013) suggest that the affective and psychomotor domains should be of equal value to the cognitive development in schools. Central to these points is that education can support the holistic development of pupils and, by seeking to expand traditional notions of learning in schools, these approaches champion the diverse ways of being in the world.

The Association for Physical Education (afPE) (2019) claims that PE makes a unique and vital contribution to the holistic development of pupils. For instance, it is argued that the outcomes of high-quality PE include, but are not limited to, the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of children and young people (afPE, 2019). These are laudable goals which, in theory, align with the holistic aims of education. In practice, however, the everyday

realities of PE suggest a narrow conceptualisation of the aims of PE, with an almost exclusive focus on the development of motor competence and sport skills (Hardman & Marshall, 2009). It would of course be incongruous for *physical* education to neglect physicality in learning. The point, however, is that the PE profession claims to contribute to a much broader set of educational goals and, while these learning experiences stem primarily from embodied experiences, the stated plurality of learning ambitions cannot be evidenced through a narrow focus on performance pedagogy. Sellers & Palmer (2008) suggest that many of the statements made about the contribution of PE to pupils' learning are underpinned by dogmatic beliefs and taken-for-granted assumptions. Consequently, the claimed holistic outcomes of PE (Bailey, 2006; Bailey *et al.*, 2009; afPE, 2019; Gray *et al.*, 2021) may appear more like unsubstantiated pronouncements than empirically derived evidence.

Kirk (2010, p. 121) identifies three potential futures of PE: “more of the same, radical reform, or extinction”. Urging the profession to adopt more reflexive approaches, he also insists that: “unless we first of all face up to and fully acknowledge the extreme seriousness of our current situation, until we grasp the nature of the problem, we cannot begin to contemplate a positive future” (Kirk, 2011, p. ix). This study is concerned with the potential futures of PE, and a consideration of these futures will serve as a point of departure. The impetus for this research is influenced by a yearning to *contemplate a positive future* for PE, the *seriousness* of the ‘PE problem’ is fully acknowledged from the outset and, by challenging the dogmatic certainty about its educational worth, this study hopes to go at least some way toward *grasping the nature of the problem*. Chief among the research aims therefore is to investigate how the PE profession might countervail its marginal status and unlock its educational efficacy through holistic pedagogical approaches. Perhaps the *attacks* on PE (Quennerstedt, 2019) should be rethought of as a response to the long overdue commitment on the part of PE practitioners to move the subject beyond *assumptions* of learning and into the realm of irrefutable *evidence*.

Evidence of learning in school is a pedagogical necessity. Whilst the concept of *learning* is the central focus of education, it is a difficult concept to define with any degree of finality. There are various theories, idiosyncrasies and intricacies associated with *learning* and it is understood in different ways in different contexts (Nagel & Scholes, 2017). However, Winch (1998, p. 154) discusses the “uselessness of grand theories of learning” due to the innumerable factors associated with learning and human diversity. In the context of school PE, however, it is vital that some form of tangible evidence born of engagement with learning

is produced, and in a mode whereby third parties might verify that learning has occurred. Of course, schools are but one domain in a wide range of settings where learning can take place (Ackoff & Greenberg, 2008), but this research is specifically interested in learning within the context of school-based physical education; learning which takes place within the school gates.

In the context of education, learning is characterised here as both a *process* and a *product* (Saljo, 1979; Purdie & Hattie, 2002; Tan, 2020). Various orientations to learning have been developed in the fields of psychology and educational psychology to better understand and explain the *processes* associated with learning. The five most common learning orientations include the behaviourist, cognitive, humanistic, social cognitive and constructivist orientations (Nagel & Scholes, 2017). There is no shortage of attention paid to the *processes* associated with learning, but the *products* of school-based learning receive little explicit attention. Exactly how pupils make meaning from and communicate their learning might itself be a taken-for-granted assumption. Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis, learning is defined as the public manifestation of privately acquired knowledge and understanding which evidences a change in behaviour. Teachers of all subjects across the curriculum – except, perhaps, physical education – have a shared understanding that literacy is both an essential tool and the dominant competency through which learning is communicated and evidenced (Palmer, 2014).

What constitutes learning in PE can of course be interpreted in different ways (Quennerstedt, Öhman & Armour, 2014). However, PE has been imbued with sport since the 1950s (Kirk, 2011) and the National Curriculum for Physical Education (NCPE) itself has been dominated by competitive sport for many years (Jung, Pope & Kirk, 2016), which has ostensibly “diluted or even drowned out the educational call for literacy in physical education” (Palmer & Sprake, 2018, p. 8). In 2004, however, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) created a National Strategy for literacy which included guidelines on the integration of literacy and PE (DfES, 2004). As if it were anticipating resistance from the PE profession, the strategy explicitly stated: “Incorporating writing into physical education is not intended to be writing for its own sake, but a method of extending the ways in which pupils learn and reflect about the subject” (DfES, 2004, p. 23). Of course, the success of such initiatives is dependent on how meaning and meaningful PE is conceptualised and implemented in schools. There is, of course, an important caveat to learning in schools: literacy is the fundamental currency by which all other subjects trade and exchange their

knowledge, but, to date, PE has only been window-shopping (Palmer, 2014). That literacy could enhance the educational status of PE is worthy of further consideration.

Literacy in learning could bring about numerous benefits for physical education. Not only could literacy enhance the perceived status of PE within the curriculum, but it could also enhance the pupils' learning experiences and fortify the professional identities of PE teachers. For instance, at the level of the curriculum, literacy could serve as a conduit for meaning-making by affording pupils the chance to reflect upon, share and communicate – through unequivocal parity with to other subjects – tangible evidence of holistic learning. Through this process of sharing and communicating, it is entirely possible that literacy in learning could form part of the assessment repertoire within physical education, including both formative and summative assessments relating to intellectual pursuits. Indeed, doing so would be considered valuable as part of a child's holistic education, which is a standard refrain in the PE community as an educational outcome of the subject (Bailey, 2006; Bailey *et al.*, 2009; afPE, 2019; Gray *et al.*, 2021).

Furthermore, from the perspective of the pupils, the integration of literacy within PE could stimulate motivation for learning and a sense of belonging in the subject, particularly those pupils who might be described as *kinaesthetically challenged* or *physically illiterate*. Pluralistic outcome claims require pluralistic requests, and both literacy- and oracy-based tasks could broaden the scope of PE outcomes (Sprake & Palmer, 2019a). An example of this might be to ask pupils to provide a written piece of work, reflecting on their embodied experiences of a movement-based experience or the ethical controversies of a sport-based lesson. Literacy, then, might serve as a bridge between physical education and those demotivated, uninspired pupils who struggle to see the value in PE, or associate the subject with *learning*. Moreover, PE-based literacy could strengthen PE teachers' sense of professional identity within the school community. With a bolstered educational legitimacy and increased curricular standing, they could stand shoulder-to-shoulder with other subject teachers, free from the longstanding sense of curricular inferiority (Houlihan, 1997). Teachers would of course need support with regard to implementing literacy in PE, both in terms of an ideological shift and also with appreciating what constitutes *meaning* in physical education.

A wide range of scholars express the need for teachers to be supported in developing pedagogical approaches and strategies that are engaging and personally relevant for learners, whereby adequate time is provided for reflection and meaning-making across different

contexts (O'Connor, 2019; Beni, Fletcher & Ní Chrónín, 2018; Brown, 2008; Ennis, 2013; Kretchmar, 2000; Lloyd, 2011; Penney, 2013; Thorburn & Stolz, 2017). The term 'meaning' in this study is broadly aligned with O'Connor's (2019, p. 1094) definition, who views meaning as the "connotative meanings that address personal associations related to movement that tell us interesting stories about who the performer is, what they feel and what they believe". Exactly how these *stories* might be communicated is a central curiosity in this study. In a school setting, for instance, it is important that pupils' experiences not only have personal meaning, but that they are also educationally meaningful (Stolz, 2014). The contention here is that the *movement* in PE is often dislocated from its potential *meaning* in education. In the school setting, movement without educational meaning is more akin to recreation and, just as other subjects utilise literacy to evidence learning, the role of literacy in schools to evidence meaning-making is paramount. Perhaps the root of the 'PE problem' is that current practice, albeit *process-oriented*, fails to harvest the tangible learning *products* analogous with meaning-making.

However, the pursuit of holistic learning evidence should not be conflated with a desire to reduce PE to quantitative observations or misleading metrics, nor should it be confused with concerns over the "new orthodoxy" (Reid, 1996a, p. 95) regarding the rise in examinable PE (Stidder & Wallis, 2003; Green, 2005). Such concerns are akin to the *McNamara Fallacy* (Bass, 1999), a criticism of decision-making based purely on quantitative observations at the expense of all others. It is important to note, however, the increased prevalence of examinable PE, such as GCSE and A-Level, was viewed as an opportunity to strengthen the academic credibility and overall status of the subject in schools (Macfadyen & Bailey, 2002). The ethos of this study, however, is not motivated by a need for metrics and measurement tools, but by a concern that the claimed holistic learning outcomes of PE (afPE, 2019) are not evidenced in practice. It is argued here that the chronic absence of learning evidence has been detrimental to the status of PE in schools. Social scientist Daniel Yankelovich (cited in Syverson, 2008, p. 109) captures this sentiment:

The first step is to measure whatever can be easily measured. That is okay as far as it goes. The second step is to disregard that which can't be measured or give it an arbitrary quantitative value. This is artificial and misleading. The third step is to presume that what can't be measured easily really isn't very important. This is blindness. The fourth step is to say that what can't be easily measured doesn't exist. This is suicide.

Providing evidence that holistic learning is taking place in PE will certainly not be *easy*, but considering the subject's vulnerable foothold in school curricula, it is nonetheless *important*. By embracing and integrating literacy for learning, the PE profession might engender more school-wide support and re-establish its status. At this juncture, however, it seems prudent to insert another caveat: the suggestion of literacy for learning in physical education does not for a moment suggest that the embodied, somatic, and corporeal aspects of learning in PE are educationally inferior. On the contrary, literacy could serve as an invaluable conduit for the physicality of learning to *go further* and *do more* as part of a child's education. This would seem more conducive to its holistic educational goals. Literacy for learning in physical education would not diminish the value of physicality in learning, nor would it infer the need to champion cognitive pursuits above it.

Renowned psychologist Carl Rogers (1969, pp. 3-4) famously criticised the passive learning observed in traditional classroom practice, insisting that: "Such learning involves the mind only. It is learning which takes place from the neck up. It does not involve feelings or personal meanings; it has no relevance for the whole person". Rogers' concerns about passive and rote learning are both shared and flipped in this study; *shared* in that rote learning and passive pupil experiences are far from desirable learning processes, and *flipped* in that PE seemingly facilitates learning which takes place from the 'neck down', which might also have 'no relevance for the whole person'. Rejecting the dualist conception of learning priorities – that is, the delusion of academic versus embodied learning – a central curiosity in this research is the potential to actively integrate the embodied and somatic experiences in PE with intellectual meaning-making, critical thinking and information-processing. The search for meaning is both central to and a universal disposition of what it is to be human (Frankl, 1985), thus the quest for *meaning* is a function of education. The etymology of 'meaning' refers to both *significance* and *intention* (Klinger, 2012). To facilitate meaning-making in education, therefore, pupils' learning experiences must have either personal or collective *significance* which should then be *intentionally* communicated to the world.

This process can be facilitated through a semiological approach to meaning-making. Semiotics is defined as "the relationship between a sign and its meaning" (Fiske & Hartley, 1978, p. 37). Literacy, as a form of communication, is closely tied with semiotics and literacy has historically been one of the prevailing channels through which meanings have been conveyed through space and time (Kell, 2006). On the issue of symbolic competence, Gross (1974, p. 57) asserts that meaning can be "purposefully communicated only within a symbolic

mode” and that the acquisition of symbolic competence must be a central aim of education. Literacy, as a form of symbolic competence, can act as the bridge between the *processes* and *products* of learning; it is the mode through which pupils in physical education can articulate their learning. Of course, no single pedagogical approach can account for the full complexity of learning. Indeed, as Polanyi (1966, p. 4) remarks: “we know more than we can tell”. Nevertheless, by integrating literacy for learning, teachers of physical education could potentially facilitate learning environments where movement and meaning do not pass one other by.

Literacy is a prerequisite for success both in school and in later life (Education Endowment Foundation, 2019). If teachers attend to the literacy requirements of their subject-specific contexts then they can increase their pupils’ chances of success in *their own* subjects (Collins, 2019). According to Draper and Siebert (2010), subject-specific teachers are often encouraged to integrate literacy into their teaching and yet, despite persuasive and sustained appeals, they remain largely resistant to its implementation in their subject. In fact, the authors draw on their experience as teacher educators and recall the “icy stares from physical education teachers” whilst a literacy specialist sought promote curriculum-wide literacy in a high school setting (Draper & Siebert, 2010, p. 20). While teachers recognise the importance of literacy, they often feel ill-equipped to implement it within their subject area (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2014), but the need for developing pupils’ subject-specific language and conventions is ever-increasing (Education Endowment Foundation, 2019). Therefore, as Collins (2019, p. 1) argues: “Secondary school teachers should ask not what they can do for literacy, but what literacy can do for them”. It could be argued, therefore, that literacy might lift the status of reasoning in PE and provide a means by which evidence of such reasoning is integrated with the learning processes and products born of the subject. This could enhance and broaden the pupils’ learning experiences in PE. The following section will discuss what is referred to hereafter as the ‘PE problem’.

The PE Problem: an historical issue with contemporary implications

Debates about the role and educational value of physical education are a consistent feature in the subject's historical landscape. Against the backdrop of curricular insecurity (Houlihan, 1997), the role and purpose of PE is the subject of fierce debate at philosophical (Capel & Whitehead, 2013), pedagogical (Tindall & Enright, 2013) and political (Johnrose & Maher, 2010; Sprake & Walker, 2015) levels. Even the definition of physical education lacks unified consensus (Capel & Whitehead, 2013; Sprake & Temple, 2016). Whilst debates continue, the inferior reputation and marginal position of PE persists. In fact, it has long been acknowledged that physical education has a low status in schools and is undervalued within many school communities (James, 2011). In large part this is due to physical education not being viewed as an academic subject (Sparkes & Templin, 1992; Sparkes, Templin, & Schempp, 1993).

This marginalised status has significant implications for PE teachers' personal and professional identities. The peripheral curricular existence and questions about the degree to which PE is educationally meaningful has notable effects on PE teachers' sense of self-worth and motivation (Mäkelä & Whipp, 2015; Whipp *et al.*, 2007). Over thirty years ago, for instance, Sparkes, Templin and Schempp (1990) discovered the challenges that PE teachers experience in seeking to legitimise themselves within the broader school culture. The authors discuss how PE teachers feel culturally disenfranchised and devalued in many school communities, and argue that "to have one's subject devalued and marginalised is to have one's self and personal sense of worth devalued and marginalised" (Sparkes, Templin & Schempp, 1990, p. 6). Furthermore, the authors argue that if PE teachers remain ill-equipped to question the status quo or challenge the structures that constrain them, then they will remain "on the outside looking in" (Sparkes, Templin & Schempp, 1990, p. 25). Moreover, the authors recommend that initial teacher training should provide student teachers with "insights into the micropolitical realities of school life with a view to empowering those students who have chosen to teach a marginalised subject" (Sparkes, Templin & Schempp, 1990, p. 20). That PE teachers should be *empowered* - even *trained* - to deal with marginality in their professional role serves to demonstrate how encultured the low status of physical education has become.

While the marginal role of PE receives considerable attention in physical education literature, there are nevertheless various success stories. For instance, Cothran (2001) illustrates

the potential for curriculum change and innovation from the ground up. By contrasting against organisational initiatives or government agendas, she pays tribute to the change that teachers can initiate themselves from within their role as physical educators (Cothran, 2001). The author also highlights the work of Rovegno and Bandhauer (1997a; 1997b), who trace a primary PE teacher's implementation of a large-scale curricular evolution, stemming from a sense of individual empowerment to move from an *activity*-based curriculum to one that is *movement*-based. Similarly, a study by Pope and O'Sullivan (1998) chronicles the experiences of a PE teacher who, by implementing a Sport Education model in a new school, confronted his own personal beliefs and assumptions about physical education, while challenging the cultural complacency in his new department. The authors recognise that, in order to "accommodate positive change, educators need to persist with initiatives until they shift the particular culture. In some contexts this may even require dismantling aspects of that culture" (Pope & O'Sullivan, 1998, p. 224). Despite the teacher experiencing various cultural and contextual challenges – that is, some pupils exploited his lack of cultural capital at the new school, others did not feel ready for the leadership roles associated with Sport Education, and some of his colleagues preferred to teach PE on a day-to-day, off-the-cuff basis with no accountability for learning – he still managed to implement curricular change. These examples demonstrate what curriculum innovations can be achieved by individual PE teachers, and how they can seek to increase the *meaning* of their subject, providing that they avoid slipping into the "embracing arms of conformity and complacency" (Pope & O'Sullivan, 1998, p. 225).

More recently, Fletcher *et al* (2021) use a range of scholarly insights (see Arnold, 1979; Chen, 1998; Ennis, 2017; Jewett & Bain, 1985; Kretchmar, 2007; Metheny, 1968; O'Connor, 2019) to highlight that ideas to promote meaningful physical education are not new. Despite advocating for learning across numerous domains (Fletcher *et al.*, 2021), however, their conceptualisation of PE seems anchored in the promotion of a commitment to physical activity underpinned by intrinsic motivation – that is, being active for the sake of activity in its own right, for an intrinsic joy of movement. There is of course a general consensus that PE is about preparing children and young people for a lifetime of physical activity (McEvoy, Heikinaro-Johansson & MacPhail, 2017). However, this conceptualisation is at odds with the holistic outcomes claimed for PE (afPE, 2019). Furthermore, whilst physical education does continue to make 'friends' it is frequently criticised for making 'enemies' with children and young people (Evans & Davies, 1986, p. 15). Research indicates

that physical education can, in fact, reduce pupils' motivation to be physically active rather than increase it (Lewis, 2014) and some pupils develop sophisticated *hiding techniques* to avoid participation in PE (Lyngstad, Hagen & Aune, 2016). Perhaps the processes and products of learning in physical education are overly restrictive and narrowly conceptualised. For instance, Kirk (2010, p. 3) outlines the pitfalls of lessons which promote the development of skills in isolation and how typical PE lessons are themselves abstracted from the whole:

In games such as basketball, to take a typical case that illustrates the situation in many other games, pupils practice various forms of passing the ball such as chest pass and bounce pass, various forms of shooting such as the set shot and lay-up, how to dribble the ball, and perhaps some techniques for guarding players. In swimming, they learn the techniques of the main strokes and water safety. In gymnastics, they practise movements on the floor such as rolls, cartwheels and balances, and possibly some apparatus work. And so on. The key point to note about this teaching and learning of techniques is that these practices are typically abstracted from the whole activity; they are typically decontextualised practices (Kirk, 2011, p. 3).

These examples demonstrate not only that conventional skill acquisition lessons lead to overly fragmented and decontextualised practices, but that the sportified curriculum more generally is abstracted from the notion of holistic learning. Performance pedagogies leave little to no curricular space for negotiating morals, ethics or citizenship, as per the *PE promise* (afPE, 2019). Furthermore, the dynamic and vibrant setting of the PE lesson can create a delusion of learning, particularly if learners' embodied experiences are void of further engagement. Nevertheless, scholars have made various attempts to broaden the potential outcomes of physical education, including, for example, *Teaching Games for Understanding* (Bunker & Thorpe, 1983), *Health-Based Physical Education* (Haerans *et al.*, 2011), *Sport Education* (Siedentop, 1994), the *Cultural Studies* approach to PE (Kinchin, 1997), and *Sport for Peace* (Ennis *et al.*, 1999). Each of these approaches will now be briefly discussed in turn.

A widely popularised, implemented and researched model in PE is Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU). This pedagogical model was developed by Bunker and Thorpe (1982), popularised by Thorpe, Bunker and Almond (1986), and is nested within a range of game-centred approaches (Hastie & Mesquita, 2019). The central idea behind TGfU is that pupils should develop an appreciation of the specific games and their associated tactical requirements, prior to the development of specific motor skills. In other words, as Butler (1996, p. 17) puts it: "teaching what to do should precede teaching how to do it". The TGfU model comprises six stages, including modified games, game appreciation, tactical awareness,

appropriate decision-making, practising the skill, and returning to the game (Bunker & Thorpe, 1982; Werner *et al.*, 1996).

The TGfU model brings about various benefits, namely that pupils become engrossed in learning, involved in their own decision-making and experience a shift from skill execution to broader tactical understanding (Butler, 1996). However, like all pedagogical models, TGfU has received scrutiny. For instance, time constraints impacting upon the effective implementation of the model (Barba-Martin *et al.*, 2020), the need for pupils to have pre-existing skill proficiency in order to enhance overall game performance (Holt *et al.*, 2006), and, that teachers struggle with both the “pedagogical intentions” and the “pedagogical content knowledge” required of the TGfU approach (Stolz & Pill, 2014, p. 60). Moreover, despite the shift from the ‘technical’ to the ‘tactical’, TGfU is not wide-ranging enough to facilitate the claimed holistic outcomes of physical education, although with the emphasise on *game-time*, it could be argued that the model could contribute to health-enhancing physical activity.

According to the Office for National Statistics (2022), there are 8.9 million pupils attending schools in England, so it is perhaps unsurprising that schools have been identified as key settings for the promotion of healthy active lifestyles (Jessiman *et al.*, 2019). The rationale for promoting health in schools is often due to the fact that pupils are a captive audience for the diffusion of healthy living concepts and that those pupils may also be a catalyst for societal change (Pearson *et al.*, 2012). This ambition for change is increasingly important given the close association between overweight or obese children and their overweight or obese parents (Conolly & Craig, 2019). Historically, health has been a central aspect of physical education discourse (Kirk, 2020) and the spotlight for health promotion in schools often focuses on PE specifically (Cale & Harris, 2013).

Critically tracing the development of different approaches, models and acronyms relating to Health-Based Physical Education, Hareans *et al.* (2011, p. 325) state that, despite their various forms and terminological differences, they are all “united by a concern for health rather than skill or sport outcomes”. The notion of general health promotion has been both a widespread rationale and an enduring justification for the legitimacy of PE in schools (Mong & Standal, 2019). The ultimate goal of Health-Based Physical Education is to foster and cultivate the attitudes and skills which enable pupils to “develop active identities and lifelong healthy physical activity habits” (Evangelio *et al.*, 2021, p. 25). This is an important and timely

issue because a third of pupils in England are currently either overweight or obese by the time they transition from primary to secondary school (Ijaz *et al.*, 2021).

However, the problem with this approach for PE is twofold. Firstly, PE can neither address nor be held responsible for societal health challenges alone. According to Fox *et al* (2004), pupils spend approximately 1% of their waking time in PE, meaning that the subject cannot address their physical activity requirements alone. Cale & Harris (2013) go further by suggesting that, whilst PE does have ‘a’ role in tackling health concerns in children, namely obesity, it cannot nor should not be held solely responsible for reducing them. Secondly, a pedagogical fixation on health promotion could result in an overly narrow educational focus which reproduces the prevailing conceptualisation of ‘ability’ in PE to that of physical competence (Evans, 2004). This could come at the expense of other important avenues for learning and holistic development. Nyberg and Larsson (2014, p. 126) argue that, from the health-centric view of PE, “learning something is not a matter of importance” and that PE-for-health simply aims to keep pupils physically active on the taken-for-granted assumption that doing so will lead to future healthy lifestyles. Gray *et al* (2021, p. 2) highlight that PE has the potential to “contribute to a broader and more socially just range of learning experiences that cater for all learners”. One approach which has sought to broaden the educational outcomes of PE is Sport Education.

Sport Education is a curriculum model that was developed by Darryl Siedentop (1982) and subsequently popularised in his book *Sport Education: Quality P.E. through Positive Sport Experiences* (1994). Sport Education comprises six basic features – seasons, affiliation, formal competition, culminating events, record keeping, and festivity – and the model was designed to provide “authentic” and “educationally rich” learning experiences in the context of physical education (Siedentop, 1998, p. 18). Furthermore, Siedentop (1998, p. 20) specified three central aims for Sport Education, which are to enable pupils to become “competent, literate, and enthusiastic sports persons”. Elaborating on these aims, Kirk (2006b, p. 259) describes these characteristics in more detail:

A competent sports person is someone one who has developed skills and strategies to the extent that he or she can participate successfully in a game. A literate sports person understands and is knowledgeable about the rules, traditions, and values associated with specific sports, and can also distinguish between good and bad sport practices. An enthusiastic sports person plays and behaves in ways that preserve, protect, and enhance the sport culture.

From the outset, therefore, it is clear that Sport Education addresses at least some of the gaps left by a curriculum focused purely on Health Based Physical Education. Discussing the key milestones and development of Sport Education, Kinchin (2006, p. 597) highlights the general incompleteness of learning through sport in traditional PE, by highlighting how such practices are typically “decontextualised” from the whole. In doing so, he advocates for the original rationale for Sport Education, presented by Siedentop (1994, pp. 7-8):

Skills are taught in isolation rather than as part of the natural context of executing strategy in game-like situations. The rituals, values and traditions of a sport that give it meaning are seldom mentioned, let alone taught in ways that students can experience them. The affiliation with a team or group that provides the context for personal growth and responsibility in sport is noticeably absent in physical education. The ebb and flow of a sport season is seldom captured in a short-term sport instruction unit. It becomes clear that, too often, physical education teaches only isolated sport skills and less than meaningful games. Students are not educated in sport.

As a response to this, the Sport Education model offers a student-centred approach (Alexander *et al.*, 1998) which strives to educate pupils about, though and in sport, catering for a wide range of skills, competencies and characteristics. As a result, Sport Education has also been viewed as a response to perceived exclusionary practices in physical education by offering all pupils a “positive, inclusive, engaging, and enjoyable sport experience” (Kinchin, 2006, p. 597). One reason it can achieve learning environment this is through its clearly defined commitment to fair play (Almond, 1997) and, as Wallhead and O’Sullivan (2005) point out, Sport Education can also foster pupils’ personal and social development through its commitment to teamwork, student responsibility and trust. As with all pedagogical models, Sport Education has received a degree of scrutiny. For instance, despite being an advocate for Sport Education himself, Hastie (2000) warns of the potential problems associated with *pupil leadership* being a central driver for learning within the Sport Education model. Teachers have expressed concern about relinquishing responsibility for teaching content, such as skills or decision-making, by handing it over to the pupils (Wallhead & O’Sullivan, 2005). A defining feature of the Sport Education model, however, is its pedagogical flexibility, and some models advocate for increased, not decreased, pupil control over their own learning. One of these models is the Cultural Studies approach.

One way in which researchers have sought to broaden the outcomes of physical education is by implementing a Cultural Studies approach. In response to calls for PE to develop pupils who can challenge taken-for-granted assumptions (Kirk & Tinning, 1990) and who can become critical consumers, not passive recipients, of sport and physical activity (Siedentop, 1994; 1995), the Cultural Studies approach to physical education was developed and popularised (Kinchin, 1997; Kinchin & O’Sullivan, 1999; Kinchin & O’Sullivan, 2003; O’Sullivan & Kinchin, 2015).

The Cultural Studies approach to physical education aims to develop meaningful connections between pupils’ experiences of PE in school and the opportunities for sport and physical activity in the school environment, wider community and national contexts (Kinchin, 2006). The Cultural Studies approach was developed in an effort to establish an “integrated curriculum framework to study sport and physical activity from a sociocultural perspective” (Kinchin & O’Sullivan, 1999, p. 41). This approach affords pupils the opportunity to “present and defend their ideas related to issues of social justice in sport and physical activity” (Kinchin & O’Sullivan, 1999, p. 41).

More recently, O’Sullivan *et al* (2015, p. 337) describe how the Cultural Studies approach to PE enables pupils to “develop as literate and critical consumers of sport, physical activity, and physical cultures”. Pupils are afforded the opportunity to engage in a specific physical pursuit, such as sport, dance or outdoor and adventurous activities, which is supplemented with a critical analysis of the role and meaning of such activities in their own lives, in the wider school and community, and in wider society (O’Sullivan *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, this approach encourages children to “question taken-for-granted assumptions about sport, fitness, health, and physical education in their school, community, and wider society” (O’Sullivan *et al.*, 2015, p. 341), giving pupils the pedagogical platform on which to identify and express themselves as critical consumers (Siedentop, 1994; 1995). It is important to note, however, that it has not always been considered the role of PE teachers to foster pupils’ *critical literacy* (O’Sullivan *et al.*, 2015), and some resistance to this approach might be anticipated. However, in a curricular landscape dominated by traditional games, the Cultural Studies approach offers exciting pedagogical opportunities for physical education, as emphasised by O’Sullivan *et al* (2015, p. 338):

We want students who can question and challenge the status quo related to the inclusivity (or exclusivity) of physical activity cultures for different cohorts of young people. We also want them to explore who or what influences the

sporting/physical activity infrastructures available to them and others in schools and communities. We want students who can unravel the hidden agendas and complexities around the movement culture in their school and community and make known/public who is potentially oppressed and silenced in the physical activity, sport, and physical cultures locally and nationally. We want students to see themselves as part of diverse cultures and to be able to both connect school-to-home learning and reflect critically upon this learning.

Encouraging pupils to question and challenge, unravel the hidden agendas, and reflect critically on their learning involves an increasing shift toward pupil responsibility. The pedagogical model known as *Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility* (TPSR) (Hellison, 1995; 2003) was developed in pursuit of this goal. In a fundamental sense, the TPSR model can be summarised as teaching pupils to take personal and social responsibility through physical activity (Hellison, 2011). Parker and Stiehl (2015, p. 175) define responsibility as the “personal acceptance of being answerable for our conduct concerning others, our surroundings, and ourselves”, which includes “fulfilling our obligations, keeping our commitments, striving to do and be our personal and moral best, and nurturing and supporting one another”. The TPSR model is therefore inherently value-laden, but, as Hellison (2010, p. 6) remarks, “values are central to human relationships, decision-making, and the development of life skills”.

The purported educational benefits of the TPSR model include improved attendance, outcomes and conduct (Wright *et al.*, 2010), pupils’ enhanced appreciation of effort, respect, leadership skills and goal-setting for their possible futures (Walsh *et al.*, 2012), and the teaching of important values (Llopis-Goig, 2011). Moreover, the TPSR model is associated with more supportive learning environments (Gordon, Thevenard, & Hodis, 2011), greater self-efficacy (Escarti, Gutiérrez, Pascual, & Marin, 2010) as well as a reduction in aggressive or disruptive behaviour and improved self-control and conflict resolution (Pozo *et al.*, 2018).

Unfortunately, however, the acceptance and implementation of deliberate pedagogical approaches that develop pupils’ character, such as TPSR, has been sluggish within the PE community, despite claims of such outcomes being historically integral to the educational claims made by and for PE (Hellison, 2010). In fact, TPSR has not materialised as an important educational focus, and the drive for increased pupil responsibility has taken “a backseat to teaching basics and to standardized testing” (Parker & Stiehl, 2015, p. 176). This is particularly disappointing and somewhat illuminating, given the ongoing claims that

PE contributes to whole-child development (Bailey, 2006; Bailey *et al.*, 2009; afPE, 2019; Gray *et al.*, 2021).

There are models, however, which embraced the notion of personal responsibility and attempted to integrate this with the core principles of Sport Education (Kinchin, 2006). For instance, the Sport for Peace model (Ennis *et al.*, 1999) gives primacy to conflict resolution within the essential framework of Sport Education. The outcome of this development was a successful “hybrid model” which sought to develop pupils’ ability to compromise and negotiate in response to conflict (Kinchin, 2006, p. 604). This would certainly seem a valuable *life skill* for pupils to develop and should perhaps be a key consideration within teachers’ pedagogical approaches. The degree to which these broader educational outcomes are achieved, or indeed strived for, remains questionable.

School subjects, however, are human inventions in that “they are socially constructed and constituted by humans” (Lawson, 1991, p. 286). PE therefore is also a social construct, meaning it can be continually reshaped and redefined in dialogic concert with the social and cultural contexts. This study seeks to continue the dialogue and locate the educational meaning, not abstracted from, but somewhere within physical education.

Realms of Meaning in Physical Education

The contributions that PE makes to learning are frequently expressed in relation to Arnold’s (1979) seminal work in which he posits three dimensions of movement which are educationally valuable: education *about* movement, education *through* movement and education *in* movement. Arnold’s assertion that PE can educate *about*, *through* and *in* movement has been highly influential in shaping policy documents (DfES/DCMS, 2004), curriculum development (Brown & Penney, 2012) and advocacy statements (Talbot, 2008). In formulating his assertions about PE, Arnold draws on the work of Phenix (1964) who, in his book *Realms of Meaning*, lays out an influential formulation of what should be contained within curricula for general education. Keen to assert that the fullest development of human beings “requires education in a variety of realms of meaning rather than in a single type of rationality” (Phenix, 1964, cited in Arnold, 1979, p. 163), Phenix lays out six realms of meaning which should be included within the school curricula:

1. *Symbolics*, which denotes the use of symbols to indicate or represent an idea, object, or relationship. For instance, in ordinary language, literacy and mathematics.
2. *Empirics*, which comprises physical science, biology, psychology, and social science.
3. *Aesthetics*, covering music, the visual arts, the arts of movement, and literature.
4. *Synnoetics*, which relates to the importance of personal knowledge.
5. *Ethics*, dealing with rightness and wrongness as well as moral knowledge.
6. *Synoptics*, which are concerned with integrative and interpretive realms, such as history, religion, and philosophy.

These realms of meaning denote a holistic conceptualisation of curriculum design. The two realms which Arnold (1979, p. 165) builds upon, in order to bolster the *meanings* associated with movement in schooling, are “the arts of movement” – which come under the general umbrella of *aesthetics* – and the breadth of “personal knowledge” – which is encapsulated by the *synnoetics* realm. In formulating this argument, Arnold (1979, p. 167) argues compellingly that “to deny movement is to deny one aspect of the growth of consciousness”. The concerns expressed in this study neither challenge nor run counter to the notion that PE can “do you good” (Evans & Davies, 1986, p. 15) and there is no call to reject movement as a valuable contributor to holistic development. Be that as it may, to deny pupils the opportunity to engage intellectually with or philosophise about their movement experiences is to deny other aspects of their holistic growth. For instance, pupils’ experiences in PE could provide a unique platform upon which symbolics, empirics, ethics and synoptics can be facilitated as part of a holistic education. This is particularly pertinent in light of the holistic outcomes claimed in the name of PE (afPE, 2019).

Given their longevity in buttressing the place of PE in schools, the educational contribution of Arnold’s three dimensions of movement – education *about*, *through* and *in* movement – will now be considered in more depth. Before doing so, it is important to note that Arnold (1979, p. 168) stressed that these dimensions of movement are “overlapping and interdependent” and that, in the context of education, this should not only be acknowledged but should be brought about whenever possible.

Education *about* movement

Education *about* movement represents a rational or intellectual form of enquiry. As a subject to be studied, this dimension encompasses areas such as “anatomy, physiology, physics,

psychology, sociology, anthropology, aesthetics and philosophy” (Arnold, 1979, p. 169). This dimension refers to the theoretical enquiries about movement, many of which have practical utility, such as theorising about the best way to lift and carry an object, which pertains to movement knowledge of a propositional nature. One of the clear benefits of this dimension, at least in education, is that pupils’ knowledge and understanding can be made “public and objective, in principle shareable, and therefore communicable” (Arnold, 1979, p. 170). Communicating this rational movement knowledge relies on symbolic competence and thus the value of literacy for learning in physical education should not be underestimated. On the issue of education *about* movement, however, Whitehead (2020, p. 91) questions whether propositional knowledge is, or indeed whether it should be, part of the educational contributions of PE by stating:

It can be argued that the role of the physical education teacher must be first and foremost to provide appropriate learning experiences in the form of physical activity to enhance learners’ movement competence. In most cases any real depth of understanding would need an extended amount of time in lessons for explanation, exemplification and discussion, and, it is argued, this would seem out of place in physical education.

Developing learners’ movement competence is commonly identified the principal goal of the PE teacher. However, physical education itself is a value laden social construct (Kirk, 1992) and it could also be argued therefore that the role of the PE teacher is not chiefly to enhance learners’ movement competencies, but to work toward a set of pluralistic educational outcomes. What’s more, the PE teacher’s role need not be viewed as hierarchical – that is, where the enhancement of learners’ physical competence resides at the apex whilst other educational goals are subordinated – and instead could be non-hierarchical with an equal standing of pedagogical modalities and ambitions. For instance, Singleton (2013) points out the commonplace assumption that most curriculum areas enable pupils to utilise textbooks as a means of augmenting their learning, but that this practice is generally not deemed appropriate in the context of PE. Justificatory utterances for this situation typically manifest in the linguistic realm of dualism, in that the mind and body are viewed as separate and PE should not be forced to bend to an academic conceptualisation of learning. However, the dichotomies associated with dualism are unhelpfully simplistic and PE may in fact benefit – at least in terms of educational status – from the integration of different forms of symbolic competence and producing evidence of learning experiences. This would seem important if the holistic educational claims made on behalf of physical education are to manifest themselves as products

of learning. Arnold would likely agree, however, that propositional knowledge becomes meaningful and useful “only against the backdrop of embodied experience” (Gill, 2000, p. 100).

Education *through* movement

Education *through* movement “aims to enhance and harmonize the physical, intellectual, social and emotional aspects of a growing individual chiefly through professionally selected and directed physical activities” (Arnold, 1979, p. 176). Education *through* movement is based on the premise that the physical activities associated with PE can serve as a means to facilitate broader outcomes, regardless of whether the activities themselves are intrinsically valuable (Arnold, 1979). From this perspective, activities such as games, gymnastics, dance, athletics, and outdoor and adventurous pursuits are educationally valuable not only because of their intrinsic worth but because of the by-products, spin-offs and wider outcomes they are assumed to produce. For instance, Bailey (2003, p. 8) makes the case that education *through* movement provides an excellent opportunity for pupils to engage in language. Hopper, Grey and Maude (2000, p. 91) describe the opportunity to translate movement into language as a “treasure chest of descriptive, directional and action words for children to explore and experience”. Moving beyond oracy, however, which is bound by temporal and transitory exchanges in learning, translating movements into literacy or other symbolic forms might result in more permanent *products* of learning.

Whitehead (2020, p. 88) states that education *through* movement deals with such areas as “cognitive development, aesthetic and moral education, fostering sound social relationships”, but swiftly warns of two potential dangers of using PE as a means to achieve other educational ends. The first danger relates to the “almost impossible” task of evidencing that PE positively impacts upon such areas as moral education or cognitive development, and the second pertains to the likelihood that other subject areas already contribute to these broader aspects, leaving physical education in a tenuous curricular position (Whitehead, 2020, p. 93). From this perspective, it could be argued that the wider matters in learning, such as those of a moral or cognitive nature, are not the responsibility of PE teachers and that the *almost impossible* task should be overlooked. However, this would be selling the pupils short of the holistic education that PE purports to offer (afPE, 2019).

Arnold clearly recognises the slipperiness of making broader educational claims in PE – or what Sellers and Palmer (2008) might term *aims and dreams* – and astutely cautions that

“what is actually accomplished is always dependent upon a set of transactions between the teacher and the learner” and that the success of these transactions will rely upon “the intelligent utilisation of those situations that arise” (Arnold, 1979, p. 173). Whitehead acknowledges Almond’s words of caution and, in doing so, acknowledges that it is not *what* is being taught necessarily, but rather *how* it is taught which can lead to wider educational outcomes. What Whitehead omits in her critical discussion, however, is Arnold’s insistence that these organic, spontaneous and unintended *transactions* can, in fact, be made to arise *intentionally* by the teacher’s deliberate facilitation of their occurrence. Merely utilising these opportunities as they arise will, at best, create spontaneous and temporal learning opportunities which might rarely be communicated beyond the moment and, at worst, be something that teachers can superficially assume is taking place in the minds of the pupils so as not to make any pedagogical commitment to this dimension. These transactions should not be left to chance and their intelligent ‘utilisation’ may ultimately hinge on careful forethought. Finding the appropriate balance is of course a desirable outcome, as Whitehead (2020, p. 92) warns of a disproportionate focus on achieving wider educational goals:

A cautionary word is needed here in that the focus of physical education is generally understood to be movement development. There could be a danger of so much attention being given to achieving broad educational goals, such as developing communication skills, that less actual physical activity takes place. A balance needs to be struck.

It is perhaps this general understanding, however, that holds the status of PE under a glass ceiling. There may be a consensus that PE focuses on movement development, but a parallel consensus also exists whereby PE is regarded as less important to other curriculum areas. Perhaps there is something to be gleaned from the adage: *If you do what you’ve always done, you’ll get what you’ve always gotten*. If PE is to position itself as a curricular imperative, then a reconceptualization of its fundamental aims and objectives is perhaps warranted. If one is an advocate of physical *activity*, then Whitehead’s caution is straightforward. If one is an advocate of physical *education*, then perhaps the only real danger is the ongoing doubt about its educational worth. Clearly, physical activity and education have overlapping features, but the assumption that less physical activity inevitably results in an inferior learning experience is erroneous. Of course, a balance must be struck, whereby intellectual pursuits are viewed not as an obligation but as an opportunity to augment physicality in learning (Sprake & Palmer, 2019a), but it currently seems that this balance is detrimentally weighted toward physical activity at the expense of learning.

Education *in* movement

Whereas education *about* movement refers to rational movement knowledge, and education *through* movement refers to the extrinsic value of PE activities, education *in* movement contends that movement activities are intrinsically worthwhile in and of themselves. Arnold (1979, p. 177) observes that an educational experience is “to be caught up in a qualitative process of becoming” and that, in this dimension, the facilitation of activities should be done “for their own sakes”. For Whitehead (2020, p. 88), this dimension pertains to the know-*how* or tacit knowledge, which comprises “knowledge we have of how to carry out habitual movement tasks”. The invitation to make sense of these dimensions provides opportunities for learners to situate themselves within their physical culture, understand their socio-cultural environment and move toward self-actualisation (Arnold, 1979).

Whitehead (2020) discusses the implications of Arnold’s three themes related to education *in* movement. These themes include sport and dance initiation, involvement in activities that are engaged in for their own intrinsically rewarding sake, and self-actualisation. Firstly, Whitehead illustrates the impact of an activity-centred PE curriculum related to the initiation into sport and dance activities. She argues that teachers have become “teachers of activities rather than teachers of learners” (Whitehead, 2020, p. 94). She goes further to highlight the impact that this has had on PE in the UK and how in this sense it might be a recruiting tool for those determined to identify the next elite athletes:

If named activities and initiation into those activities that have the highest profile in a culture, together, become the focus of physical education, the result could be, as in, for example, the UK, a curriculum directed to participation in competitive team games, such as football and rugby. Furthermore, this approach can all too readily ‘dance to the tune’ of those who see physical education as instrumental in bringing prestige to the country through international sporting success in key activities such as Olympic events. An insidious corollary of this is a focus on the identification and promotion of talent in physical education, at the expense of the majority of the learners (Whitehead, 2020, p. 94).

Not only would this view of PE result in the alienation of many learners, but it would also perilously overlook the subject’s potential to support pupils’ holistic development. In outlining the three dimensions of movement, Arnold makes clear their

conceptual differences whilst emphasising their interdependence and stressing that there is no artificial divide between them:

If movement were conceived of only in intellectualistic terms or what can be propositionally stated about it, it would be but a hived-off and disembodied academic pursuit. Similarly, if movement was seen only as a means of serving ends other than its own it would remain purely instrumental in character and not worthy of being educative in its own right (Arnold, 1979, p. 177-178).

Notwithstanding Arnold's influential contribution, Whitehead (2020, p. 90) argues that it "has not been able to establish the uniqueness of the subject, nor improve the respect shown to the subject as a significant aspect of schooling". The concerns raised by Arnold are shared but his polemic and binary language might be questioned. By supposing that movement were conceived "only" in intellectualistic terms, and if movement was seen "only" as a means of serving other ends, Arnold circumvents the potential for embodied experiences to serve as the stimulus for intellectual enquiry. That is, intellectual activities relating to the physicality of learning need not be hived-off and disembodied academic pursuits, and instead can form an integrated and interdependent aspect of becoming physically educated. It could be argued that only against the backdrop of intellectual enquiry can the physicality of learning be considered educationally meaningful. Again, literacy offers a means by which learners' personal meaning-making can be communicated and would not detract from the intrinsic value of movement in learning.

The Myth of Holistic Outcomes in Physical Education

Broadly speaking, holistic development in education is an approach to learning and teaching which emphasises the importance of children's physical, affective, cognitive and social development. The claimed outcomes of high-quality PE (afPE, 2019) resemble something approximating holistic development. However, the term holistic development implies a process-oriented approach and, given that learning is best conceived as both a *process* and a *product* (Saljo, 1979; Purdie & Hattie, 2002; Tan, 2020), a new term which encompasses these attributes would seem useful. Therefore, the aims of learning-oriented physical education, as put forward in this study, are to *facilitate the development of holistic capital*. This stated aim is informed, firstly, by Carl Rogers' theory of facilitation (1967), in that the teacher should be conceived as a 'facilitator' of learning. Second, the notion of 'development'

implies that learning is, indeed, an ongoing process and should be conceived as such. Third, the notion of ‘holistic’ learning in PE is ambitious, noble, but more importantly, it is urgently needed. Finally, the term ‘capital’ refers to the stock of attributes which are deemed valuable and beneficial to the learner. Teachers of PE could actively strive to facilitate learning by (1) encouraging pupils’ conscious physical action, addressing the somatic, embodied, corporeal dimensions of learning to develop physical literacy and proprioception, (2) by promoting intellectual curiosity and drawing on embodied cognition to open up a world of meaning-making, and (3) by supporting pupils’ psychosocial capital, the stock of social and emotional attributes needed to flourish in both school and the wider community. In applying this philosophy, a pragmatic view of this might be termed a Three Pillars Framework (Figure 3), a triad of interconnected learning domains, each of which denotes equal educational utility. This would seemingly reaffirm the aim of facilitating the development of holistic capital. Crucially, through literacy, PE could generate evidence of these venerable aims by enabling the PE profession to share, demonstrate and verify progress towards them.

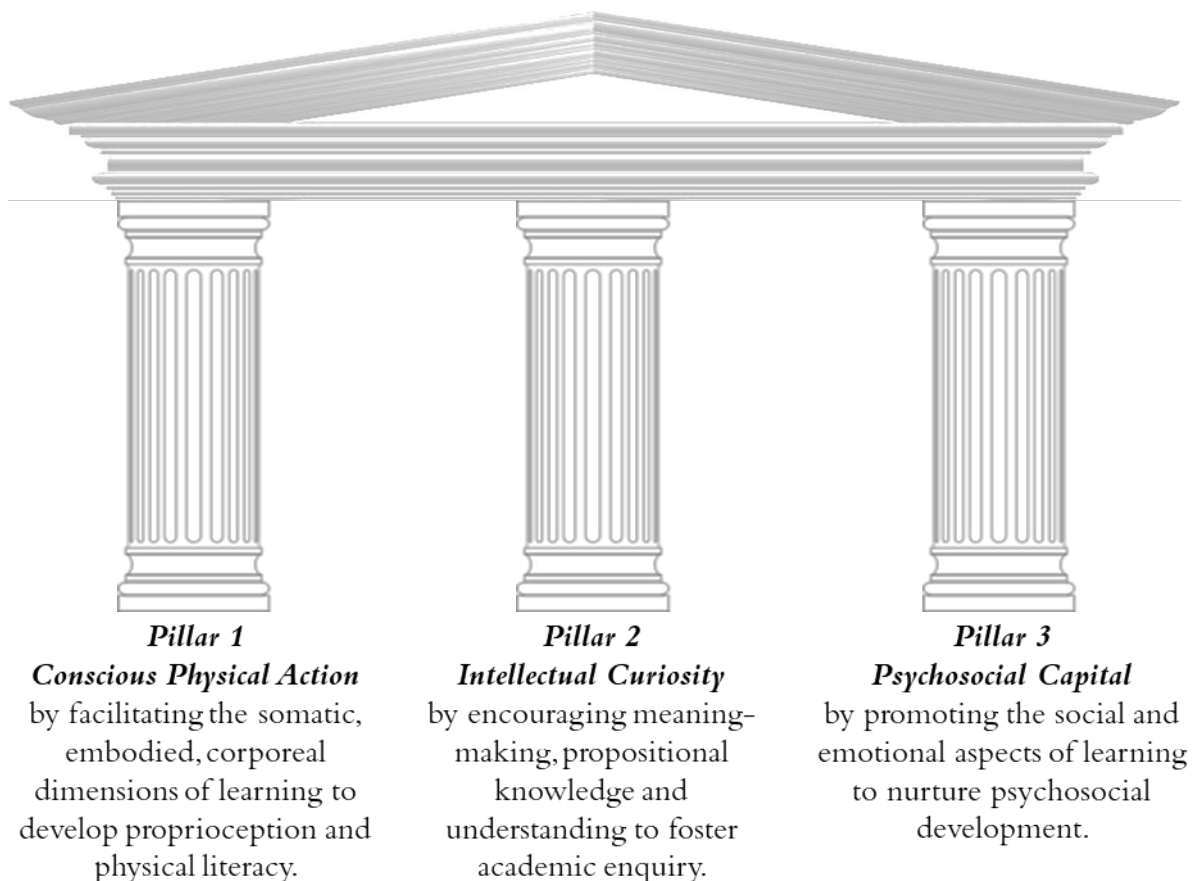


Figure 3: Three Pillars Framework

Researchers in the field of physical education have offered some persuasive evidence that PE brings about holistic educational benefits. For instance, Bailey *et al* (2009) critically reviewed research which suggests that PE, along with school sport, develops pupils across the physical, social, affective and cognitive domains of learning. The aim here is not to refute these claims, but to offer an alternative way of viewing this ‘contribution’ to learning. Much of the research about the claimed educational benefits of PE seeks to bolster the value of the subject in its current form. Furthermore, the research is generally located within a conceptual view that PE is a useful buttress for learning elsewhere in the curriculum. For instance, the place of physical education in the curriculum has often been justified through its contribution to other areas of education (Green, 2008). Legitimising physical education through its coincidental by-products leaves it vulnerable to interrogation; the extrinsic offshoots of PE say little about the intrinsic educational merit of the subject itself. If the ostensible by-products of PE became a deliberate pedagogical feature, such as deeper engagement with moral, ethical and cultural dilemmas through literacy, then physical education could potentially cement its place and purpose in the curriculum and justifiably claim to educate the learner holistically. However, it is not the role of PE to merely prop up and support pupils’ learning elsewhere in the curriculum. Rather, it is to provide meaningful learning experiences within the subject itself (Sprake & Palmer, 2019).

Achieving holistic learning outcomes is contingent on providing a breadth of learning activities and a plurality of symbolic evidence. The degree to which PE activities achieve this in practice has, of course, been questioned. For instance, while at pains to rid the PE profession of the arrogant claim that PE activities can, on account of their presence in the curriculum, be intellectual, David Best (1978, p. 55) argues:

Such an erroneous conception is part of the pervasive myth in the literature on physical education of what is often vaguely called ‘the body/mind dichotomy’, or of the tripartite division of the human personality into ‘thinking, feeling and doing’ aspects – sometimes more pretentiously into ‘cognitive, affective and conative’ domains – with the *de fide* assumption that physical education activities can provide the desired ‘synthesis’, ‘unity of the organism’, ‘wholeness’ or ‘integration’.

The integration of different aspects of learning should not be based on *de fide* assumptions – that is, based on the obligatory beliefs associated with specific doctrines. In this case, teachers of PE are somewhat theologically required to have faith in the idea that physical education activities, by virtue of their occurrence, contribute to pupils’ holistic development.

Precisely what constitutes these ‘physical education activities’ is fundamental to the issue of developing holistic capital in PE. If ‘physical education activities’ encompasses traditional forms of PE – such as games and the development of sports skills – then of course teachers are leaving holistic learning to chance. However, if PE activities afforded pupils the chance to integrate their *thoughts*, *feelings* and *actions* and communicate their learning through multimodal symbolic competencies, then the assumption of whole-child development would ostensibly move toward more robust evidence of learning. Cheffers (2005, p.49) scrutinises the lack of integration between curriculum theory and physical education, stating: “It is a pity that brilliant knowledge washes around like sink water because it is poorly recorded and poorly revealed. Students are blamed for impoverished learning attitudes when, in fact, the stuff was unintelligible in the first place”. Perhaps it is time to move beyond interdisciplinary activities and toward integrated and pluralistic learning whereby pupils’ meaning-making is experienced and communicated.

Accountability to this, however, would need careful consideration and the PE profession would need to arrive at a consensus on what learning it should be accountable to (Bailey *et al.*, 2009). Considering the mind-body indivisibility attributed to a monist philosophy, also propagated by Whitehead (2010), it would seem prudent that each element of the human psyche is provided equal opportunity to flourish. Revisiting Whitehead’s statement (2020, p. 91), it would indeed require “an extended amount of time” to facilitate learning of a propositional nature in PE, and yet *time* is what physical education so desperately seems to need (Quennerstedt, 2019). It is precisely this viewpoint – that propositional knowledge is somehow out of place in physical education – that renders physical education trapped within a paradoxical stalemate (Sprake & Palmer, 2018a). It becomes a telling irony when PE scholars turn to literacy when communicating something of educational significance, but these same opportunities are denied to the pupils as part of their learning in PE. Literacy is synonymous with thinking, and thinking should be synonymous with physical education. Propositional knowledge can be integrated into the learning menu in PE, but ongoing resistance to, or apathy for, its implementation is part of a self-fulfilling ideological deadlock. For instance, in his research on teachers’ attitudes and responses to the implementation of the 2014 NCPE, Harold (2020) reports that despite the recent sea-change in PE curriculum priorities, teachers’ practice remains unchanged. Whitehead (2020, p. 91) extends her review of Arnold’s position on educating *about* movement by questioning the extent to which this aspect of learning is communicated:

In conclusion it seems somewhat grandiose to claim that propositional knowledge is effectively presented, understood and learned in physical education, outside studying for an examination at the age of 16 or 18 years. That physical education teachers have the opportunity to highlight aspects of these fields seems acceptable, but to claim that an important contribution is made to education in this way by physical education is both overstating the case and trivialising these important areas of study.

It is reasonable to assert that propositional knowledge is seldom facilitated and learned in current physical education practice, aside perhaps from the preparation for GCSE examinations. Indeed, it is ‘grandiose’ to claim that propositional knowledge is developed in PE at all. Recognising this issue is one thing but the desire to address it is another matter entirely. Whitehead (2020, p. 97) appears somewhat unperturbed by this problem, insisting that: “claims to contribute to education through the enhanced understanding of certain academic disciplines and their attendant propositional knowledge are highly questionable and are perhaps better forgotten”. That such claims are ‘highly questionable’ is a reasonable assertion. However, her contention that these areas are ‘perhaps better forgotten’ seemingly reveals a major pedagogical blind spot within the PE community. It seems both an oversight and an injustice that the value of academic and intellectual pursuits is somehow beyond the remit of physical education, particularly from authors who utilise literacy to advance the progress of their subject, and also when other subjects are deemed of higher value (Bleazby, 2015). This line of argument seems in opposition to any promise of a *holistic* physical education. That physical education might be a stimulus for intellectual pursuits has, it seems, been entirely overlooked. Such oversights are likely to influence the state, status and futures of PE in schools and thus serves as a rationale for, and unique contribution of, this study.

Education *about*, *through* and *in* movement continue to be the central pillars upon which PE is justified as an educationally legitimate subject. To date, however, there is little evidence that PE has facilitated meaningful intellectual engagement with the physicality of learning to enable pupils to experience the full breath of its stated learning outcomes. Ongoing efforts to secure a legitimate educational status for PE have undoubtedly contributed to the subject’s persistent ability to survive (Hendry, 1975). Nevertheless, as PE continues to clamour for educational acceptance, other subject areas appear to thrive.

The issues raised thus far provide a timely rationale to investigate the place of literacy for learning in physical education. The research aims, objectives and associated questions will

now be contextualised and discussed in parallel with relevant academic literature, with the view to integrate an ongoing review of literature whilst setting up the research project at hand.

Research Aims, Questions & Objectives

This study will investigate the stated contributions of PE to holistic learning. By investigating the educational rhetoric of PE, and by exploring the role of literacy in learning, this study has both iconoclastic and heterodox foundations. That is, it will challenge cherished beliefs and question the unorthodoxy of literacy in PE. The first step in solving any problem is to recognise that a problem exists. A central ‘PE problem’ is the dearth of tangible evidence to substantiate many of its purported educational claims. To explore these issues further, this study has three central aims:

Aim 1 To investigate the learning culture and educational status of physical education, against the backdrop of other curriculum areas;

Aim 2 To investigate ways in which the claimed holistic educational outcomes made in the name of physical education might be facilitated, experienced, and evidenced in schools;

Aim 3 To investigate the potential value of literacy for learning in physical education.

The research idea is that PE is a goldmine of untapped learning potential and educational expression, and this study hopes to go at least some way towards excavating it. Each of the research aims have corresponding questions, objectives and associated activities, identified in Figure 4, which will be expanded and contextualised in this section, integrating relevant literature throughout:

Questions	Objectives	Associated Activities
Research Question 1: What is the state and status of PE within in the educational landscape?	Objective 1: Investigate the philosophical, pedagogical, and cultural aspects of PE, as well as the subject’s perceptual value and status of PE as an educational endeavour in schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal reflections • Surveys • Interviews • Focus groups • Participant observation • Existing literature
Research Question 2: How might the claimed holistic outcomes of PE be facilitated, experienced and evidenced in schools?	Objective 2: Scrutinise the dogmatic educational claims made by and for PE and challenge conceptual understandings of what constitutes meaningful learning in PE.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethnographic visiting • Participant observation • Interviews • Focus groups • Existing literature
Research Question 3: What is the value of literacy for learning in PE, for pupils to make meaning from their experiences?	Objective 3: Explore the educational currency of literacy as a conduit for meaning-making and consider the potential value of this to support and strengthen the status and value of PE.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethnographic visiting • Participant observation • Interviews • Focus groups • Surveys • Existing literature

Figure 4: Research Questions, Objectives and Associated Activities

The State and Status of PE within the Educational Landscape

Physical education has long been a part of educational systems but, more recently, the status of PE is perhaps indebted to the country of Denmark which, over two-hundred years ago, passed a law in 1814 for gymnastics classes for all elementary boys (Bennett, Howell & Simri, 1975). Little over one-hundred years ago, the prefatory memorandum of the Syllabus of Physical Training for Schools forcibly outlined the general development and goals of physical education in the UK, stating that:

The place, scope and conception of physical education have broadened and it has gradually assumed a meaning entirely different from that implied by the old term “school drill”. It is now recognised that an efficient system of education should encourage the concurrent development of a healthy physique, keen intelligence and sound character. These qualities are in a high degree mutually interdependent, and it is beyond argument that without healthy conditions of body the development of the mental and moral faculties is seriously retarded and in some cases prevented. In a word, healthy physical growth is essential to intellectual growth (Board of Education, 1919, p. 3).

What the syllabus overlooked was the potential for PE to serve as the basis for intellectual inquiry in and of itself. That the physicality of learning in PE might serve as a stimulus for ‘intellectual growth’ in its own right seems to have gone unnoticed for much of its recent history. The 1919 syllabus does state, however, that the “object of Physical Education and Training is to help in the production and maintenance of health in body and mind” (Board of Education, 1919, p. 3). Though the mind-body distinction may be dualistic in wordage, the goals ascribed to PE were to some degree holistic. At least, there is some recognition that physical education could develop more than a *healthy physique*. The notion of *keen intelligence* and *sound character* arising from PE is an interesting claim but until educational claims are evidenced, they cannot be labelled as outcomes. The ground on which PE stakes its educational claims must amount to more than holistic promises and moral posturing, and perhaps literacy for learning might offer a more stable footing. Fourteen years later, the 1933 Syllabus for Physical Training for Schools was published in which the object of Physical Education and Training was identical to the 1919 syllabus, but *keen intelligence* had been replaced with *alert intelligence* (Board of Education, 1933, p. 6). A crucial point here is that the vision of PE as a *holistic* subject which provides avenues for broad educational goals is by no means a recent concept. The extent to which the holistic educational potential of PE is realised in practice, however, is of significant interest for this study.

Debates regarding the claimed educational benefits of PE are nothing new, but they are still as vibrant as ever (Bailey *et al.*, 2009; Thorburn & MacAllister, 2013; Reid, 2013). The role of PE, the issue of philosophy-to-practice, the sphere of political influence, and debates over PE pedagogy are but some of the areas which have received plentiful attention in PE literature (Capel & Whitehead, 2013; Houlihan & Green, 2006; Penney & Evans, 2002; Sicilia-Camacho & Brown, 2008). Unfortunately, however, the PE profession hitherto has failed to adopt reflexive approaches (Hargreaves, 1982; Evans, 2017) and seems oblivious to the role it plays as part of the problem (Sprake, 2017). Even the most willing PE teachers have struggled with conceptual shifts in their practices, commonly reverting back to their original pedagogies (Casey, 2014) and the ambiguous role of PE, combined with fixed pedagogic mind-sets, leaves little room for curricular innovation.

PE is not without advocacy from interdisciplinary stakeholders. For instance, PE is recognised for its potential to promote health and lifelong physical activity (Green 2002; Penney & Jess 2004). The health benefits of physical activity are irrefutable. Widely cited research has identified a “linear relation” between physical activity and overall health status (Warburton, Nicol & Bredin, 2006, p. 801) and there is little doubt of a connection between physical activity and improved quality of living. PE has also been praised for its contribution to improved psychological health (Bailey, 2006), nurturing social development (Sandford, Armour, & Warmington 2006) and supporting cognitive and academic performance (Trudeau & Shephard, 2008; Ardoy *et al.*, 2014). Put simply, PE has become a multi-purpose subject to achieve multi-faceted aims (Sprake & Palmer, 2018a). Ironically, the myriad aims for PE have resulted in ideological confusion (Sprake & Walker, 2015) and the very notion of what constitutes physical education has seemingly become a nebulous concept. The struggle for role consensus within the PE community, at philosophical, political and pedagogical levels, might be likened to an anchor weighing it down (Sprake & Walker, 2015). However, as Hendry (1975) remarked, PE teachers may occupy a marginal role in schools, but they are nevertheless survivors. After decades of survival, however, the modern-day threat to the security of PE in the curriculum is intensifying (Griffiths & Gillespie, 2016; Youth Sport Trust, 2018) and PE needs to take its place alongside other school subjects as an educational imperative.

The performance of all government-funded schools in the UK is measured by the English Baccalaureate system (EBacc). According to the Department for Education (DfE) (DfE, 2019a) the EBacc system comprises a group of subjects which are deemed essential for

pupils' future opportunities, further study and career prospects; these subjects are English, maths, the sciences, geography or history, and a language. Omitting PE from the list of 'essential' subjects is somewhat revealing as it seems that PE is neither able to permeate the ideological high ground in education nor convince the teaching profession of its educational importance. To appreciate this issue in more depth, a discussion about what constitutes *education* itself would seem useful.

In 1965, Richard Peters' inaugural lecture presented a thesis which argued that education, if properly conceived, referred to "the initiation of the unlearned into those intrinsically worthwhile forms of knowledge that were constitutive of the rational mind" (McNamee, 2005, p. 2). Soon after, Richard Peters and Paul Hirst developed what was became known as the *Petersian* view of education, from which the primary role of education is a means of fostering the development of a rational mind, or rationality. From this viewpoint, education implies the transmission of worthwhile knowledge, where cognitive effort is paramount and where these transmissions are conceived as a two-way process in which the learner shares responsibility (Peters, 1966). What education strives for is inextricably linked to what society deems valuable in human beings (O'Hear, 1981). Yet the Petersian doctrine casts doubt over the educational value of PE, due to its predominantly corporeal focus and lack of academic contribution to learning. Peters did not stop here, however, as he also scrutinized the value of games as educational endeavours. Using cricket as an example, Peters insisted that "unless the game is viewed under an aesthetic or moral purpose" then it does not have any serious purpose (Peters, 1966, p. 158). Perhaps the most telling of Peters' statements, however, is when he compared PE and games to other curriculum areas:

Curriculum activities, on the other hand, such as science or history, literary appreciation, and poetry are 'serious' in that they illuminate other areas of life and contribute much to the quality of living. They have, secondly, a wide ranging cognitive content which distinguishes them from games. Skills, for instance, do not have a wide ranging cognitive content. There is very little to know about riding bicycles, swimming, or golf. It is largely a matter of knowing how rather than of 'knowing that', of knack rather than of understanding. Furthermore, what there is to know throws little light on much else (Peters, 1966, p. 159).

There is perhaps a growing need to *throw light* on the holistic learning outcomes of PE. In light of the Petersian conception of education, it is for the PE community to evidence its holistic learning claims; the burden of proof lies not with Peters himself but with the PE

profession. The hegemony of the Petersian thesis had significantly detrimental effects for the place of PE in schools, casting it into the educational hinterland (McNamee, 2005). With the landscape of education largely informed by dualism (Sprake & Walker, 2015), it would appear that the Petersian doctrine has become somewhat of an educational axiom – that is, the academically oriented system of education is so well-established that it has become self-evident that academic enquiry is both synonymous with, and paramount to, educational legitimacy. Such ideas about education have, of course, been met with animated resistance from both teachers and educational philosophers. For instance, Andrew Reid (1996a; 1996b; 1997) has argued that the Petersian view of education is overly narrow and restrictive, and he offers a broader conceptualisation of education in which educators strive toward the development of pupils' wellbeing that is grounded in “rationally informed desires of both a theoretical and practical kind” (McNamee, 2005, p. 3). For Reid, the question of what education is *good for* rests in personal wellbeing, either of the pupils or others with whom the pupils become morally connected with (White, 2000). David Carr (1997, p. 201), on the other hand, signals the “distinction between education and non-educational knowledge by observing that the former is knowledge which informs rather than merely uses the mind”. Carr refers somewhat derogatively to sport and games as a valuable part of a child's *schooling* but not their *education* (McNamee, 2005), the former being a plurality of goals including vocational and recreational knowledge and the latter being the acquisition of academic knowledge (Green, 2008).

Aside from debates over what constitutes education, PE has certainly established itself as an everyday feature in the educational landscape, but it would seem that the significance of PE in a child's education is a value judgment. PE teachers are known for being immense advocates for their subject discipline (Kirk, 2011). There is, as Green (2008, p. 17) remarks, “an in-built constraint or inertia in education in the form of teachers and academics who, having grown up with the subject disciplines, have become disciples of those subjects – with all the ideological involvement and associated vested interests that entails”. Such vested interests might include the perpetuation of arbitrary divisions between ‘academic’ and ‘non-academic’ school subjects, or to preserve a sense of collegial faith that PE – in its current form – contributes to whole child development. Concerns should arise, however, when ideological involvement becomes ideological possession – that is, if teachers become possessed by their ideologies then future pedagogical innovations which they perceive as running counter to their own preferences are likely to be met with continual resistance.

Psychologist Daniel Kahneman (2011) discusses the ease with which individuals can identify and label the mistakes of others, but the difficulty with which they are able to recognise their own. This reluctance for introspection is a crucial issue because self-examination is “especially difficult when we most need to do it” (Kahneman, 2011, p. 3). The PE community is apparently suffering from a disinclination for self-examination, which is particularly pertinent at a time when introspective practices are perhaps needed most. By continuing to profess its own self-worth (afPE, 2019) whilst, at the same time, refusing to contend with its own shortcomings, the PE profession is perhaps residing itself to the proverbial cave. It is precisely at this moment where PE teachers are invited to venture out. Drawing on the old colloquial British phrase, perhaps new and existing PE teachers should not only *sit next to Nellie* but should also engage in difficult conversations.

In most education systems (approximately 95% of countries) PE is either practiced as a general rule of thumb or as a result of legal requirements (Hardman & Marshall, 2009). However, despite being an enduring fixture in education systems across the world, the foothold of PE within the curriculum has been far from comfortable and the gap between official policy requirements and practical implementation is significant globally (Hardman, 2011). Among the pervasive factors affecting this gap include a “loss of time allocation to other competing prioritised subjects”, “lower importance of school PE in general”, “lack of official assessment” and “attitudes of significant individuals such as head teachers” (Hardman, 2011, p. 12). Each of these factors are concerning but they are ostensibly linked. For instance, the lack of conceptual clarity about PE *assessment* may have diminished the perceived *importance* of the subject. Thus, the *significant individuals* such as head teachers may be less likely to display favourable *attitudes* towards PE as an academic subject, resulting in their proclivity to allocate more time to *prioritised* subjects. Conversely, head teachers often have very positive attitudes towards PE, but perhaps for the wrong reasons. For instance, Palmer (2010) discusses the commonplace arrangement in schools whereby PE departments are championed for their practical utility in applying head teachers’ discipline culture and police-like enforcement of school standards. PE can be highly valued by head teachers in this sense, but, when it comes to academic achievement or expectations, it is seemingly at the bottom of the pile.

Frequently overlooked, however, is the notion that the PE community shares a responsibility in untangling this muddle. Put another way, perhaps the burden of addressing the ‘PE problem’ lies with the PE community itself. Addressing this issue from within could

begin with PE teachers gazing across the curricular landscape and taking note of the educational practices taking place within those subjects deemed more of a priority. This should not be misinterpreted as a suggestion to abandon the subject's *physical roots*, but it may be of profound value to the status of PE if the profession considered an integrative approach to learning and teaching which embraced its physical and intellectual potential. One notable difference between PE practices and other subject areas is that literacy, as a conduit for learning communication, is a common feature in all other subjects but is seriously underutilised in PE.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the most prevalent PE ideology was related to recreation (Carroll, 1998) with an emphasis on playing games (Kane, 1974). Such ideologies would seem to lack serious educational purpose, at least for Peters (1966). Despite attempts to provide a wide range of curricular options, PE trudged along and did so in a manner which, for Carroll (1982), had very little actual teaching going on. More recently, Alderson and Crutchley (1990) rightly signalled the lack of professional consensus regarding what it means to be physically educated and how a consensus might be achieved. The authors criticise the “simple belief that involving children in a selection of physical activities will achieve valuable educational ends” (Alderson & Crutchley, 1990, p. 38). This statement lies at the heart of this study. Not only have the nature and purposes of PE endured persistent uncertainty and scrutiny (Green, 2008) but simply *believing* that PE is achieving educational ends is insufficient. PE teachers often declare the educational contribution of PE based on their belief that the physical activities typical to the subject increase pupils' academic outcomes (Green, 2008) and evidence linking physical activity with increased creativity, known as embodied cognition, is persuasive (Oppezzo & Schwartz, 2014). However, research demonstrating a *correlation* between two phenomena – say, for instance, physical activity and academic outcomes – does not mean they are *causally* related. In short, correlation does not mean causation (Barrett, 2017, p. 35) and so the claims that PE brings about academic benefits by proxy presents an epistemological problem. That is, such beliefs are unsubstantiated. Turning beliefs into justified truth claims requires some degree of evidence, which is seldom sought or obvious in physical education.

Over two decades ago, Penney (2000) drew attention to how a significant rise in education policy reform in the 1990s was met with a stifling inertia within the PE community to engage in critical reviews and subject development. For Goodson (1993, p. 22), the underlying fabric of the PE curriculum remained “surprisingly constant” despite the radical

changes in the organisational landscape of education. For Penney (2000) this was a missed opportunity. The resistance to change seemingly gave rise to the chronic insecurity which now haunts the position of PE within the curriculum. By the turn of the 21st Century, it was a 19th Century curriculum model that continued to inform PE pedagogy (Tomlinson, 1994) and thus it is unsurprising that many teachers reported a sense of occupational “survival” as opposed to “development” (Day, 1997, p. 44). For a subject that was gravely in need of recalibration, PE teachers displayed an apathy towards pedagogical update. Central to the ‘PE problem’, therefore, are questions not only about the educational legitimacy of PE but also about the apparent unwillingness to refute its dubious contribution to learning with serious conviction.

According to Jess and Gray (2019, p. 152) the PE profession should expect to make “gradual and non-linear progress” towards becoming a “robust educationally justifiable subject area”. However, the state and status of PE would only be enriched and strengthened if the supposed holistic learning outcomes were, firstly, evidenced at all, and, secondly, presented in a more educationally varied and verifiable format. Clearly, physical competence is an element of learning which can be nurtured and evidenced, but the expansive learning potential in PE cannot, nor should it, be reduced to the assessment of physical competence alone. Holistic development in PE can, and should, be manifest in a variety of ways and, as a result, the evidence of learning should correspondently reflect this. If PE is held to account on its promise to contribute to pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (afPE, 2019), then judging them primarily on their physical competence is educationally insufficient as it sells the pupils short of the holistic education they were promised. If the PE community were to look inward and question whether or not the ‘promises’ and ‘contents’ match the ‘pedagogy’ and ‘claims’, then the subject might be better-positioned to solve its crisis of status from within. It is perhaps time for physical education to practice what it preaches.

By this point, it is clear that the educational significance of physical education has long been the subject of “animated debate” (Smith & Parr, 2007, p. 37) and the grounds on which PE can be justified in the school curriculum are also contentious (Whitehead, 2013). Armour and Jones (1998, p. 3) described the “lowly status accorded to physical education in the education system”, while Ozolinš & Stolz (2013, p. 888) challenge, but also recognize, the “shadowy, marginal existence” of PE in schools. The marginalisation of PE and the interrogation of its educational importance (Bailey *et al.*, 2009) are neither new issues nor emerging fields of study. However, a major and contemporary concern is that the allocated

time reserved for PE in schools is now spiralling downward (Youth Sport Trust, 2018). In fact, some schools have abandoned traditional PE all together (Griffiths & Gillespie, 2016). This contributes to a somewhat bleak and potentially catastrophic picture for the future of PE in schools. Whilst there is no shortage of research discussing the state and status of PE, few studies have challenged the PE community to recognise its own role as part of the problem. Within the practical limitations of PhD research, this study will challenge the rhetoric surrounding the claimed outcomes of PE and, at the same time, explore alternative future practices in an effort to counterbalance the declining status of PE in schools.

Facilitating, experiencing and evidencing holistic educational outcomes in PE

The process of *being* or *becoming* physically educated should enable pupils to experience themselves as a “holistic and synthesised acting, feeling, thinking being-in-the-world, rather than as separate physical and mental qualities that bear no relation to each other” (Stolz, 2013, p. 950). If part of being educated involves questioning, reasoning and challenging social phenomena (Palmer, 2014) then PE is in a prime position to make a unique contribution to pupils’ holistic education due to the abundance of social, political, environmental, ethical and moral issues associated with physical culture. However, there is currently little evidence of reasoning in PE. Becoming physically educated requires more than simply doing for the sake of doing; a high-quality physical education in its fullest sense may need to make wider educational requests of the pupils. Sport and physical culture offer a profusion of rich opportunities to discuss, debate and write about various social and moral controversies. As a means of fostering deeper learning, which can also be evidenced, literacy is the educational currency through which all (other) subjects demonstrate their worth. Unlike other subjects, however, pupils’ direct experience of learning in PE is uniquely born of physicality (Palmer, 2014, p. 13). Yet the meaning of *ability* in PE is subject to personal interpretation (Croston & Hills, 2017) and cannot be reduced to physical performance alone. Arguing for a more sustainable aim for physical education, Quennerstedt (2019, p. 619-620) proposes seven pedagogies which, for him, account for different ways of being in the world as some-body, including:

1. *A pedagogy of becoming* – which includes a view of the child as always being in a process of becoming physically educated.
2. *A pedagogy of meaning* – including a focus on meaningful experiences and the process of making new or revised meanings out of experience.
3. *A pedagogy of hesitation* – offering time for deliberation and reflection.
4. *A pedagogy of interruption and discovery* – bringing something new to education that involves uncertainty, curiosity and disturbance making movement as well as movement culture something to discover.
5. *A pedagogy of critical inquiry* – focusing on the understanding and challenging of taken for granted assumptions about ourselves and others.
6. *A pedagogy of social justice* – offering opportunities to change oppressive, unfair and unsustainable PE practices in school as well as in society.
7. *A pedagogy of plurality* – viewing physical education practice as open-ended in terms of different possibilities, different ways of being or diverse opportunities to be for example healthy, however these are construed.

These pedagogical ambitions, if enacted, would arguably place PE in a stronger educational position in the context of education more broadly. However, Talbot (2010, cited in Bailey, 2010, p. ix) argues that, in PE, “it is not easy to demonstrate that learning has taken place: it cannot be seen or touched, and evidence of learning has to be inferred from observed behaviour”. This is perhaps the crux of the ‘PE problem’. Regardless of how informed a given teacher may be, it is simply inadequate that the breadth of claimed learning outcomes in PE are reliant upon their *inferences* about observed behaviour. This is particularly important considering pupils’ observed behaviour is habitually reduced to the restrictive practices of the typical ‘PE menu’ which consists of a few selected and codified sports. Holistic outcomes require holistic processes. If learning cannot be seen, then it must be made visible. If learning cannot be touched, then it must be made tangible. If inference is the guiding principle to determine whether learning has taken place, then physical education has a significant pedagogical blind spot. The staunch resistance to literacy for learning in physical education reveals a profound ignorance and, as a consequence, PE is standing in its own way.

On the issue of measuring and providing evidence of learning in PE, Frapwell (2014) asserts that teachers’ records should be focused on *improving*, not *proving*, and that teachers are free to deepen pupils’ conceptual understandings of a particular area. Again, though, when

teachers are asked to *prove* how their students have *improved*, this presents difficulties because the broader concepts available to explore through physical education are seldom utilized. Indeed, the demand for pupil-data is now synonymous with education and schools in England have some of the most sophisticated datasets in the world (Downey & Kelly, 2013). Sympathetic to Frapwell's view, the amount of data now collected by and for schools is quite remarkable: summative, formative and normative data; pupil attainment, predicted grades, class levels, behaviour monitoring, attendance, demographics, special educational needs, socio-economic data, and this list is far from exhausted. The Department for Education's Workload Challenge survey reported that 56% of teachers claim that data collection is the biggest cause of unnecessary workload (DfE, 2014). The notion of literacy in PE is not intended to increase workload, but it might increase the status of PE in schools.

As outlined previously, Kirk (2010, p. 121) presents three potential futures for PE, including "more of the same, radical reform or extinction". Despite such warnings, PE at the chalkface remains largely unchanged. That is, heavily dominated by games and rife with competition (Burgess & Griffiths, 2018). The culture of PE is notoriously resistant to change (Gerdin & Pringle, 2015; Kirk, 2011), but to offer *more of the same* whilst withstanding questions about its educational worth offers little in the way of a solution. In fact, it resembles the tenacious pupil who refuses to get changed for a PE class. This antipathy for change has perpetuated the same time-worn debates about the educational utility of PE. Most, if not all, other subjects in the National Curriculum are impervious to this 'value debate' because their one commonality is their ability to provide literacy-based evidence that pupils are learning. The caution here is that physical education might be unwittingly spearheading its own *extinction* (Sprake & Walker, 2015).

A plausible way in which PE might dodge ongoing questions about its educational significance is to offer a more simplistic and realistic set of claims – that is, for instance, health and leisure aims – by continuing with *more of the same*. Alternatively, if PE is to survive, let alone thrive as an educationally valuable part of schooling, then its teachers may need to ameliorate their pedagogical practices, supplemented by evidence of learning, so as to achieve the subject's holistic aspirations. This vision for the future of PE, however, may require *radical reform*.

The Value of Literacy for Learning in Physical Education

Literacy can be characterised as “the ability to use language and images in rich and varied forms to read, write, listen, speak, view, represent, and think critically about ideas” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 5). Writing offers a distinct way in which learning can be explored and evidenced. Unlike verbal communication, words remain on the page for consideration which enables the learner to tackle more complex ideas and the relationships between them (Wilkinson, 1986). Through the careful and deliberate act of writing, learners can *press pause* and reflect in order to gain a greater understanding of their social world. Literacy is also heralded for its empowering capabilities:

To be literate is to gain a voice and to participate meaningfully and assertively in decisions that affect one’s life. To be literate is to gain self-confidence. To be literate is to become self-assertive. Literacy enables people to read their own world and to write their own history. Literacy provides access to written knowledge – and knowledge is power. In a nutshell, literacy empowers (Kassam, 1994, p. 33).

The value of literacy also permeates education policy. For instance, Ofsted’s (2012, p. 4) literacy drive unapologetically states: “There can be no more important subject than English in the school curriculum. English is a pre-eminent world language, it is at the heart of our culture and it is the language medium in which most of our pupils think and communicate. Literacy skills are also crucial to pupils’ learning in other subjects across the curriculum”. The significance of literacy is also reaffirmed by UNESCO (2004) in their Statement for the United Nations Literacy Decade, 2003–2012:

Literacy is about more than reading and writing – it is about how we communicate in society. It is about social practices and relationships, about knowledge, language and culture. Literacy finds its place in our lives alongside other ways of communicating. Indeed, literacy itself takes many forms: on paper, on the computer screen, on TV, on posters and signs. Those who use literacy take it for granted – but those who cannot use it are excluded from much communication in today’s world. Indeed, it is the excluded who can best appreciate the notion of “literacy as freedom”.

The now ubiquitous activities of reading and writing, which came into being approximately 4000 years ago, transformed human ability to “record, store and transmit language across time and distance” (Murphy, 2019, p.9). Literacy is central to human existence. Syverson (2008, p. 110-111) states that literacy is “instrumental in cultivating, co-

ordinating and defining activities, experiences and relationships” and because of this it is “irreducibly relational and social”. Recently discovered cave art from over 43,000 years ago, painted by anatomically modern humans in Sulawesi, Indonesia (Brumm *et al.*, 2021), is just one example of deliberate attempts to *leave something behind* in learning: in this case through storytelling. If left to inference, the learning stories of pupils in PE will go unheard and the subject will continue to leave nothing behind. Asking pupils to produce a piece of writing or artistic work relating to the physical and/or sports culture that they are said to be learning about and through might serve as a platform on which they could communicate their learning. The potential value of literacy, as a means of supporting, consolidating and providing evidence of learning in PE is grossly overlooked in current PE practice. Literacy could act as a bridge between the *physical experiences* of PE and the *learning outcomes* that it claims to produce.

Furthermore, it is not widely recognised that reading, writing, speaking and listening are not merely cognitive activities, they are in fact themselves “embodied activities” (Syverson, 2008, p. 111). From this viewpoint it could be argued that PE needs to stop window-shopping and embrace literacy as an embodied activity. However, when even the staunchest physical education supporters appear to doubt the subject’s capacity to evidence its value, it seems unsurprising that PE remains on the periphery of educational priorities. PE is the only subject that seemingly relies upon teachers’ personal interpretations about pupils’ learning. As stated, however, a future of PE where the emphasis is placed not on the development of physical skills but on the development of holistic capital may require “radical reform” (Kirk, 2011, p. 121). Best (1978, p. 36) argues that there are “good reasons why the development of linguistic skills has been, and should continue to be, the most important single aspect of every child’s education, yet that is certainly not to say that language, or any other aspect, is *the way of educating*”. The point is to locate a pedagogical balance whereby the many educational aims and claims of PE are experienced and evidenced.

At present, however, the archetypal PE lesson will see pupils judged on their physical performance. Of course, the physical and performative components of learning are an important aspect of becoming physically educated. However, the paucity of educational requests that challenge pupils to evidence or perform their intellectual, social, moral, cultural or emotional development is nothing short of a disappointment. Put more bluntly, if you do PE, you are seldom asked to *write* anything. Merleau-Ponty (1945) discussed how gestural language from bodily expressions was a form of language in and of itself, and that no deeper

philosophising is required to understand the intent behind the action. In every day embodied parlance, this is a perfectly rationale conclusion. However, the wide-ranging educational claims made by PE cannot be evidenced by bodily gestures alone. The action of striking a football, for instance, has its linguistic limits and is doubtfully able to express a pupils' development toward moral and spiritual growth (afPE, 2019). The “gestural basis of language” (Abram, 1996, p. 76) does not go far enough for the educational claims made by and for physical education in schools. Additional philosophising, interrogation of intent and semiotic communication of meaning is required for an educational claim to be made. Otherwise, bodily movement in PE can neither claim to be deliberate action nor will it be shown to throw light on much else (Peters, 1966).

There is of course need for a pragmatic understanding of teachers' everyday lives in the workplace. In 2013, Ofsted published a report titled *Improving literacy in secondary schools: a shared responsibility* in which they recognised the potential barriers to cross-curricular literacy initiatives:

Teachers are busy and hard-working people. They have challenges in their own subject area. Senior leaders should not assume that all teachers will welcome and embrace cross-curricular literacy initiatives. The link between literacy and more effective learning in every subject area needs to be established clearly and explicitly. The case for literacy needs to be made carefully and with a sensitive understanding of individual subjects' different needs. The starting point for all teachers should be: ‘What literacy skills do students in my subject need and what approaches to language learning will help me to be an effective teacher of my subject?’ An emphasis on writing, for example, may need to be carefully negotiated in order to ensure that the very different needs of teachers in, say, history, mathematics and music are equally met (Ofsted, 2013b, p. 39).

Of course, PE teachers are incredibly hard-working and busy people but neither hard work nor busyness result automatically in meaningful learning experiences for pupils. The dearth of meaningful learning evidence produced in PE renders the subject vulnerable, firstly, to the familiar sense of marginalisation, and, secondly, to its potential *extinction* in the future. For some, however, the issue of literacy has created a “dividing line” between subjects that are deemed important and those that are viewed as disconnected (Daggett, 2010, p. 43). The drive for literacy itself may not be responsible for this division but rather the insularity and unwillingness of the PE community to embrace it. Working across such boundaries and engaging in literacy will most likely serve to enhance physical education, not weaken or

damage it (Palmer, 2014). It is not sufficient to assume that learning is taking place; learning cannot and should not be left to chance. By engaging in PE-related literacy and semiology – that is, the use of symbols to communicate, such as in music or dance – pupils may be afforded the opportunity to engage more thoroughly in the highly personal and existential act of meaning-making in PE (McFee, 2003). PE has a unique opportunity to cultivate, capture and evidence learning in a manner that is both recognised and valued in education, and the causality between sensory engagement and intellectual interpretation is central to being physically educated (McNamee, 2004; Kirk, 2014; Palmer, 2014). At the chalkface, however, there is little evidence of any genuine commitment to teasing out the currently dormant intellectual pursuits in PE. Ofsted (2013) has voiced concern that literacy initiatives are far less likely to succeed where literacy is viewed as distinct from *normal* mainstream teaching and learning. It is precisely these taken-for-granted and ostensibly ‘normal’ practices which need to be scrutinised; that literacy is perceived as ‘abnormal’ in PE is an underlying barrier to the subject’s educational potential. Furthermore, the value of literacy for PE is mentioned in their report but it is focused exclusively on “tactics or strategies in sport” (Ofsted, 2013b, p. 8), an oversimplification of the subject to which even the most conventional devotees of PE might take offence.

Capel and Whitehead (2015) argue that physical education could and should contribute to broader educational aims. Yet these aims will only be realised through carefully considered pedagogy (Whitehead, 2012). Their underlying message, it seems, is to *proceed with caution*. Whilst Capel and Whitehead (2015) do acknowledge the importance of engaging in wider learning activities through PE, they make only brief reference to the potential strengths and opportunities to be gained by doing so. In fact, they seem more focused on the perceived threats and weaknesses of such endeavours. One such weakness is the “all but impossible” task of proving the effectiveness of PE in contributing to wider educational aims (Capel & Whitehead, 2015, p. 23). This is perhaps indicative of how, even at an academic level, PE culture is highly resistant to change (Gerdin & Pringle, 2015). It could be argued that the PE community has a responsibility to overcome such difficulties – not shy away from them – particularly if it has the potential to enhance the state and status of a vulnerable subject (Hardman & Marshall, 2009). The place of literacy in learning for physical education therefore could be paramount not only for survival of the subject but of critical educational benefit to the students who will carry that kind of learning experience forward as being part of what physical education asked of them at school.

It is of course important to recognise that any educational change is nested within broader social, cultural and micropolitical contexts. Discussing these micropolitical contexts, Carr (1997, p. 196) outlines three potential theoretical arguments through which PE theorists and practitioners could justify the value of current physical education activities for pupils' learning:

- (i) to argue that the Peters–Hirst conception of education is basically correct, to admit that physical activities have no real educational value and seek their non-educational curricular justification;
- (ii) to argue that the Peters–Hirst conception of education is basically correct and seek to reconcile the traditional content of the PE programme with that conception;
- (iii) to argue that the Peters–Hirst conception of education is either partly or wholly mistaken, and to argue for an alternative conception of education which is broad enough to accommodate practical and physical as well as theoretical and academic pursuits.

It would seem naively dichotomous to view these three arguments as discrete points because, within these three theoretical points, there is room for conceptual overlap: for instance, in response to point one, a case could be made for the inclusion of non-educational physical pursuits in schooling as a conduit for *health and wellbeing*, but this is unlikely to uphold the holistic *PE promise*; for point two, it could be argued that the state and status of PE would benefit from heeding the insights of the Petersian thesis and by *increasing the status of intellectual enquiry*, but this does not need to be conceptualised as the abandonment of embodiment in learning; finally, point three suggests a standpoint from which theorists can justify the place of PE activities on the basis that the Petersian thesis is either partly or wholly mistaken. While it seems perfectly rational to argue for a conception of education which is “broad enough to accommodate practical and physical as well as theoretical and academic pursuits” (Carr, 1997, p. 196), this line of argument does not need to label the Petersian thesis as wrong or *mistaken*. Instead, it might be prudent to regard it as providing a *partial* understanding of what constitutes a rounded education. Consequently, each of Carr’s three points could have practical utility in theorising about the justification for, and pedagogical direction of, PE in the future. To this end, it seems there is a significant opportunity for PE

to facilitate a pedagogy of embodied enquiry – that is, a pedagogical mode which teases out the pupils’ embodied experiences as a stimulus for wider intellectual pursuits.

The introductory chapter has provided some context to the ‘PE problem’ and brings the study to the point of departure. This study aims to explore the conceptual possibility of *physical education* which is broad enough to integrate physical and intellectual activities, so that the subject might finally fulfil its holistic educational promise. Building on Quennerstedt’s seven pedagogies (2019) this study will propose a *pedagogy of integration*, which draws on the notions of becoming, meaning, hesitation, interruption and discovery, as well as critical inquiry, social justice and plurality. Through a pedagogy of integration, both the pupils and teachers of PE might transform the practices of PE, utilising a multi-disciplinary conception of what it means to become physically educated and to evidence a pupil’s physical education. In essence, this will prepare learners *for* complexity *through* complexity.

Chapter Two

Methodology

The social world is comprised of complex, dynamic and changeable phenomena. Understanding its complexity is inherently challenging and studies investigating matters of a qualitative nature invariably require suitable research methodologies. Although knowledge is a moving target and the human aim is rarely stable, humans are nonetheless an inherently curious species (Berlyne, 1954). The hallmarks of qualitative research are based upon human curiosity for, and appreciation of, the complexities inherent to social phenomena with an understanding that investigations are temporal, transactional, and transitory.

In many ways, education is a microcosm of society. It is a social phenomenon characterised by complexity. Undertaking qualitative research in dynamic and complex school environments requires a sound methodological awareness because, like society, qualitative research is always complex, dynamic and “on the move” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 1). Research traditions, paradigms, methodologies and associated methods are in a continual state of flux and adaptation (Torrance, 2016). This study recognises the societal and cultural complexities associated with education and capitalises on the methodological flexibilities and idiosyncrasies associated with qualitative inquiry. Contesting codified formulae, procedures or rules for conducting qualitative inquiry, Eisner states that “in qualitative matters cookbooks ensure nothing”. (2017, p. 169). Avoiding formulaic recipes, therefore, the research philosophy adopted in this study appreciates that research should be philosophically informed and contextually appropriate.

This chapter begins with an integrated discussion about, and rationale for, the chosen research paradigm and methodological principles. The research methods are then introduced and their alignment with the research aims is discussed, followed by a justification of the approach to data analysis. The process of identifying, selecting and negotiating the research participants will then be presented, followed by a consideration of research ethics. The chapter closes with a summary. This section aims to explain the research paradigm (the *macro*), rationalise the methodology and methods (the *meso*), and justify the data collection strategies and data analysis techniques (the *micro*). Of course, these aspects are not mutually exclusive. Presenting the methodology as a triad of macro, meso and micro aspects might give the impression that they are conceptually discrete, when in fact they form the interlacing threads

of a methodological whole. By drawing attention to these threads, however, this chapter aims to illustrate a commitment to methodological congruence (Richards & Morse, 2013).

Research Paradigm: ontology, epistemology, methodology, axiology and reflexivity

Research paradigms are an essential and constituent part of all research because they inform the selection and usage of appropriate methodologies and methods (Riska, 1972; Hussey & Hussey, 1997; Howel, 2012). Research paradigms are an embedded aspect of all educational research (Brooke, 2013) and they signal the researcher's philosophical orientations and methodological proclivities. For Susan Langer (1953, p. 3), philosophy is described as a "fabric of ideas". Research paradigms can be understood in these terms because they refer to a set of ideas, beliefs or worldviews which underpin the assumptions, principles and strategies of a research community (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006).

Described as intellectual traditions, schools of thought or a set of values and beliefs, research paradigms are generally shared by a research community for their investigative endeavours (Ma, 2016). Paradigms reflect the shared assumptions and principles which frame how researchers view, interpret and act within the world (Nguyen, 2019). From this viewpoint, a research paradigm can be characterised as "the conceptual lens through which the researcher examines the methodological aspects of their research project to determine the research methods that will be used and how the data will be analysed" (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p. 26). Paradigms are loaded with consensus about the appropriateness of methodological principles and practices. It is important, therefore, that researchers are mindful of their chosen paradigm throughout the research process.

An umbrella term, therefore, the research paradigm is comprised of "a basic set of beliefs that guide action" (Guba, 1990, p. 17). It is this set of beliefs and first principles that constitute research paradigms, which encompass four important terms: *ontology*, which explores the nature of reality and of the human in the world; *epistemology*, which is centred on the relationship between the knower and the known; *axiology*, which focuses on values and ethical concerns; and *methodology*, which focuses on the means by which knowledge about the world can be gained (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Therefore, a research paradigm is made up of the researcher's *ontological* and *epistemological* assumptions, their *axiological* considerations and their chosen research *methodology* (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). It is

contended here, however, that *reflexivity* is an important aspect of qualitative research paradigms and should be integrated with researchers' paradigmatic awareness. The integrated features of the researcher's paradigmatic awareness in this study are illustrated in Figure 5:

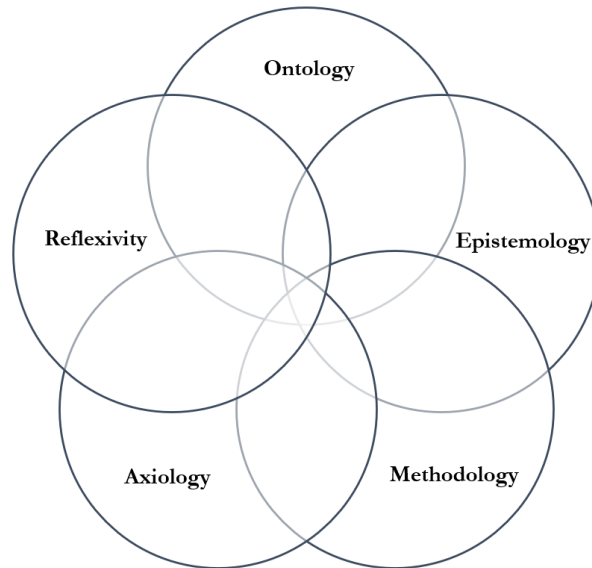


Figure 5: An Integrative Paradigmatic Awareness

Mills, Bonner and Francis (2006) insist that researchers must select a paradigm that is aligned with their beliefs about the nature of reality. A detailed discussion about the recent proliferation of theoretical research positions is beyond the scope of this study, yet two of the most pervasive and divergent paradigms are worthy of note: the *positivist* and *interpretivist* paradigms. Positivism and interpretivism are perhaps two of the most prominent philosophies upon which researchers scaffold their work and they each have opposing ontological and epistemological origins (Bassey, 1999; Humphrey, 2013). These paradigms and their foundations will now be discussed whilst simultaneously articulating the rationale for the chosen paradigm. This will serve as the first thread of methodological congruence.

The research paradigm for this study is *interpretivism*, also known as *constructivism*. In recent decades, interpretive research has enjoyed sweeping legitimisation across the spectrum of social sciences, not least in education (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), and it is widely acknowledged that interpretivist researchers are sympathetic to the existence of multiple realities (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003; Guba, and Lincoln, 1989; Hatch and Cunliffe, 2006; Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). From this perspective, any social phenomena can be interpreted in an infinite variety of ways because individuals experience the world through their own frame of reference (Krauss, 2005). A central assumption of interpretivism is that reality is

socially constructed (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). From this perspective reality is *perceived* and meaning is *constructed* by the individual based on their interactions with the world, and different meanings can be assigned by different individuals to the same scenario (Gray, 2009). In the context of physical education, pupils and teachers experience the PE world through their own personal perspectives and set of values – their frame of reference – and thus their perceived realities may differ. This results in different emotional experiences and different notions of *truth* about physical education. To explore a cultural phenomenon, therefore, it is important to understand not only the perspectives of those within the culture itself but also that their views and experiences of the same phenomenon may widely differ.

Therefore, this study lends itself to an *inductive* research design whereby the focus is not to test pre-existing hypotheses based on existing theories, but to develop new theoretical insights based on the processes and outcomes of the fieldwork (Grønmo, 2020). Unlike *deductive* approaches, which generally begin with a specific hypothesis and end with generalisable results, sometimes referred to as ‘top-down’ approaches, inductive approaches begin with the concrete experiences of the research participants and then move towards abstract theorising, known as ‘bottom-up’ approaches (Lichtman, 2013). With no hypothesis to test, this study would not benefit from *deductive* approaches, but will instead generate socially derived data at the granular level and formulate theory from the ground up. In this case, empirical evidence will be drawn from both the researcher’s and the research participants’ lived experiences to cultivate new theoretical understanding. The socially dynamic setting of education can reveal unexpected incidents and insights and interpretivist methodologies are consciously designed to anticipate changes in the social and contextual currents of the research environment (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). The methodological net is both wide and flexible enough to catch and cultivate the plurality and fluidity of potential data sources, consistent with the research philosophy.

A key strength of the interpretivist–constructivist paradigm, therefore, is the methodological flexibility it permits. This flexibility also safeguards the researcher from becoming the methodological puppet of a given research tradition – that is, controlled by rigid and pre-determined procedures and criteria and constrained to overlook social complexity and contextual fluidity. Having been a teacher, the researcher is acutely aware of the vibrancy of school settings and the fleeting social interactions they afford, and this flexibility will be crucial for capturing the social complexities of the school environment. The researcher will enter the

field, where upon he will respond appropriately and in a way that aligns with the research paradigm.

The interpretivist paradigm is generally conceptualised as having a *relativist* ontology and a *subjectivist* epistemology (Levers, 2013). Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2018) echo that the constructivist paradigm contains the same *relativist* ontology but describe the epistemological position as *transactional*, meaning that findings are co-created between the researcher and the researched. The interpretivist-constructivist paradigm also assumes a *naturalist* methodology and a *balanced* axiology (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Aligned with the *transactional* epistemology, the interpretivist-constructivist methodology is *dialectical*, which pertains to meaningful dialogue between the researcher and the researched in the construction of research findings. These philosophical foundations will form the methodological thread of this research, and each will be discussed briefly to provide the reader with a clear rationale for their suitability in this study.

Ontology

A salient feature of research paradigms, ontology examines the form and nature of reality as well as what can be known about it (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Researchers employing positivism – otherwise known as *positivists* – are deeply rooted in the ontological view that research phenomena have universal truths and realities which are external to and independent of the inquirer’s physical and metaphysical presence. Research underpinned by this perspective necessitates some form of separation between the researcher and the researched (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988), whereby researchers view themselves as detached outsiders trying to suspend their personal views and values so as not to influence the outcome of the research (Vishal, 2012). Positivists are habitually concerned, therefore, to adopt a value-free standpoint in which they remain neutral and detached from the research, divorcing values from facts (Creswell, 1994; Loughlin, 2018). The extent to which this separation can occur in practice is of course debatable (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill & Bristow, 2015), but researchers of this doctrine are obliged to stand behind a proverbial thick wall of one-way glass (Sparkes, 1992) and observe nature as “she does her thing” (Guba, 1990, p. 19).

Whilst the positivist paradigm is ubiquitous within the natural sciences, it has also gained significant traction within the social sciences, in large part due to August Comte’s sociology (Benton & Craib, 2011) and the subsequent work of Emile Durkheim (Hasan, 2016). Traditional approaches to the social sciences are conducted in a similar way to natural

science research, whereby researchers aim to discover laws about and causalities between human behaviour (Schulze, 2003; Krauss, 2005). Positivist researchers believe that human activities, thus including those in physical education, can be separated into measurable components (Schempp & Choi, 1994) and the assumption is that once patterns, actions and behaviours are discovered within one group, then other groups of a similar type will act and behave in the same way (Curtner-Smith, 2002). The traditional approach to social science research sought the replicability of social phenomena. However, central to the paradigmatic debate in the social sciences is whether the social world can be adequately understood, investigated or known using positivist principles (Bryman, 2015). Some qualitative researchers argue that “social life cannot be known through the measurement instruments of surveys and experiments, because of the infinite variability of human interpretation, action and interaction” (Williams, 2016, p. 3). Denzin (2018, p. 843) draws on the ancient Indian parable *The Blind Men and the Elephant* to fortify this position: “We can never know the true nature of things. We are each blinded by our own perspective. Truth is always partial”.

The paradigms debate, also known as the paradigm wars, extended to the research landscape of physical education. For instance, Sparkes (1992) points out that towards the latter part of the 1980s there was an upsurge of academic interest in the conceptualisation of the research process, in researchers themselves and in the foundation of knowledge claims in the PE context. In problematizing claims to knowledge, researchers have been encouraged to adopt reflexive approaches in which they are constantly mindful of their *position* in the research; what is revealed about the social world is always a consequence of the position adopted by the onlooker. This gave rise to an appreciation of the epistemological value of adopting various interpretive practices in fieldwork (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

The interpretivist paradigm is diametrically opposed to positivism. Researchers who employ the interpretive paradigm – or *interpretivists* – tend to believe that the social world cannot be studied or understood in the same manner as the physical world (Sparkes, 1994; Curtner-Smith, 2002). The ontological position associated with the interpretivist paradigm is *relativism* which, like many philosophical concepts, can be traced back to Ancient Greece. Relativism denotes a view of reality and truth as relative to both perceived experience and the context from which they emerge (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). There are, of course, ontological problems with relativism, particularly with the more radical forms of relativism. For instance, it has long been acknowledged that individuals can never completely transcend their own perspectives, schemes or conceptual frameworks (Quine, 1960; Nagel, 1986; Siegel, 2011)

and, when combined with the postmodern claim that there are infinite ways of perceiving the world – thus purporting that there are infinite *truths* and no single *truth* – the basis of claims to knowledge can be undermined and destabilised (Wight, 2018). However, in a post-truth era, the notion of truth(s) as boundless interpretations has little practical utility, and seemingly overlooks the Aristotelian equipoise: “Fires burn in both Hellas and Persia, but men’s ideas of right and wrong vary from place to place” (Williams, 2016, p. 197).

Therefore, the ontological position in this research is aligned with a *non-realist* approach, which accepts that a physical world is ‘out there’ independent of the researcher but recognises that the external world is subject to interpretations which are inextricably linked to the interests and purposes of those who interpret it (Sparkes & Smith, 2009). In other words, the beliefs and intentions upon which human behaviours are predicated are incredibly complex as they vary between individuals, cultures and across timespans, thus it is difficult to establish universal truths in order to explain the complexities of the social world (Borg & Gall, 1989). Dimitriadis (2016) addresses this issue more assertively by questioning whether the term *research* should be abandoned altogether and replaced with the word *inquiry*. The methodological orthodoxies that now infuse qualitative endeavours, owed in large part to the lingering positivist whispers tormenting the ears of qualitative researchers, can now be simultaneously revealed and challenged. In the post-qualitative or post-interpretivist realms, the word *inquiry* signals an open-endedness which avoids the drawbacks of the term *research*, a word that has become tarnished with the positivist brush (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). If the pendulum swings too far, however, then the open-ended possibilities of *inquiry* may be problematic. Greene (2013, p. 253) argues that a “loss of systematicity” could give rise to epistemological challenges: firstly, the systematic nature of qualitative inquiry is important for its defence; and secondly, without defined and systematic approaches, the processes by which knowledge comes into being might be obscured in its dissemination (Greene, 2013). By absorbing these competing insights, therefore, this study attempts to engage in *systematic qualitative inquiry*. That is, even though the lingering whispers of positivism will not directly shape the research, they will be *heard* nonetheless and their ostensible torment will be integrated as part of the researcher’s methodological atlas. By integrating, not ignoring, the whispers of positivism, this study will embrace methodological pluralism on the one hand whilst maintaining systematicity on the other. What’s more, without hearing these whispers, the post-qualitative and post-interpretive movement may lead to a philosophy of permissibility

and deliberate ambiguity, which would present additional challenges when it comes to the integrity, rigor and practical utility of research findings.

The interpretivist paradigm allows the researcher to recognise and narrate the meanings associates with human experiences (Fossey *et al.*, 2002) as opposed to quantifying, measuring or predicting them in relation to a hypothesis. Whilst the positivist paradigm has enjoyed the historical monopoly in educational research, interpretive approaches have established wide-spread legitimacy in sociological (Riehl, 2001), psychological (Howitt, 2019) and pedagogical domains (Pope, 2013). This approach strives to explore and understand the issues under investigation but told from the perspective of the individuals to which the issues relate (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2010; Sarantakos, 2013). The role of the researcher when undertaking interpretive research is to interpret or understand the participants' personal meanings and actions but viewed within the cultural context in which the action occurs (Grønmo, 2020). Seeking to understand the behaviour, values and perceptions of the participants from an empathic standpoint is known as *verstehen*, which is a central aspect of qualitative research (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2020). In this regard, primacy is given to “the personal interpretations of the participant(s) rather than theoretical knowledge of the researcher or previously held ‘truths’ about a selected phenomenon” (Pope, 2013, p. 21). Heidegger (1996, p. 141) believed that fully detached reflection is impossible because “interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something to us.” More specifically, therefore, the presentation and analysis of data draws on Max van Manen’s (1990) hermeneutic phenomenology which is attentive to both the descriptive (phenomenological) accounts of how things appear as well as interpretive (hermeneutic) in that all phenomena are subject to interpretation. Van Manen (1990) states that researchers should always recognise their own assumptions because presuppositions can persistently sneak back into their reflections. As a result, the researcher has embraced the fact that his personal experience and worldview will seep into the fabric of discussions; the point is not to avoid this but to acknowledge it as both an inevitable and valuable resource for qualitative inquiry.

According to Geertz (1973), interpretivist research should not be viewed as a scientific endeavour in search of laws, but an interpretive process in search of meaning. The researcher and the researched can each interpret the world in different ways, resulting in different meanings ascribed to the phenomenon being investigated. Consequently, interpretivists are generally inclined to reject the central tenets of positivism. That is, the researcher is not and cannot be a detached judge of the social world. Rather, they are an integrated part of that

social world precisely because they occupy both the physical and metaphysical space within it. Philosophical attacks on positivism, however, are “rarely directed at true objectivity, but rather at pretenders who use it to mask their own dishonesty, or perhaps the falseness and injustice of a whole culture” (Porter, 1995, p. 3). Put another way, it is not the notion of universal truths that are questioned, but whether impartial and value-free research can ever be attained and applied when positivist research is itself a human, thus interpretive, endeavour. The researcher in this study is less concerned with metaphysical debates about what constitutes a fact and more concerned to make well-reasoned assumptions.

The intention here is to provide a transparent qualitative account of the physical education environment. Having been a PE teacher, the researcher is cognisant that he is part of the social milieu of PE, but also that he is an ‘outsider’ to the communities being studied. Additionally, the researcher is aware that he, the staff and the pupils each have uniquely personal accounts of PE which shape the meanings they ascribe to their experiences. The vexed debates about the nature of reality and the acquisition of knowledge, as well as the questions they generate, are epistemological issues in that they seek to determine the legitimacy of claims to knowledge (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Whether positivists or interpretivists, researchers’ ontological beliefs are always closely tied with their epistemological assumptions (Annells, 1996; Crotty, 1998).

Epistemology

Epistemology is the philosophical study of knowledge and justified beliefs (Hetherington, 2019). Epistemology is a crucial aspect of all research paradigms because it is centred on the relationship between the knower and the known (Holmes, 1986). In research, epistemology deals with the processes by which something can come to be known and on what basis knowledge of truth or reality can be claimed (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Cooksey & McDonald, 2011). Knowledge always pertains to truth or reality, whereas beliefs occupy the continuum between unsubstantiated claims and justified true beliefs. Drawing on Plato’s contention that knowledge adds value to true beliefs, Schmitt (1992, p. 1) suggests that knowledge is “indefeasibly justified true belief” in that, by acquiring knowledge in addition to true belief, the knower is able to ascertain the unassailable justification for their belief. One of the central epistemological problems, therefore, is to explore when individuals merely believe and when they know (Audi, 2018). By investigating the dogmatic beliefs about holistic PE outcomes (afPE, 2019) this study is inherently epistemological because, at its core, it seeks

to transform the taken-for-granted assumptions, or beliefs, into *indefeasible justified true beliefs*.

Positivism is typically associated with the epistemological conviction that scientific methods, used to study observable and measurable ‘facts’ as well as causal relationships, are best placed to legitimise claims to knowledge. The virtues of positivist research, according to Humphrey (2013, p. 5), “reside in the promise of securing objective knowledge”. Therefore, positivists ordinarily adopt deductive approaches in which a specific expectation is deduced from a general premise or hypothesis, which can then be tested (Schutt, 2019). These approaches result in the proclamation of *a priori* knowledge. For truth to be enunciated *a priori*, then reason or knowledge is based upon theoretical deduction as opposed to empirical observation, which denotes a top-down approach to the acquisition of knowledge (Ma, 2016). Researchers concerned with theoretical deduction tend to seek definitive conclusions about their datasets by testing, confirming or rejecting their initial hypothesis. Positivist researchers tend to adopt quantitative methods as these are congruent with research endeavours seeking more generalisable knowledge claims with degrees of certainty for specific outcomes. However, Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2018, p. 140) are convinced that “objectivity is a chimera: a mythological creature that never existed, save in the imagination of those who believe that knowing can be separated from the knower”. On the issue of scientific inquiry, Bertrand Russell (1946, p. 2) also makes a compelling case: “Science tells us what we can know, but what we can know is little, and if we forget how much we cannot know we become insensitive to many things of very great importance”.

Understanding social life by obtaining and presenting statistical data is problematic (Porter, 1995), not least because the complexities of social life cannot be explained through statistical data alone. This is not to deny the value and contribution of positivist research to the understanding social worlds. Indeed, Hasan (2016) postulates that both positivism and interpretivism are to some degree appropriate for the analysis of the social world; the former being most applicable for providing larger-scale social surveys and descriptive information, and the latter being better placed for unearthing and disseminating the deeper meanings associated with the complexities of the social world. In opposition to positivism, it is argued that all forms of knowledge are socially constructed (Angen, 2000). For Madison (1988, p. 44), the impartial world of science is “but an interpretation of the world of our immediate experience”, which is an inherently personal experience (Lerum, 2001). Lather (2006) offers a Foucauldian view in qualitative educational research. By drawing on Foucault’s notion of

“inexact knowledges” (Foucault, 1998, p. 321), Lather (2006, p. 787) pushes for a counter-hegemonic view of science that “troubles what we take for granted as the good in fostering understanding, reflection and action”.

Such animated debates have shaped the methodological landscape of educational research. For instance, drawing on the work of Gage (1989), Denzin (2008, p. 316) states that “during the 1980s, the paradigm wars...resulted in the demise of quantitative research in education, a victim of attacks from anti-naturalists, interpretivists and critical theorists”, creating a space in which ethnographic studies flourished. However, as a conscious effort to avoid the pitfalls associated with “methodological tribalism” (Aspers & Corte, 2019, p. 143), it seems prudent to point out that the philosophical orientation of this study by no means reflects a criticism of positivist research. Avoiding the temptation to justify the epistemological position of this study on the basis of a false sense of superiority, the epistemological position in this study does not claim that one position is more *valid* than another. Rather, it was deemed that *systematic qualitative inquiry* is most suited to and fit for purpose in this study.

Reflexive note: For two reasons, the philosophical underpinnings of this study are aligned with interpretivism. Firstly, interpretivism is philosophically appropriate for addressing the research aims. Secondly, I share the belief that multiple realities exist simultaneously and, as a result, the epistemological foundations of this study are located within social constructivism (Crotty, 1998). My worldview is grounded in social constructivism and empirically derived information through lived experience. As Bruner (1986, p. 95) remarks: “what we call the world is a product of some mind”. In this case, my worldview is the result of the complex exchanges between both my own and others’ minds. Guba and Lincoln (1989, p. 80) assert that: “At some level we must stop giving reasons and simply accept whatever we are as our basic belief set – our paradigm”. Sparkes (1992, p. 12) argues that paradigms “shape how we think and act because for the most part we are not even aware that we are wearing any particular set of lenses”. Therefore, I will enter the field with a carefully planned methodology, but I will also make deliberate attempts to bring into consciousness the lenses that I may be wearing, albeit it unconsciously.

There is, of course, growing recognition that qualitative research is informed by multiple epistemological positions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), meaning that different philosophical perspectives resonate with researchers at different points and that this can affect their viewpoint and approach over time (Moses & Knutsen, 2012). The researcher in this study will utilise this

epistemological pluralism because of the contention that the acquisition of knowledge is not confined to one epistemological canon. For instance, an *empirical* epistemology assumes that knowledge is derived from direct experience of observable entities (Pernecky, 2016). David Hume (1711–1776) divided all human knowledge into two categories; *relations of ideas* and *matters of fact*. Logical propositions, that 1 metre contains 100cm, is an example of the former, whereas the latter includes contingent observation such as stones falling when released in the air. Despite the *relations of ideas* being an example of *a priori* knowledge, it is only through the *acquisition of the idea* that it can be known without empirical investigation and thus, for Hume, all ideas are derived from experience, sensations or, as he termed it, ‘impressions’. This led Hume to argue that “all our ideas are nothing but copies of our impressions, or, in other words, that it is impossible for us to think of anything, which we have not antecedently felt, either by our external or internal senses” (Hume, 1740, cited in Millican, 2007, p. 45).

Embodiment, experiential learning and sensorial experiences are core aspects of PE, through which ideas, or ‘impressions’, can be derived. Important, however, is the recognition that pupils’ and teachers’ experiences of PE do not occur in isolation, rather they are constructed within a complex and dynamic social milieu whereby matters of fact and relations of ideas can play out. For both pupils and teachers, the meanings associated with PE are therefore shaped by interactions within and between PE communities, the ideas and practices associated with PE as well as the locality and cultural contexts of their experiences. This aligns with the relativist position which asserts that all knowledge is context dependent (Williams, 2016). Much like epistemological positions are informed by ontological worldviews, the applied methodological perspectives should also align with the researcher’s ontological and epistemological positions.

Applied Methodological Perspectives

Qualitative research is used to explore the meanings associated with social phenomena, but specifically from the perspective of those who experience it and thus data is collected in its natural setting (Malterud, 2001). Qualitative research primarily explores the meanings and interpretations which individuals or groups assign to their contexts and thus the purpose is to investigate a social phenomenon against the backdrop of its natural setting (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2020). A central tenet of qualitative research is to explore the meanings that people give to parts of their lives (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2016) and to seek understanding of individuals’ experiences through their own frame of reference (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). For Denzin and Lincoln (2018, p. 10), qualitative research is “a situated activity that locates the

observer in the world”. It is consistent with a *naturalist* methodology in which the researcher is viewed as a participant observer, generating socially derived data gathered through various forms (Carr & Kemmis, 1986).

Reflexive note: Mark Rothko described the interpretation of his art as “a consummated experience between picture and onlooker. Nothing should stand between my painting and the viewer” (Rothko, cited in Baal-Teshuva, 2015, p. 7). For me, this has methodological resonance. In creating his art, Rothko wanted to leave its associated ‘meanings’ open to the onlooker’s interpretation. I often consider what ‘meanings’ people deduce from his paintings and my only conclusions have been that there are multiple interpretations of his work; the colour and the shape, as well as the layers can create meaning in infinite ways and thus through multiple realities. This is a useful comparison to the research paradigm because the PE world – or the art – can also be interpreted in many ways by those associated with the subject – the onlookers.

To be a researcher, however, is “not to be a passive onlooker but to be an observer with a purpose” (Palmer & Griggs, 2010, p. 4). Qualitative research permits a wide range of flexible approaches to, and methods for, the study of social phenomena (Saldaña, 2011) and researchers should be prepared for this complexity. Typically, qualitative research generates multiple forms of data from a variety of sources (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and methodological flexibility allows for the direction of the study to be influenced by the data collected (Palmer & Griggs, 2010). Furthermore, qualitative research is discovery-oriented so there are no prescriptive sequences of data collection or analysis (Richards and Morse, 2013). The researcher, therefore, is able to respond as necessary. Notwithstanding its attendant flexibilities, qualitative research involves the systematic collection, interpretation and presentation of data which is socially derived. The PE community thus far has received little support from qualitative research evidence which might enable them to address some of the problems relating to curricular change (Evans, 2017). However, as Spracklen (2014, p. 139) notes: “arguments in favour of physical education are never made in an entirely coherent manner. The case is too often stated rather than demonstrated”. This study hopes to play a small part in addressing these issues, by seeking to demonstrate what might be achieved in the name of physical education and how beliefs about holistic PE outcomes can become empirically evidenced. In an effort to problematize the utility of research positions and paradigms, Peterson (2020, np) argues that “the problem isn’t what the world is made of; it’s how to act in the world, regardless of what it’s made of”. How to act in the world is a highly

individual issue but it is invariably and closely tied with morality and ethics. Of course, decisions about how to act in the world and about what constitutes educational worth is a matter of values.

Axiology

In addition to ontology, epistemology and methodology, a fourth aspect of research paradigms was proposed by Heron and Reason (1997) known as *axiology*. Deriving from two Greek words (*axios*, or worthy, and *logos*, meaning reason and theory), axiology refers to the philosophical study of values and ethics. The idea that research is a value-laden enterprise is not new. Indeed, Lincoln and Guba (1985) acknowledged that researchers' values were an important consideration because they offered a point of departure from positivist methodologies, in that, by identifying the research problem, choosing the theoretical framework and deciding on which data collection strategies to use, researchers were engaging in value-laden activities. It was not until more recently that Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2018, p. 132) agreed that axiology should be viewed as "a part of the basic foundational philosophical dimensions of paradigm proposal" because it enables researchers to "see the embeddedness of ethics within, not external to, paradigms".

Research in the interpretivist paradigm is invariably value-laden. The researcher is an inseparable part of the social world under investigation and so the processes, findings and reporting will be influenced by their personal and professional values (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). The personal viewpoints of the researcher can present issues for the credibility, integrity and representation of research. If so inclined, they could obscure or undermine the data according to their personal values or to pursue their own ends. The intention here is not to erase the researcher's predispositions, but to cautiously acknowledge them as an inseparable part of life. Methodologies are inextricably linked with researchers' philosophies (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and thus their predispositions are not only possible but inevitable. The point is to make it visible throughout. A balanced axiology denotes that the outcome of any research will invariably reflect the values of the researcher but that the researcher will maintain their integrity and transparency throughout (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). The processes and products of this research, therefore, will unavoidably reflect the researcher's values, but earnest and deliberate attempts will be made to ensure a transparent and balanced view of the findings.

To do this effectively, the researcher will also assume an emic approach to the research. Emic approaches seek to elicit the experiences and accounts which are meaningful to the

native members of the community being studied (Lett, 1990). In this case the ‘natives’ are the pupils, teachers and other members of the school community. More than merely representing the meaningful accounts of research participants, emic understandings empathise with another cultural group (García, 1992). As a qualified teacher of physical education, the researcher is in a uniquely strong position to empathise with the pupils and teachers, as well as the associated cultural practices. Therefore, the researcher’s balanced axiological position will be manifest through an empathic venture. The researcher will seek to foster an empathic rapport with the research participants, in this case, the pupils, teachers and other members of the school community. Empathy is characterised as the *sine qua non* for obtaining reliable information in qualitative research (Bednarek-Gilland, 2015). With its root in the Greek term *empathia*, empathy denotes the appreciation of another’s feelings which, in qualitative inquiry, is also commonly discussed with reference to *Verstehen*, meaning empathic understanding (Gair, 2012). This is a vital aspect of interpretive research because appreciating the feelings and lived experiences of the research participants enables the researcher to gain deeper insights into social phenomena by tapping into the intersubjective connections between the researcher and the researched (Thin, 2014; Atkinson, 2017).

The axiological foundations of this study are underpinned by the researcher’s sensitivity for ethics and proclivity for empathic discourse. As a guiding principle in this study, therefore, empathy is embedded within the researcher’s ontological and epistemological worldviews. That is, accounting for multiple realities requires the researcher to be acutely aware that perspectives on PE are varied because the subject itself is a social construct. A value-sensitive and empathic philosophy will be a central feature of the research process and will require a strong focus on the participants’ experiences whilst recognising that the researcher may make impressions on the social phenomenon. This level of self-reflection in research, known as *reflexivity*, is the final aspect of the paradigmatic awareness outlined previously.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is “a conscious experiencing of the self” and should be regarded as a central thread of the research process (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2018, p. 142). Reflexivity refers to “the ways in which the products of research are affected by the personnel and process of doing research” (Davies, 2008, p. 4). From the outset it is important to point out that the unfolding ‘products’ of this research will be influenced by the complex, dynamic and unpredictable interactions between the researcher and the researched. The point is not to suppress this truism but to embrace it as a methodological inevitability. All social activities, including research

itself, are *endogenous* because they contain both internal experiences and personal meanings for the individuals involved (Cunliffe, 2003). The researcher's social background and experiences may affect their views about, and interpretations of, the phenomenon under study which may lead to knowledge claims that are not based purely on the reality of the phenomena but also on the researcher's personal worldview (Grønmo, 2020). Reflexivity involves the deliberate processes by which the researcher acknowledges the way in which he or she affects the processes and outcomes of their research (Davies, 2008; Haynes, 2012). It is based on the epistemological belief that the researcher is an inseparable part of the social construction of knowledge (Angen, 2000).

Reflexivity does not infer a fixation on establishing a firm grip on validity, as this is more akin to the positivist approach. Instead, reflexivity is a means of accepting and capturing the researcher's individuality by putting it to creative use (Okely, 1996) in a manner which demonstrates transparency. Reflexivity, therefore, is a mechanism by which the researcher can reflect on how their presence, behaviour or values, for instance, may have impacted upon the data, which can then be reported to establish research integrity. Conversely, the researcher can identify how the data, or the phenomenon under study, may also have affected them. Reinharz (1997) expands on the researcher's relationship to the field, by suggesting that the self is both *brought to* and *created in* the field. She contends that researchers bring with them their *research-oriented selves*, which refers to the planned and focused research activities, their *brought selves*, which is comprised of their socially, historically and personally created viewpoints, and their *environmentally created selves*, wherein the self is in a continual state of becoming due to the interplay between the self and the research context (Reinharz, 1997). Of course, these *selves* are not conceptually divorced because they are each embodied by the researcher, but the degree to which the 'environmentally created self' is shaped in *the field* depends on how the field itself is conceptualised. If conceived only as the physical space in which research activities occur, the ostensible impact of the field on the self is limited by contextual boundaries. However, if perceived as an emblematic or metaphorical space then the field can continue to shape the self, long after the researcher exits the physical research setting. Nevertheless, these multiple identities reveal the fluidity of the self in research settings (Alcoff & Potter, 1993). Reflexivity, therefore, denotes "a process of on-going mutual shaping between researcher and research" (Attia & Edge, 2017, p. 33). The researcher is a human instrument (Guba & Lincoln, 1981) that acts as a malleable conduit through which the 'realities' of the social world are illuminated. Invariably, the light must pass through the

researcher's methodological lens and, through the transparency of reflexivity, the researcher can present a research story that recognises the inevitable refraction of knowledge.

Whilst much is invested in conceptual frameworks and theoretical perspectives, Saldaña (2014, p. 977) criticises the chronic complexities associated with social research and puts it somewhat more bluntly: “How 'bout me just sayin' what it really is and what I really mean: *This is where I'm comin' from*”. This section has attempted to articulate where I, the researcher, *am coming from*. The research paradigm has been articulated with reference to ontological and epistemological positions, including the chosen methodology which comprises a range of ethnographic tools to generate socially derived data, underpinned by a balanced axiology and a commitment to reflexivity. The interpretivist research paradigm is closely tied to qualitative methodologies, the former being a methodological approach and the latter being a means of collecting data (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). Having laid out the philosophical underpinnings of the research paradigm, the following section will discuss the more practical elements of the research and will consider the various social roles of the researcher during the data collection phases. Before doing so, for the reader's convenience figure 6 provides a condensed overview of the research paradigm and its inquiry implications:

Interpretivist-Constructivist Paradigm	Inquiry Implications
Ontology: a <i>relativist</i> ontology with a <i>non-realist</i> approach	The researcher accepts that there is an external physical world that is independent of his thoughts or motives, whilst, at the same time, recognises that this same world is interpreted in different ways by its inhabitants and that these interpretations are invariably value-laden.
Epistemology: epistemological pluralism, drawing upon <i>subjectivist, constructivist, transactional</i> and <i>empirical</i> epistemologies	Knowledge is invariably developed through <i>subjective</i> and <i>empirical</i> experiences, which is always <i>constructed</i> between the knower and the known, and <i>transactional</i> between individuals or groups.
Methodology: a <i>naturalist</i> and <i>dialectical</i> methodology drawing upon methods pertaining to <i>ethnographic visiting</i>	The researcher seeks to understand a culture from within by immersing himself in the social environment to capture authentic, or <i>naturally occurring</i> data, where possible. In addition, by recognising the co-construction of understanding between the researcher and the researched, the methodology is <i>dialectical</i> .
Axiology: a <i>balanced</i> axiology	Transparency of process and product which is underpinned by emotional intelligence and empathy. By accounting for the researcher's values, the findings and thus any knowledge claims will be reported in a <i>balanced</i> way.
Reflexivity: integrated <i>reflexivity</i>	By <i>integrating reflexivity</i> throughout, the researcher will show an awareness of the self and how it permeates every aspect of the inquiry, from the initial motivation and identifying of the research problem, to the research activities and reporting.

Figure 6: The Researcher's Paradigm and Inquiry Implications

Research Methods

Research methods are inextricably linked with the methodology. Whilst methodologies provide the theoretical framework on which the research can be conducted and interpreted, research methods are the practical tools by which the research aims and objectives can be achieved (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). This study seeks to investigate the learning culture and educational status of PE, with reference to both its holistic educational claims and the potential of literacy as a conduit for meaning-making in PE. This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, drawing on a combination of methods associated with “ethnographic visiting” (Sugden & Tomlinson, 2002, p. 12). The features of these methods will be discussed and justified in this section, demonstrating methodological alignment throughout.

Due to the scope of the research aims, it would be inappropriate for the researcher to adopt the position of a methodological purist and use a singular research method (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, p. 17). Critiquing methodological prescriptivism, Janesick (1994, p. 215) amalgamated the terms *method* and *idolatry* to coin the term *methodolatry*, which describes a “slavish attachment and devotion to method”. For Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 48), this refers to a “a preoccupation with selecting and defining methods to the exclusion of the actual substance of the story being told”. By avoiding excessively prescriptive methods – that is, not becoming a slave to methodological “cookbooks” (Eisner, 2017, p. 169) – the researcher can enter the field in a way that is free from procedural shackles and embraces complexity. As Wolcott (2005, p. 5) highlights: “a crucial aspect of fieldwork lies in recognising when to be unmethodical”.

Educational researchers regularly utilise multiple methods of data collection from multiple sources of qualitative information which, in turn, can lead to multi-modal representations of human experience (Punch & Oancea, 2014). Researching PE as a social phenomenon, in all its complexity and with the multiple realities of its constituents, relies on the selection of appropriate methods. Being acutely aware of the dynamic and social milieu of education, and open-minded to multi-modal representations, the methods for this study will be congruent with the research paradigm (Richards & Morse, 2013) and will also capitalise on the methodological flexibility inherent to qualitative research (Tuval-Mashiach, 2017).

Richards and Morse (2013) offer a useful framework for ensuring the methodological congruence of a research project, including congruence between the *question* and the

proposed *methods*, as well as between the *methods* and *data analysis techniques*. The authors highlight which methods are conducive to different types of research questions and in doing so they suggest that questions about the values, beliefs and practices of a cultural group are best explored through ethnographic research. Therefore, this study will draw on a combination of ethnographic tools (Green & Bloome, 1997) and will strive to present the data in as rich and unique a form as it is generated.

Reflexive note: I am an embodied researcher and will as part of the fieldwork be learning through corporeal experiences in a situated ethnography. My personal presence in the research environment has implications for my own meaning-making, just as it is for the learner in physical education. Moreover, my physical presence will undoubtedly exert a social influence upon the environment. This is not something I am concerned about. The reflexive accounts about my positionality in the field are congruent with my epistemological position that knowledge is socially derived. The reciprocity of socially constructed knowledge between myself as the researcher and the researched is an opportunity, not a threat, and I intend to enter the field with an open mind. Ethnographers are renowned for their ability to keep an open mind whilst conducting research, but this should not be conflated with a lack of rigour. As Fetterman (2010, p. 1) puts it: “The ethnographer enters the field with an open mind, not an empty head”.

Ethnography

Ethnography is an approach to research that involves “immersion within, and investigation of, a culture or social world” (Goodley *et al.*, 2004, p. 56). Silverman (2020, p. 248) suggests that a vital aspect of ethnography is for the researcher to “get inside the fabric of everyday life”. Perhaps a distinction can be made between getting *to* the fabric and getting *in* the fabric. Two basic components of weaving involve the warp (longitudinal) and the weft (transverse). This analogy might be useful in understanding the value of ethnographic research. Interviews and focus groups, for instance, can provide opportunities for researchers to get an indication of what research participants might be thinking (Silverman, 2020). Getting *to* the fabric is one thing, but ethnographic research goes further. By consciously weaving one’s self into the everyday realities of the social world under investigation, the ethnographer can get *inside* the fabric which could lead to a deeper and more informed understanding of the social phenomenon. Ethnography is useful in this sense, not because it claims to guarantee knowledge about others, but because it “brings us into direct dialogue *with* others” (Jackson, 1996, p. 8).

Ethnographic research generally involves “holistic studies of social life in communities, institutions, organizations or other contexts” (Grønmo, 2020, p. 179). The notion of *holistic* research resonates with the integrative paradigmatic awareness outlined previously. More than focusing on others, or participants, Eberle and Maeder (2011) assert that the ethnographer should adopt a multisensory approach to their work, taking into account the architecture, spatial arrangements and even the furniture as important aspects of data collection in addition to the means and intent behind participants’ communication. It can be advantageous to recognise the plural and interlacing elements of which a social phenomenon is comprised and weave these elements more fully into the research, as doing so helps to capture the essence of the inquiry. In addition, by weaving themselves into the fabric of everyday life, ethnographers seek to develop a deep understanding of a social world by studying people in their naturally occurring settings. Brewer (2000, p. 6) describes ethnography as:

The study of people in naturally occurring settings or ‘fields’ by methods of data collection which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally.

Observing human behaviour as it occurs naturally can lead to more “authentic, true, honest, detailed and perhaps accurate field data” which can support “deeper philosophical analysis for practical understandings about human behaviour” (Palmer & Grecic, 2014, p. 90). Capturing this authenticity often requires the researcher to *be there*, but simply *being there* will not necessarily yield valuable insights because, as outlined previously, researchers should go about their fieldwork with a clear sense of purpose (Palmer & Griggs, 2010). Purposeful observations should not be conflated with purposeful omission or concealment of research findings. Instead, observing with purpose refers to the need for researchers to remain focused on the research aims whilst being aware and responsive to their situation in the field, and any changes within it. An awareness of what data is valuable for achieving the research aims is not the same as neglecting other important findings. In any case, it is not the presence of bias that matters but the degree to which it is recognised and voiced, as Norris (1997, p. 174) remarks:

A consideration of self as a researcher and self in relation to the topic of research is a precondition for coping with bias. How this can be realised varies from individual to individual. For some, it involves a deliberate effort at voicing their prejudices and assumptions so that they can be considered openly and challenged. For others, it happens through introspection and analysis.

Consideration of the *self* will also manifest in the form of reflexivity. The inquiry process will employ consistent introspection and reflexive analysis. The multimethod research strategies, such as observational field notes (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2020), interview transcripts, data analysis and data presentation, will be supplemented with reflexivity. Also important is that the researcher is aware of his fluctuating social roles, duties and corresponding behaviours, and that this will invariably impact upon the environment, the data collection and the data interpretation. It is important to note that these fluctuating roles can have implications for the degree to which the researcher is accepted as an *insider* or *outsider*.

Several scholars have argued against the notion that the insider–outsider distinctions in educational research are dichotomous and fixed (Hellawell, 2006; Arthur, 2010; Thomson & Gunter, 2010). In the unpredictable school environment, the researcher’s social roles and responsibilities can fluctuate due to a myriad of potential and unforeseen reasons. Furthermore, the binary view of researchers as either *insiders* or *outsiders* is not only an oversimplification of the fluidity of researcher identities, but it also suggests implicitly that the researcher is a merely *passive recipient* of their field work identity, as though it were prescribed to them by external factors alone. This is only a partial view of the complex phenomenon of insider–outsider identities in educational research. Milligan (2016, p. 248), proposes the more active term of “inbetweeners” to account for researchers’ deliberate attempts to adjust their positioning on the insider–outsider continuum. Drawing on Bauman’s (2000) notion of *liquid identities*, Thomson and Gunter (2010, p. 26) present the term “liquid researchers”, suggesting that researcher identities are dialogic, fluid and should be conceptualised as an ongoing self-evaluation process. This means that researcher identity is never static but is instead malleable and negotiated as part of the social dynamics of the fieldwork. From a sociological perspective, the deliberate attempt to manipulate one’s position on the insider–outsider continuum could be characterised as impression management.

In his dramaturgical analysis, Goffman (1959) discussed identity in terms of impression management, whereby individuals embody both ‘front stage’ and ‘backstage’ personae. The front stage denotes what the *actors* are prepared to reveal publicly, whereas the backstage persona is revealed only *behind the scenes* or in trusted environments. Goffman’s dramaturgy offers a useful theoretical framework for reflexivity and introspection about the researcher’s impression management during fieldwork. The intention here is to integrate the notion of dramaturgy within the research and engage in *dramaturgical reflexivity*. That is, the researcher

intends to be mindful of the occasions in which he is engaged in impression management. Accounting for this in preparation for fieldwork demonstrates a commitment to methodological congruence and reflexivity. Applying it in practice will be intimately linked with the researcher's fluctuating roles and identities in the school setting.

Invariably, schools are complex and dynamic social environments (Cole, 2002) which have the potential to influence the researcher's role, duties and behaviours. Hammersley & Atkinson (1995, p. 104) identify various social roles that are potentially undertaken by researchers during fieldwork, ranging from a "complete participant" to a "complete observer". The continuum of social roles is identified in figure 7:

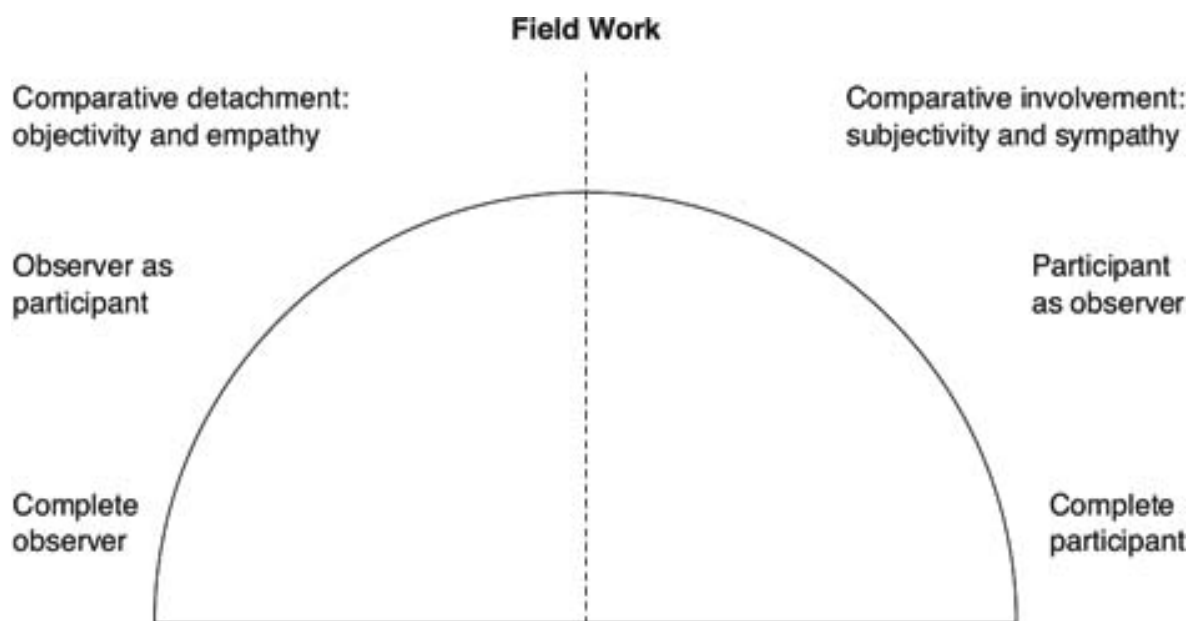


Figure 7: Theoretical Social Roles for Fieldwork (Junker, 1960 cited in Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 104).

These social roles and identities can, of course, be *intentional* on the part of the researcher or *instigated* by the social environment depending on the social dynamics of the research setting. For instance, in the school environment, the researcher may have the *intention* of remaining comparatively detached by occupying the role of "complete observer" but could quickly find themselves in a "participant as observer" role due to the *instigation* of the research participants. In the case of this study, there are an infinite number of factors which might influence the researcher's role and identity. The busy school environment renders it difficult to predict how, when and why this process will manifest. Being aware of this prior to entering the field, however, will only enhance the reflexive approach to the analysis of socially derived

data. Mills and Morton (2013, p. 9) rightly point out that ethnography is never a linear process and encourage researchers to consider several questions:

But what if your experience of ethnographic fieldwork not only forces reflection, but leads you to rethink the very research questions and design? Can one ever be prescriptive about a method that depends so much on how the researcher responds to the world in which they find themselves?

An ethnographic story of discovery, though it is comprised of a beginning, middle and end, cannot begin at the end. Of course, the issue of what *counts* as ethnography within education has been somewhat contentious. Green and Bloome (1997) offer three distinct approaches to ethnography which are traditional in both social science and education: *doing ethnography*, adopting *ethnographic perspectives* and *using ethnographic tools*. The former involves an “in-depth, and long-term study of a social or cultural group” (Green & Bloome, 1997, p. 4) which, in the case of this research, is unachievable in its fullest sense because the researcher is unable to fully immerse himself as a full-time and long-term member of the social world. The latter two involve taking a more “focused approach” and using the “methods and techniques usually associated with fieldwork” respectively (Green & Bloome, 1997, p. 4). The *focused approach* in this case is to investigate the educational worth and potential of PE in schools, whilst at the same time reconciling questions about its educational legitimacy. It will achieve this by adopting *ethnographic principles* and employing *ethnographic tools* (Green & Bloome, 1997).

Jeffrey & Troman (2004) described three ethnographic time modes: firstly, the authors present a *compressed time mode*, which denotes a short but intense period of ethnographic research in which the researcher inhabits the environment for anything between a few days to a month; secondly, they describe a *selective intermittent time mode*, which denotes a long period of time in the field with a flexible approach to the field visits; thirdly, they discuss a *recurrent time mode*, which focuses on temporal visits to schools, such as beginnings or ends of terms, or summer or winter periods. Unfortunately, none of these time modes accurately reflect the intentions for this visiting ethnography. The closest resembling time mode is the *compressed time mode* as it relates to short bursts of ethnography. However, due to various commitments, the researcher is unable to become a full-time member of the community and will be visiting the field sites on a weekly basis. The researcher has arranged two separate *researcher-in-residency* phases, one in a primary school and one in a secondary school, with the view to interpret the attitudes and beliefs of staff toward literacy for learning in PE. As a

result, the researcher will adopt a form of “ethnographic visiting” (Sugden & Tomlinson, 2002, p. 12). Here, the researcher and the social world under study are well-acquainted but remain discrete. Therefore, although this study cannot claim to be a classic, long-term and fully-immersed ethnography (Sugden & Tomlinson, 2002), it will nevertheless utilise a variety of ethnographic tools (Green & Bloome, 1997) to develop a situated observational account of behaviours in their natural settings. The next section provides a brief discussion about the ethnographic tools used in each phase of the study.

A Multimethod Approach to Fieldwork

The fieldwork activities in this study comprise three phases. All three phases overlap conceptually as the research aims remain steadfast, but the data collection activities for each phase occurred at discrete times, locations and with different personnel. In striving for an authentic account of PE culture, the researcher harnesses the multimethod flexibility permitted by qualitative inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). At times, the data presentation breaks from academic tradition using crystallization, a term referring to “the capacity for writers to break out of traditional generic constraints” (Ellingson, 2008, p. 3). Not to be conflated with mixed methods approaches, crystallization is a form of methodological pluralism which embraces multimethod research in its design, practice and dissemination (Ellingson, 2017). The researcher does this with confidence due to the increasing prevalence of counter-hegemonic resistance toward top-down orthodoxies in qualitative inquiry, meaning there is no one gold standard for qualitative research (Denzin, 2018).

Phase One comprises a preliminary scoping exercise, intended to provide the contemporary *lay of the land*. Surveys were sent to pupils and teachers who were involved in co-authoring chapters relating to PE and physical culture for the *Sports Monograph* book (Palmer, 2014). Interviews and focus groups were facilitated with both primary teachers and secondary teachers of PE. Beyond the tensions of terminology relating to qualitative *research* or *inquiry*, new and novel methodologies are incredibly prevalent in the field, such as the “performance turn” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 11). The performance turn views human beings as *performers*, not just researchers or inquirers. Harnessing the methodological flexibility, the researcher developed a reflexive script, presented as a play, which illuminates a personal account of the researcher’s lived experiences. This is a form of ethnodrama (Saldaña, 2005) which, put simply, means dramatizing the data (Saldaña, 2011, p. 13) and such reflexive anecdotes are used in concert with more traditional academic writing.

Phase Two is informed by eight episodes of data collection: episode one comprises three focus groups with different primary and secondary teachers and school leaders; episode two contains a narrative account of a literacy coordinator in a secondary school; and episodes three to eight are informed by a twelve-week period of data collection using ethnographic tools in a primary school in the North West of England. The primary method of data collection in this phase was participant observation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995), but due to a fortuitous opportunity the researcher's primary mode of being is a full participant. That is, the primary school very kindly offered the opportunity for the researcher not only to observe but also to facilitate learning in a manner conducive to investigating the 'PE problem'. The researcher seized this opportunity and unapologetically accepted the role of teacher-as-researcher (Kincheloe, 2012), which is how the phrase researcher-in-residence was coined organically. The researcher's methodological antennae worked tirelessly during this phase because data was not only manifesting in many different forms and accruing in waves, but the researcher played an instrumental role in the generation of socially constructed data. Phase Two concludes with an interview in which the school Head Teacher openly reflects upon the researcher residency.

Phase Three encompasses a nine-week period of weekly ethnographic visits to a secondary school in the North West of England. During this phase the researcher almost exclusively employed a participant observation role (Junker, 1960, cited in Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 104). Data was grounded in empirical observations and accumulated through descriptive field notes which were expanded upon immediately after the field visits. Phase Three also ended with a reflective interview consisting of three PE teachers who had been helpful in facilitating the observational fieldwork. Each phase informed the next, both conceptually and philosophically. The researcher embarked on each subsequent phase having been informed by the data collected in the previous phase. This engendered new pedagogical and cultural insights, an evolving philosophy for what it might mean to be physically educated and a deeper understanding of methodological principles for educational ethnography.

An important consideration is the distinction between ethnography *of* and ethnography *in* education; the former denotes the use of educational settings, such as schools, as physical sites for the pursuit of social science research aims that are framed by the home disciplines of the researcher, such as anthropology, psychology or sociology; the latter can be understood heuristically, where education becomes both the physical and intellectual site from which knowledge is derived from and about the specific context (Green & Bloome, 1997).

This study pertains to an ethnography *in* education, or, more specifically, an ethnography in physical education, because the school settings are used both as the physical and intellectual sites of knowledge construction. At this juncture, it is important to provide an overview as to the identification of appropriate research participants and how access to both the participants and school environments was negotiated.

Research Participants

Identifying research participants is a fundamental issue for qualitative researchers. Like most aspects of research, there are various approaches to and techniques for the identification of research participants, known as *sampling*. Hatch (2002) outlines a range of sampling techniques used in educational research including, but not limited to, *snowball*, *criterion*, *theory-based*, *convenience* and *opportunistic* sampling. The most frequent sampling technique in studies of an ethnographic persuasion is known as judgmental, or purposive sampling where researchers use their own judgement to identify the most appropriate members of the community in question (Fetterman, 2020). This judgement involves the purposeful consideration of those who are deemed well-placed to answer the research questions. As a qualitative study, this research is fundamentally concerned to develop a depth – as opposed to a breadth – of understanding (Palinkas *et al.*, 1994) and, as a result, it is generally accepted that a relatively small sample size that is purposively selected is suitable for a study of this kind (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Campbell *et al.*, 2020).

The schools and participants were predominantly selected using an approach called *mixed purposeful sampling*, drawing on a combination of *convenience* and *opportunistic* sampling (Hatch, 2002). However, schools are largely fenced off environments, both in the physical and figurative sense, so in gaining access to schools it can be advantageous to have prior knowledge of the research participants (Coe *et al.*, 2021). By utilising his own professional and personal networks, the researcher was able to gain the support of different “gatekeepers”, who are the trusted members of the community under study and are in a unique position to facilitate the researcher’s access to, and rapport with, additional research participants (Gratton & Jones, 2010, p. 200).

Once access to the schools had been granted, however, the individual participants were not *selected* but, on account of their presence in the field, naturally became the all-pervading social data. The pupils and teachers in the schools *are* the social fabric of the environment and thus the researcher utilised opportunities to observe, listen and communicate

with participants wherever access permitted. Once the participants and gatekeepers were identified, the next stage related to gaining access to the participants within the research environment, which invariably requires careful consideration. The sampling process for each Phase of the research will now be briefly discussed.

Phase One: teachers and school leaders in the North West

As highlighted previously, Phase One (Chapter Three) presents a preliminary scoping exercise comprising postal surveys sent to pupils and teachers, interviews and focus groups with both primary teachers and secondary teachers of PE, and a reflexive ethnodrama which illuminates a personal account of the researcher's lived experiences as a teacher of PE.

The reflexive ethnodrama was developed to bring the researcher's lived experiences to life and to set the scene for a qualitative study that is committed to reflexivity throughout. The pupils and teachers who took part in the survey were identified using purposive sampling (Fetterman, 2020). Both the teachers and pupils had collaborated previously to produce a piece of PE-inspired written work to be published in a chapter in *The Sports Monograph* book (2014). As a result, their unique insights into the process and value of literacy for learning in PE was deemed important. Phase One also contains two semi-structured interviews with teachers of secondary physical education, exploring their personal views about the status of PE and the potential role of literacy for learning in the subject. The researcher is personally acquainted with both teachers, so they were identified using both *purposive* and *convenience* sampling; 'purposive' in that the teachers are good informants due to their characteristics and experiences, and 'convenience' because they are directly accessible to and supportive of the researcher (Richards & Morse, 2013).

Phase Two: A primary school in the North West

Phase Two (Chapter 4) comprises various data collection techniques, drawing on the insights of numerous stakeholders. For instance, three focus groups were conducted with different groups of teachers. Focus group 1 included primary school teachers with whom the researcher is already acquainted. Having been a pupil at the school previously and, years later, volunteering at the school to gain work experience, the researcher was already known to the Head Teacher and several colleagues in the school. Consequently, these participants were also identified using both purposive and convenience sampling (Richards & Morse, 2013). Focus group 2 comprised two different primary school teachers. One of the teachers, Miss O'Farrell,

is a personal friend of the researcher and it was originally agreed that she would take part in an individual interview. However, on the morning of the school visit, she asked if Mrs Sharples – unknown to the researcher prior to the event – could join the interview due to her keen interest in literacy for learning. Consequently, what was initially intended to be the purposive and convenience sampling of one teacher resulted in a form of *snowball* sampling, whereby participants who are already in the study suggest another person or persons to take part (Richards & Morse, 2013). This is also indicative of the methodological flexibility that is both required in and beneficial to qualitative research (Tuval-Mashiach, 2017). Focus group 3 comprises three secondary PE teachers, none of whom were known to the researcher prior to the focus group. In this case, the researcher utilised his personal connection with a different member of staff in the school – the “gatekeeper” (Gratton & Jones, 2010, p. 200) – in order to negotiate access to the PE department. This was deemed an important opportunity to move beyond any potential overreliance on convenience sampling, while maintaining a purposive sampling method.

Phase Two also includes a narrative account of a Literacy Coordinator in a secondary school, known in the study as Miss Leach. This teacher was identified using a combination of convenience and purposive sampling (Richards & Morse, 2013). Whilst Miss Leach is a personal acquaintance of the researcher, denoting the *convenience*, she has a school-wide responsibility in her role as Literacy Coordinator meaning she works across the curriculum, including with the PE department, to develop pupils’ literacy for learning opportunities across all subject areas. As a result, her unique insights of working with a PE department were deemed both highly relevant and invaluable for this study and, as a result, she was *purposively* invited to share her insights.

Additionally, Phase Two comprises a twelve-week period of data collection using ethnographic tools in a primary school in the North West of England. The selected primary school is the same school used for focus group 1, whereby the researcher is known to the schoolteachers and vice versa. Again, this school was selected using convenience and purposive sampling (Richards & Morse, 2013). The school is in close proximity to the researcher’s home, making it both convenient and financially viable for the researcher to repeatedly drive to and from the research setting (Boudah, 2020). The school itself is a mixed-sex comprehensive in a rural middle-class area, with a predominantly White British intake. Clearly, while there are innumerable variations within and between pupils and teachers – for instance, differences in socioeconomic status, culture, race, ethnicity, sex, gender and so on – this study has not sought

to centre its analysis on these sociological factors. Therefore, despite being a relatively small sample, this study will not claim to offer any representative or generalisable information, nor does it seek to break down the analysis on the basis of heterogeneous sociological factors. Instead, the principle concern of this sampling frame is to obtain in-depth information from those who are well positioned to provide it (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2017) and purposive sampling has enabled the researcher to develop theory based on the gradual accrual of data from various sources (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2017). It is certainly the case, however, that future research could investigate literacy-based PE pedagogies with an increased sociological focus.

Phase Three: A secondary school in the North West

Phase Three (Chapter Five) presents the experiences, data handling and findings from a nine-week period of data collection using ethnographic tools in a secondary school located in the North West of England. Two episodes of data collection occurred in the formulation of Phase Three. *Episode one* presents the findings from a nine-week period of ethnographic visiting in a secondary school, utilising participant observation as the primary method of data collection. *Episode two* contains an unstructured and conversational focus group with three secondary PE teachers.

The secondary school used as the site for a nine-week period of ethnographic visiting was selected through convenience and purposive sampling (Richards & Morse, 2013). That is, having had extensive experience volunteering at the school previously, the PE department and school leadership team are not only well-acquainted with the researcher, but were also highly receptive to and supportive of the research. This school is also a fairly convenient travel distance as it is relatively close to the researcher's home (Boudah, 2020). The school itself is a Church of England, 11-16 co-educational school and is a member of an educational trust which includes four secondary schools and one primary school. Although it is situated in an area of significant socioeconomic deprivation, the school is oversubscribed and attracts pupils from five local authorities. Of these pupils, 80% identify as Christian and 20% identify as having either another faith or no faith. There are above average numbers both for children with special educational needs and disability as well as looked-after children. However, the school has below average levels of children on free school meals.

The socioeconomic differences between the primary school and secondary school were not a factor for analysis in this study, but this is not to say they may not have had an impact upon the findings. Again, future research could investigate the place of literacy and learning in PE with a specific focus on socioeconomic disparities. That the researcher was known to most of the research participants may also have impacted upon the data. For instance, participants may have been more receptive and open to the researcher in their school settings, or potentially more closed-off. It is clear, however, that due to the personal affiliations with participants, the researcher was able to negotiate access to various field spaces in an efficient and sustainable manner.

Gaining *access* to the field space in educational research is one thing but maintaining the *cooperation* of research participants is an ongoing process (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Wanat, 2008). Research participants, particularly in qualitative studies that involve prolonged research relationships, are not *selected* but, rather, their contributions are *negotiated*. This reiterates the importance of empathy in qualitative research (Bednarek-Gilland, 2015) and the use of emotional intelligence to maintain trust and rapport throughout the school visits. Negotiating access to and cooperation in the field are both crucially important issues, but equally important is the planning and preparation for data analysis. Entering the field without having considered strategies for data analysis is comparable to setting sail without the nautical wherewithal to dock safely. Therefore, the chosen techniques for data analysis will now be discussed briefly.

Data Analysis

Qualitative studies often yield large volumes of data which can make the process of data analysis challenging (Robson, 2002). Denzin (2018) outlines three general positions for evaluative criteria in qualitative inquiry, including foundational, quasi-foundational and nonfoundational positions: *foundationalists* contend that conformity and shared criteria is essential, regardless of whether the research is qualitative or quantitative; *quasi-foundationalists* insist on the need for a unique set of criteria for qualitative research, such as grounded theory, reflexivity and voluptuous validity; finally, the *nonfoundationalists* view research as a moral endeavour and stress the conceptual difference between understanding and prediction (Denzin, 2018). Schwandt (1996, p. 59) offers a blatant example of the nonfoundationalist ethos in suggesting that qualitative researchers should wave “farewell to criteriology”, but such a radical approach is unsuitable here. This study is interested in meanings and understanding,

not generalisable facts and laws, so it is postulated that qualitative research should not be enslaved to objective and systematic criteria (Lather, 2006).

By the same token, a complete absence of evaluative criteria would leave the researcher rudderless in the qualitative ocean and defenceless against inevitable scrutiny. Therefore, this study borrows from both the *quasi-foundational* and *nonfoundational* positions, demonstrating the former by applying theoretical grounding, reflexivity and transgressive validity where appropriate, and demonstrating the latter through a commitment to operating within a moral framework. The competing positions for evaluative dominance give rise to the uncertainties around *rigor* in qualitative research, a term which is itself contested (Barusch, Gringeri, & George, 2011).

It follows, then, that there is no universal consensus as to the most accepted method of data analysis in qualitative research (Gratton & Jones, 2010), but there are three procedures which are generally observed, including data *reduction*, data *display* and *conclusion drawing and verification* (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In practical terms, this means that, firstly, large datasets must undergo a meaningful *reduction* to become manageable, presentable and intelligible for its intended audience. Secondly, once reconfigured, the data is *displayed* in its most suitable form, such as written or diagrammatical forms, enabling the researcher to extrapolate meaning from the emerging patterns and generated themes. Finally, the researcher should undertake a macro analysis of the compressed dataset to arrive at rational conclusions and to present the implications of the data, having revisited the data as many times as is deemed appropriate (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This process is known as data saturation (Saunders *et al.*, 2018), but it should be noted that this too is an interpretive and value-laden activity.

Data analysis in qualitative research not only takes place following but also during the fieldwork (Silverman, 2010; Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2020). That data analysis should occur in parallel with data collection means that the interpretive process is inseparable from the fieldwork activities. Critical incidents, intuitive curiosities and perceptual patterns of meaning can all be derived through the researcher's embodied experiences both in the field and once the field has been exited. The researcher's interpretive work is not confined to the *physical field* because it continues long after the researcher exits the physical fieldspace. As discussed, it could be argued that the field encompasses both a *physical* space, in which fieldwork activities occur *in situ*, and a *metaphorical* space in which the fieldwork continues in the mind of the researcher. It could be tempting to view the physical and metaphorical

dimensions of the field as discrete entities. However, such perceptual boundaries could create the misconception that the interpretive work is interrupted because of the researcher's geographical location, when in fact the interpretive work is enmeshed in the entire research process.

Expanding the notion of the field does, however, give rise to epistemological implications. For instance, on the one hand, the physical settings in which data collection activities occur signals some form of immersion within the participants' environment and, consequently, the experiences associated with these activities would appear to tessellate with *constructivist* and *transactional* epistemologies. On the other hand, the metaphorical space – say, the researcher's home – in which the researcher continues to generate meaning from the observed data might be more akin to *empirical* and *subjectivist* epistemologies. Of course, the issue of 'when' knowledge or understanding are acquired and through 'which' epistemological channel(s) they are developed is difficult to determine, thus the adoption of epistemological pluralism in this study. For instance, the researcher could continue to engage in hypothetical dialogue with participants long after exiting the fieldspace – that is, of course, if a *dialectical* methodology could stretch so far. Arguably, when the data analysis becomes the predominant activity in qualitative research, the researcher continues to engage in dialogue with the research participants long after the physical field has been vacated. This process ostensibly represents socially constructed and dialogic meanings, but they would be achieved in a manner whereby the researcher has the luxury of interpretive flexibility whilst the participants are fixed in time.

One major problem with this is that the participants are unable to speak back; they become *ghosts* through which the researcher makes meaning. This approach might betray what Frank (2005, p. 966) calls the two ethical injunctions of qualitative inquiry: *finalization* and *monologue*. Finalization occurs when the researcher attempts to determine with finality what the participant is, could be or what they are not and never will be; monologue, or monologic discourse, refers to the attempts by some researchers to utter the last word in their research endeavours. For Frank (2005), both are ethically intolerable. Therefore, in this *dialectical* methodology, the dialogue will not finish with the report. Instead, it should be conceived of as both a temporal and transitory snapshot; an ongoing aspect of continuous dialogue through which the researcher and the research are always in a state of becoming. These issues demonstrate, perhaps, some of the reasons underpinning the growing recognition about the role of epistemological pluralism in qualitative inquiry.

Capturing qualitative data in its complexity, as it unfolds in the moment or after the fact, can therefore be challenging. Researchers need to be alert and attentive to the minutia of the social environment and be able to readily seize upon both significant and seemingly trivial moments when they arise, because even moments of apparent insignificance could become significant in ethnographic research. The primary way in which such data was captured in this study is by using descriptive field notes, a staple of ethnographic work as they involve both perception and interpretation (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011). Precisely what constitutes either a *critical incident* or a *pattern of meaning* depends, of course, on the researcher's interpretation. Researchers using the interpretivist paradigm can utilise their intuition because doing so is their epistemological prerogative. In this regard, field notes become a practical means of facilitating methodological congruence.

Whilst the descriptive field notes capture both significant and insignificant moments in the fieldwork, qualitative analysis in the *interpretive* sense seeks to look beyond description and “get beneath the surface of the data” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 173). Clearly, getting beneath the surface of the data requires time, reflection and analytical headspace, and such headspace is unlikely to be available whilst navigating the social dynamics of educational research and negotiating the various social roles of a qualitative researcher. Therefore, employing a rational method for data analysis both during and after the fieldwork is important.

As the study progressed and the fieldwork began to taper off, the analysis gradually became the dominant activity (Grønmo, 2019). To ensure that the ongoing enterprise of data analysis continued to be fruitful after the fieldwork, this study adopted Braun and Clarke's (2006, p. 87) method of thematic analysis, comprising a six-phase and recursive process of thematic analysis:

1. *Familiarising yourself with your data*: transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial codes.
2. *Generating initial codes*: coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collecting data relevant to each code.
3. *Searching for themes*: collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.

4. *Reviewing the themes*: checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis.
5. *Defining and naming themes*: ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. *Producing the report*: the final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Thematic analysis is a means by which the patterns of meaning in qualitative data are identified, analysed and reported (Braun & Clarke, 2006). More recently, Braun and Clarke (2019, p. 590) have renamed their approach *reflexive thematic analysis*, emphasising the “centrality of researcher subjectivity and reflexivity”. This more recent terminology is aligned with the methodology in this study. Thematic analysis can be used in conjunction with a wide range of epistemological frameworks, but a salient feature of thematic analysis is that involves the interpretation and description of data in the construction of themes (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). The emphasis on *themes* as opposed to ‘topics’ or ‘categories’ is deliberate. Richards and Morse (2013) argue that themes are not necessarily confined to specific sections of text. Instead, themes are more pervasive across the data and once the researcher has identified a theme, they become more likely to ‘see’ it in segments of text. The heightened awareness created by the identification of themes could ostensibly lead to what might be termed *thematic possession*. Whilst the researcher initially shapes the theme, the theme eventually might shape the researcher. Whereas grounded theory denotes the *emergence* of themes already contained within the data, thematic analysis foregrounds the researcher’s role in the *construction* of themes. The latter demonstrates how thematic analysis is methodologically aligned with constructivism.

Fundamental to qualitative data analysis is to be prepared for serendipitous findings (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2020). By adopting a reflexive approach to interpretive research, the researcher – through ongoing dialogue with the environment, the data and the *self* – openly acknowledges his role in the construction of themes. The serendipitous findings are embraced as a qualitative possibility through a transparent approach to thematic analysis. In ethnographic

research, data is not something with which to become familiar with *after the fact* but as part of an ongoing process of data familiarisation. This stage is nevertheless vital in developing a general sense of initial patterns or ideas as the researcher interacts with the data.

From here, initial *codes* were developed. Data *coding* pertains to the “essence-capturing” attribution of either visual or language-based data (Saldaña, 2020, p. 4). Coding is a widely recognised feature of the qualitative research landscape, for which there are entire texts devoted to its philosophy and application (Saldaña, 2020), but there is no universally agreed method of coding which claims superiority. Indeed, too much attention to specific coding techniques can be a “distraction” (Mills & Morton, 2013, p. 123) and the researcher in this case had no interest in becoming embroiled in “coding fetishism” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 4). It is nevertheless important, particularly against the backdrop of thematic analysis, that coding is understood and appropriately implemented. Coding can be broken down in to two parts; first cycle coding denotes *analysis*, in which the dataset is taken apart, and second cycle coding relates to *synthesis*, where it is reassembled into the presentation of meaning (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). There are a wide variety of coding methods at the qualitative researcher’s disposal, but this study will take influence primarily from three methods of coding: *descriptive coding*, which assigns labels to initial codes and is a versatile method useful for ethnographies; *pattern coding*, which identifies similarly coded data and is useful in reviewing the initial themes; and *theoretical coding* which acts as an umbrella to integrate other codes in the progression toward the discovery of primary themes.

The interviews and focus groups were each transcribed verbatim and, due to participants’ intonation in one focus group, Jefferson’s transcription system (2004) was used to capture both *what* was said and *how* it was said. This allowed the researcher to apply the principles of *verstehen*. The transmitted messages were then interpreted by the researcher and themes were created. In addition to the verbatim transcriptions, there are two additional columns running alongside the captured raw data (Appendix 1). These include *methodological implications* and *study implications* columns; the former being used reflexively to highlight any emerging issues or opportunities relating to the method of data collection, and the latter being an essence-capturing activity to draw out the information pertaining to the research aims as well as new and interesting avenues for consideration. Generating this level of detail also afforded the opportunity to reflect on any ethical issues as they arose in the fieldwork.

Ethical Considerations

The all-pervading issue of research ethics is captured by Goodwin *et al* (2003, p. 567), who state that ethics is “an ever-present concern for all researchers; it pervades every aspect of the research process from conception and design through to research practice, and continues to require consideration during dissemination of the results”. The question of ethics is particularly pertinent to researchers in the qualitative camp. The dynamic, emergent and dialogic nature of qualitative inquiry prohibits the researcher from even momentary lapses of ethical consideration (Iphofen & Tolich, 2018). The reason for this, as outlined by Armstrong *et al* (2014), relates to the inevitable disconnect between ethics *on paper* and ethics in the *real-world*. Notwithstanding the importance of procedural and regulatory ethics, sooner or later the focus shifts to the researcher’s aptitude for considerate and conscientious behaviour in mitigating potentially damaging relationships in the field (Murphy & Dingwall, 2007). Put another way, ethics unfolds both in the field and in the moment. Being prepared for ethical dissonance between paper- and reality-based ethics requires “ethical competence” (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 269) which, for Robinson (2020, p. 3), is an imperative skill that denotes “the researcher’s willingness to acknowledge the ethical dimension of the research process and their ability to recognise and respond appropriately when ethical issues arise”.

Of course, procedural ethical approval – or ethics *on paper* – is a vitally important stage, not least because it mandates the researcher to think carefully about, and acclimatise to, the potentialities for ethical problems in qualitative inquiry. Formal ethical approval for this study was granted in April 2017 via the Ethics Committee at the University of Central Lancashire. Since then, however, the researcher has taken additional steps to ensure familiarity with relevant ethical guidelines, both for research in social science generally and in education specifically. For instance, the researcher is acquainted with the ethical principles outlined by the Academy of Social Sciences (AcSS) (2015) which states that all social research “should respect the privacy, autonomy, diversity, values and dignity of individuals, groups and communities”, should “aim to maximise benefit and minimise harm” and that researchers should “act with regard to their social responsibilities in conducting and disseminating their research” (AcSS, 2015, np). Additionally, the researcher is *au fait* with the ethical guidelines promoted by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2018) which states:

[A]ll educational research should be conducted within an ethic of respect for: the person; knowledge; democratic values; the quality of educational research; and academic freedom. Trust is a further essential element within the relationship between researcher and researched, as is the expectation that researchers will accept responsibility for their actions (BERA, 2018, p. 5).

Therefore, the planned activities in this study have a sound ethical basis and the researcher will remain committed to these ethical principles throughout. For instance, all personal data will be kept on a password-protected laptop and saved in the University's secure cloud service. Furthermore, the participants' *privacy* and *dignity* will be respected by ensuring their anonymity (AcSS, 2015), an issue which itself cannot evade scrutiny. Deploring the ethics and utility of anonymising people and places in qualitative inquiry, Nesor (2000, p. 555) views this activity as "an engine of detachment" which obscures the connections between places, participants, writers and readers. Addressing this is forthrightly, then, the *place* of inquiry in this study is the North West of England – narrow enough parameters to appreciate the geographical context, but vague enough to protect both the institutions and personnel – and the *people* involved will be anonymised using pseudonyms, which is intended to bring vibrancy to the research story.

Ensuring anonymity is not the same as promising confidentiality, but these terms are often and erroneously conflated or used interchangeably. Some clarity on these important distinctions is useful. On the one hand, *confidentiality* is a general term referring to all information which is concealed from everyone but the researcher, but confidentiality can extend to the participants' actions or words and this can be problematic for the researcher. *Anonymity*, on the other hand, means keeping the identities of research participants secret (Saunders, Kitzinger & Kitzinger, 2015). In this study, the participants were guaranteed anonymity, as opposed to confidentiality, and far from being an "engine of detachment" (Nesor, 2000, p. 555), therefore, this method is an engine of integration. The researcher did not ask the participants if they were comfortable using pseudonyms, however, which might have been a more power-neutral approach (Mukungu, 2017).

The researcher takes seriously his *social responsibilities* both in the conducting and disseminating of the research. Firstly, the researcher not only provided the schools with his Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) documentation, but also carried out an internal DBS check which the secondary school required. This demonstrates the researcher's commitment to safeguarding the welfare of pupils in the school setting, an ethical imperative of educational

research. Secondly, in the dissemination of the research, the findings will be shared as they appear in the report and participants' anonymity will remain. The researcher will conduct every aspect of the study within an ethic of respect (BERA, 2018) and, as outlined, will draw on his emotional intelligence and empathic faculties to preserve a mutually respectful and trusting research experience.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the chosen research paradigm for this study. In doing so, the researcher's commitment to this paradigmatic awareness has been outlined with five crucial areas, including the *ontological* and *epistemological* positions, the *axiology*, *applied methodological perspectives* and integrated *reflexivity*. This chapter has also outlined the methodological flexibility afforded by interpretivist inquiry and indicated the intention to utilise research methods pertaining to ethnography. The planned *phases* of inquiry have been set, along with the respective methods used in each phase. The rationale for reflexive thematic analysis has been discussed, providing six thematic and inductive phases for interpretive analysis. The justification for identifying, selecting and negotiating with research participants was also discussed, and the chapter closed with a discussion about research ethics. This should bring the reader up to the point of departure, where the researcher will take his first steps into the *fields* of inquiry.

The following three chapters present and discuss three main phases of primary research undertaken for this study. Each phase includes some conventional qualitative techniques as well as unique and novel data collection strategies. What's more, the presentation of data also breaks from academic tradition, in that various forms of presenting the data will ensue as appropriate. Each phase of research has either directly or indirectly informed the next and, using inductive approaches, the unfolding themes derive straight from the data, resulting in a data-driven inquiry (Janesick, 1994).

Chapter Three

Phase One:

Scoping the Field(s) through a Reflexive Lens

This chapter discusses the experiences and findings from a scoping exercise concerning the status of learning in PE. Drawing upon a combination of reflexive notes in conjunction with a variety of data collection strategies and presentation techniques, five episodes of data collection are presented. These episodes explore the researcher's experiences and the perspectives of pupils, teachers, and other PE stakeholders. In doing so, this chapter contends with some of the dominant issues regarding the 'PE problem'. Relevant literature and theory will be woven into the chapter as an inductive response to the generated data.

Episode one comprises personal reflections about a poignant moment in the researcher's prior teaching experience. Publishing a pupil voice chapter whilst still in post (Sprake, 2014), he experienced significant backlash from a colleague. *Episode two* presents a reflexive ethnodrama which brings to life another pivotal moment in his development as a PE teacher; the day he was caught, as if red-handed, collecting in some homework from a Year 8 PE class. Having left his role as a teacher of secondary PE, *episode three* is informed by postal surveys in which both pupils and teachers were able to reflect on the value of literacy in the context of physical education. The participants identified for this survey had previously co-authored a chapter in *The Sports Monograph* book (2014) and, because of their prior experience of using literacy for learning in PE, the researcher used purposive sampling (Fetterman, 2020). *Episode four* comprises two semi-structured interviews with teachers of secondary PE, exploring their personal views about the status of the subject and the potential role of literacy for learning in PE. Finally, *episode five* comprises some initial field notes recorded during a rapport-building visit to a primary school. Figure 8 presents a brief outline of the five episodes and their associated research activities:

Phase One Data Collection Episode	Associated Research Activities
Episode One	Personal reflections on publishing a pupil voice chapter in <i>The Sports Monograph</i> (2014) whilst still in post as a PE teacher.
Episode Two	“Homework in PE?! Are you ‘avin a laugh?!” A scripted ethnodrama written for the purpose of reflexivity which was subsequently performed at a national qualitative research conference (Sprake <i>et al.</i> , 2020).
Episode Three	Surveys sent to staff and pupils who contributed to <i>The Sports Monograph</i> .
Episode Four	Interviews with secondary PE teachers, both of whom are given pseudonyms: Miss Hayes and Mr Phillips.
Episode Five	Rapport-building visit to a primary school.

Figure 8: Phase One Data Collection Episodes and their Associated Research Activities

The chapter closes with additional details about where some of the data accrued thus far have been published and disseminated for professional consumption. The five episodes of data collection will now be discussed, integrating the key themes and patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Reflexive note: During the winter term of 2013, I was a full-time PE teacher enjoying my first term in post. At the time, I had never given thought to the idea of undertaking a PhD, but even in the early stages of my career I was fascinated by pupil voice and keen to experiment with novel teaching methods. I managed produce a chapter (see Sprake, 2014) in a book called *The Sports Monograph* (2014). This book contains co-authored works between teachers and students about their PE experiences and, unbeknown to me at the time, began to sew the intellectual seeds for my PhD. That is, in the aftermath of publishing this chapter I became increasingly curious about, and disillusioned with, the state and status of PE in schools, based on the learning experiences that pupils were getting, and that I was implicitly providing.

Reflections on Writing a Pupil Voice Chapter (Sprake, 2014)

The shift towards using pupil voice to inform educational practice aimed to shift the conceptualisation of pupils as passive recipients to active participants (Hodgkin, 1998; Enright & O’Sullivan, 2010). Prior to this paradigm shift in educational research (Lincoln, 1990), pupil voice was viewed as a *nuisance* or a *distraction* because it conflicted with the traditional conceptualisation of pupils as passive recipients of knowledge (Erickson & Shultz, 1992). In essence, pupil voice refers to the ways in which children and young people actively participate in school decision-making which shapes their lived experiences in schools (Mitra, 2007). Fullan (1991, p. 70) asks: “What would happen if we treated the student as someone whose opinion mattered?” Initiatives to drive up pupil voice are generally designed to address the teacher-pupil power relations and democratise the classroom (Charteris & Smardon, 2019) by giving pupils a sense of agency in the world (Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). However, there is no shortage of rhetoric in education and attempts to involve pupils in the democratisation of their school experience has often been tokenistic (Pleasance, 2016). Therefore, whilst there is merit in establishing dialogic forms of learning engagement (Lodge, 2005), it is important that pupils *see* and *experience* the developments to which they have contributed (Fielding, 2012).

Pupil voice research in PE is a relatively new phenomenon; it was not until the latter part of the twentieth century that PE research began to integrate pupil voice (Dyson, 2006) and much of the research on PE at the time was based on large-scale surveys of participants, which Evans and Davies (1986, p. 12) describe as “unsophisticated” and “generalised”. For Dyson (2006, p. 327), the PE profession at this point had “failed to take a reflective attitude towards practices and rationales that establish and maintain physical education”. Nevertheless, the growing popularity of qualitative approaches in the 1980s resulted in the increased usage of qualitative methods in PE, including pupil voice (Evans & Davies, 1986; Hendry, 1996; Kollen, 1981; Pissanos & Allison, 1993; Underwood, 1988). This methodological shift is intimately linked with the paradigm wars in educational research (Gage, 1989; Sparkes, 1992) and contemporary research in PE often draws upon the insights and experiences of pupils (Coates & Vickerman, 2010; Lamb & Lane, 2012; Mitchell, Gray & Inchley, 2013).

One of the inevitable outcomes of pupil voice research in PE, as indicated by Graham (1995), is that teachers will need to contend with how their pupils feel about their PE experience. He argues that pupils as young as “five years old, are able to express their feelings, needs, and thoughts about what is taught in physical education” (Graham, 1995, p. 481).

Much can be learned, therefore, by considering pupils' insights when planning, facilitating and evaluating PE practices. However, previous attempts to elicit pupils' perspectives on their PE experiences revealed that, although generally viewed in a favourable light, PE was also seen as "meaningless, boring, and alienating" (Kollen, 1981, p. 31). Even pupils who are considered *good at PE* have reported dissatisfaction with the subject, and many pupils view PE as a break from more important subjects (Morey & Goc-Karp, 1998). In light of such damning reports, it is conceivable that the PE profession might view pupil voice research as a *nuisance* or an *inconvenience*, particularly if it threatens to undermine the subject's role in learning. Acknowledging such inconvenient truths, however, might be what the PE profession needs the most. Overlooking the pupils' perspectives does not mean that pupils are devoid of useful insights and the ostensible short-term convenience of disregarding pupil voice might have long-term consequences for the state and status of PE. Carl Jung drew on a Medieval dictum of human transformation, *in sterquiliniis invenitur*, which when translated means *in filth it shall be found* (Jung, 1967, p. 35). Carl Jung's interpretation of this dictum was clear: that which we need the most will be found where we least want to look. The path of least resistance presumably includes *more of the same*, but the path which seems needed the most is *radical reform*.

Arguing for a pupil-centred approach to PE pedagogy, Smith (1991, p. 51) questions the ability of educational researchers to "keep the child in view" and whether or not there is a genuine commitment to improving pupils' experiences of pedagogical practices in PE. Perhaps the embodiment of the qualitative surge in PE research was Graham's (1995) article *Physical education through the students' eyes and in students' voices*. Prior to this there were very few studies which gave primacy to the pupils' experiences and this article became somewhat of a landmark moment which legitimised pupil voice research in PE (Dyson, 2006). Since the 1990s there has been a proliferation of educational research involving pupil voice, from early attempts to elicit pupils' perspectives on learning to more recent approaches which view pupils as partners in, or leaders of, research projects (Cook-Sather, 2018).

Spending more time in a school setting and speaking to pupils on their level permits the researcher access to their deeper realities, lived experiences and worldviews (Dyson, 1995). It is now widely accepted that through dialogue with, and interpretation of, pupils' lived experiences, researchers can gain valuable insights into curriculum reform (Corbett & Wilson, 2002; Fullan, 1999), a timely justification for pupil voice approaches in light of the potential threat of extinction looming over PE (Kirk, 2011). Dyson (2006, p. 341) argues that

researchers need to “discover ways for teachers to access student voice, so this knowledge can better inform their practice”. It is argued here, however, that pupil voice need not be accessed merely to *inform* teachers’ practice, but that pupil voice could *be* a pedagogical practice. That is, pupil voice in learning could be communicated as a pedagogical prerequisite of their PE experience. Despite the methodological developments in PE research, however, there has been little in the way of a philosophical shift. For instance, Cothran and Ennis’ (2001) qualitative study revealed that the majority of pupils still believe that PE has no value, and of those pupils who view the subject in a positive light, PE serves as little more than an enjoyable break from learning. Whilst scholarly understandings of PE may have developed, the experiences for pupils at the chalkface have gone largely unchanged.

Reflexive note: At the time of publishing my pupil voice research (Sprake, 2014) in *The Sports Monograph* (Palmer, 2014), I was a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) in my first year as a secondary school PE teacher. The aim of the chapter was to provide an opportunity for pupils to engage intellectually with PE by reflecting on their experiences and sharing them through the written word. Being a practitioner at the time, the idea was to respond to these voices and enhance pupils’ learning experiences where possible. The wider agenda, perhaps, was to hold up a mirror which could reflect back at PE, including myself as a novice teacher, what pupils were really experiencing – something which I viewed as innately valuable. In line with my social constructivist philosophy, whereby pupils are viewed as *active, social* and *creative* learners (Perkins, 1999), I invited them to contribute to the chapter.

The chapter was fittingly titled *I’ve got my PE Kit, Sir, but what else is missing?* (Sprake, 2014) and the constructed themes were neither ground-breaking nor unexpected. For instance, pupils cited issues such as a lack of choice or variety, gender stereotyping, the subject’s health-promoting potential, the lack of curriculum time allocation and the stark contrast between pupils who experience a sense of belonging in PE and those who feel alienated (Sprake, 2014). The most shocking outcome of this chapter was not contained within the chapter itself, but in the departmental backlash to its publication. Whilst ideological conflict between PE teachers, even those in the same department, is not uncommon (MacPhail & Lawson, 2020), the response to this chapter was overwhelmingly negative. For instance, whilst in the PE office, one colleague made clear his opposition to the project and, whilst throwing the book on the desk, he proclaimed: “Sprakey, you’ve been ‘ere five minutes and yer tellin’ me ‘ow to do my job?!” The frenzied monologue continued with various pejoratives. His views were apparently shared by other PE colleagues who, albeit

more subtly, criticised the valued of such endeavours. It soon became clear that the *culture* of PE is not only resistant to change (Kirk, 2011) but, when faced with genuine opportunities for introspection, it can also be fiercely oppositional.

The word ‘culture’ is used as it refers to “a system of enduring meanings, perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and practices shared by a large group of people” (Barrett, 2017, p. 22). There is little doubt that PE, with its associated meanings and activities, is a social construct (Kirk, 1992), and this critical incident gives rise to *who* constructs it and by *what* means the status quo is maintained. The more experienced, well-established colleagues reaffirmed their *enduring attitudes* and *beliefs* (Barrett, 2017) and they were not about to concede to a reflexive mode of being. This kind of departmental backlash is perhaps but one ingredient of the ‘PE problem’.

Reflexive note: Although the resistance was deflating at the time, my concerted efforts to embody a more reflexive orientation have enabled me to develop more empathy for the so-called resisters. Sparkes (1990) discusses the challenges of curricular innovation in PE and advises against any mischaracterisation or vilification of the protagonists in research reports. It is not my intention to mischaracterise my previous colleagues as *villains*. In fact, our relationship overall was very positive. PE teachers are notoriously self-protective and are encouraged to “defend their subject with conviction” (Whitehead, 2020, p. 112). It would seem that the social norms associated with PE – that is, the guiding principles which effect the social behaviours of a group based on unwritten or unspoken rules or standards (Cialdini & Trost, 1998; Hogg, 2010) – are also being heavily fortified and protected. However, this defensive position has seemingly resulted in a collective identity that is not far removed from tribalism.

Although there was one main protagonist in the incident described, there were various members of staff in the department who were visibly against the pupil voice chapter. Drawing on social psychology, teachers in the PE community seem anchored to a collectivist ideology in which their self-concept is closely tied to and defined by their group identity (Barrett, 2017). Furthermore, when referring to PE as *his* subject, the teacher in this case demonstrated the embodiment of the endowment effect, which pertains to an irrational sense of ownership over something. In defending his subject, the teacher finally insisted that “we do enough as it is without asking for additional written work” and that my pupil voice chapter “might reflect badly on us as teachers”. Critical reflection is an essential part of a teacher’s professional

repertoire (Sellers, 2017), not least because it subjects personal biases to scrutiny (Fook & Gardner, 2007). In this case, however, the teacher seemed intent on critical *deflection* by closing down the conversation about pupil voice as a valuable pedagogical mirror.

Discussing the micropolitical landscape of PE, Thomson and Sparkes (2019, p. 2) reflect on three overlapping dynamics of power that manifest within and between PE department staff: first, they discuss the exercise of power *through* others, which denotes the implementation of sanctions and rewards, often by those in positions of authority; second, they discuss power *with* others, which refers to the ways in which staff can become empowered to make decisions about shared goals; and, thirdly, they discuss power *over* others, which is often achieved at the hands of those in legitimate positions of authority and pertains to the exercise of power that is “influenced by dominance and control to ensure that a set of ends are achieved.” In this instance, the teacher had no formal position of authority but nonetheless exerted his power based on his lengthier teaching experience and succeeded in supressing future activities of this sort. Nevertheless, having been published, the pupil voice chapter “provides valuable insights into pupils’ perceptions of Physical Education which may well be of value to those concerned with pedagogic discourse” (Sprake, 2014, p. 338).

Reflexive note: Strangely enough, it is *me* who is interested in this pedagogic discourse in that I have become increasingly concerned that PE is “bereft of intellectual engagement with the ethical, artistic, social and psychological aspects of physical performance” (Sprake, 2014, p. 338). For instance, one pupil recalled his experiences in PE by using what George Orwell (1946) might have described as an arresting simile:

[I]n key stage three, you’re told which sport you’re playing, when and where you’re doing it and, you do, no questions asked. The schedule for year seven, as I remember it, is football, football, football, gym, football, football, football, cricket, cricket, football, football, cricket, football, dodge-ball, football. You may be thinking ...what’s the matter, you get to play cricket and dodge-ball too?! Well yes, but dodge-ball only cropped up at Christmas and the occasional cricket games were like an oasis in what seemed an arid, endless desert of football (Alex - Year 10, in Sprake, 2014, p. 339).

Alex’s comments capture the essence of a dreary, uninspiring and predictable PE environment and perhaps he too views the subject as “meaningless, boring, and alienating” (Kollen, 1981, p. 31). Another pupil commented that “the teachers make you do the same things every week and it gets really boring. PE would be better if we tried new things instead

of doing the same each week” (Georgina – Year 9, in Sprake, 2014, p. 343). The views expressed in the pupil voice chapter demonstrate a sense of dissatisfaction and frustration with PE experiences. Nevertheless, their voices, shared through literacy, are now being used in the teaching of undergraduate students, many of whom are aspiring to become PE teachers themselves. Perhaps the value of pupil voice in learning extends far beyond merely gauging how pupils feel about their PE experiences. There is now a wealth of research in education which considers the views of pupils. Less common, however, is the prevalence of pupil voice research which permits discussion about the modal flexibilities in learning (or lack thereof) in PE. The breadth of what pupils are said to be learning in PE is rarely discussed from the pupils’ perspectives.

‘Homework?! In PE?! Are you ‘avin a laugh?’: A Reflexive Ethnodrama

Reflexive note: Publishing the pupil voice chapter was not the only time I had felt some resistance to change in PE. As an NQT, like many others I entered the profession with wide eyes and a desire to change the world. Armed with a passion for education and the conviction that PE has a crucial role to play in it, I did what most NQTs are advised to do; I took a risk and tried something new. Regrettably, my pedagogical endeavour was quashed the moment I was caught, as if red-handed, collecting in the homework I’d set for a Year 8 PE class. Visibly perplexed by the notion that homework and PE could co-exist, my PE colleague publicly ridiculed, demeaned and callously undermined the entire idea. Not only did he undermine me as a professional, but, ironically, he also undermined the educational worth of ‘our’ subject. The curious and confused pupils witnessed in disbelief their homework being snatched from their teacher’s hands and overtly devalued by another teacher in the same department. I immediately began to consider what message this sent to the pupils and considered the place of PE in the curriculum. The perceptual ripple effect of this critical incident is immeasurable, but the wider revelations served as a major catalyst in the formation of this study. My only regret is that I allowed this incident to deter me from setting homework in PE again.

Homework is a perennial issue in education. The purposes and value of homework is a contested area in and of itself (Hallam & Rogers, 2018). The notion of homework as a valuable aspect of PE, however, is almost entirely overlooked (Mitchell, Stanne & Barton, 2000) and when pupils are asked to complete homework in PE it tends to relate to physical

activity and promoting healthy, active lifestyles (Smith & Claxton, 2003). It is perhaps unsurprising therefore that minimal research has been devoted to exploring the role and value of homework in PE (Hill, 2018). The purpose here is not to grapple with core questions about homework, but to reflect on how the PE department reacted to a homework activity which the researcher set when he was still in post. A reflexive script has been written to capture the essence of this critical incident. The increasingly used method of ethnodramatic writing (Cannon, 2012) has been utilised to transform the researcher's lived experiences as a teacher in the field into a performance. This method of writing promotes deep reflexivity for ethnographers (Goldstein, 2008) and, by representing participants in a dramaturgical fashion, can illustrate more clearly the nuanced subtleties of their personae (Donmoyer & Donmoyer, 2005). It is hoped that this reflexive ethnodrama, which was performed at a national qualitative research conference (Sprake *et al.*, 2020), captures the significance of the experience, as it serves as a fundamental pillar upon which the premise of this research stands:

“Homework?! In PE?! Are you ‘avin a laugh?”

by Andrew Sprake (2020)



Background & Context: Andrew Sprake

This short ethnodrama seeks to illustrate a troubling experience that I had as a PE teacher. The aim of the performance is to *breathe methodological life* into what has become a pivotal moment for me, both personally and professionally. The script itself was written as a recollection of the events as they unfolded but, perhaps more importantly, it represents the value of reflexivity. The story told here could have quite easily been passed off as an insignificant exchange between PE teachers. However, deep reflection on these incidents has served as a major catalyst in my professional development; not least because it spawned the initial ideas for my PhD, but I am now here, going public with this story, and challenging myself to share what I hope is a simple yet thought-provoking story about homework in PE.

Narrator

It was a normal day in the school. The sports hall was alive with sound as the squeaking of pupils’ trainers gripping the sports-hall floor reverberated around the walls. The echoes of pupils’ laughter and enjoyment was an everyday normality for Mr Sprake and, as their PE lesson came to an end, the Year 8 pupils quickly gathered around him for a final plenary.

The pupils were then given the routine spiel about “getting changed quickly” so that they could leave for break, on time and *on the bell*. Only, this time, they were asked to bring out their homework with them, for Mr Sprake to collect.

Having changed from their PE kit into their regular school uniform, pupils began to filter out of the changing rooms and lined up on the sports hall floor, cross-legged and arms folded. By this point, most of the other PE teachers were gathering in the sports hall, ready to dismiss their pupils. Homework in hand, each and every pupil

in Mr Sprake's class had completed the homework task which had been set the week before.

The key characters in this short story include Mr Sprake, a Newly Qualified Teacher of Physical Education; Mr Wit, an experienced PE teacher with a good standing in the school; and Miss Lamb, another experienced teacher who is responsible for Girls' PE. Other than Mr Sprake, all characters in this script have been given pseudonyms, to protect their identity whilst bringing the story to life.

The scene begins with Mr Sprake, addressing his class:

Narrator

In his usual positive and optimistic tone, Mr Sprake said to his class:

Mr Sprake

“Well done everyone, what a good start to the day! It's pleasing to see that you've all done your homework too, and I'm looking forward to reading it! Please make sure you have it to-hand and I'll come down the line and collect it.”

Narrator

Whilst the pupils are handing in their homework with an apparent sense of pride, Mr Wit arrives in the sports hall with *his* Year 8 class following close behind. They had been outside for a football lesson. Addressing his pupils at the changing room entrance, Mr Wit roars:

Mr Wit

“Right then, you lot! Go and get changed and line up out 'ere when you're ready!”

Narrator

Meanwhile, he sees Mr Sprake collecting the homework from the pupils in his class. Visibly astonished, Mr Wit approaches Mr Sprake in the sports hall and, in front of all of the pupils, cries:

Mr Wit

“Sprakey! [bursts into laughter] What on *God’s green earth* are you doing, lad?! Oh my God, no! [laughter continues]

Narrator

Slightly confused, Mr Sprake responds:

Mr Sprake

“What do you mean? I’m just collecting their homework from last week, why?”

Narrator

With flailing arms and a dropped jaw, Mr Wit snatched the pupils’ homework from Mr Sprake’s hands, and continued with the interrogation:

Mr Witt

[grabbing the homework papers and flicking through them]

“Man alive!.....Homework?!.....In PE?!.....Are you avin a laugh?!”

Narrator

By this point, Mr Sprake is about halfway down the line as he continued to collect the other pupils’ homework. Deliberately loud, to ensure that his pupils hear his faith in what the pupils had been asked to do, Mr Sprake said:

Mr Sprake

“Yeah, I set them some homework last week; we’ve been looking at the importance of *rules* in PE and Sport, and why rules matter outside of sport and in society in general. I think there’s a lot to be learned through PE in this way”.

Narrator

Pausing for a moment in disbelief. Mr Wit then turned his back on Mr Sprake and began walking toward to PE office, still clutching the homework he’d taken from Mr Sprake. Whilst marching toward the office, which is visible from the sports hall floor and in full view of the pupils, Mr Wit bellowed:

Mr Wit

“This guy is ‘avin’ a laugh!.....Never in my life! Oh my god!”

Narrator

Arriving at the PE office, where the other teachers had gathered after they’d dismissed their pupils, Mr Wit shouts:

Mr Wit

“Oi, Miss! Have you seen this?! [laughing] Sprakey is giving Year 8 pupils homework.”

Narrator

The PE office erupts with a mixture of mumblings and muted laughter, while Mr Sprake dismisses his class:

Mr Sprake

“Well done everyone, I’ve been really impressed with your effort today and I’ll get this homework back to you next week.”

Narrator

Meanwhile, repeating himself to ensure that the entire PE department hears about the homework saga, Mr Wit cries:

Mr Wit

“Just look at what Sprakey is doing now! Homework.....in a Year 8 PE class!”

Narrator

The volume of over 30 pupils walking out of the sports-hall was not loud enough to drown out Miss Lamb’s reaction:

Miss Lamb

“Oh my god. No way. No.....way! Sprakey?! Nooo. What ya doin’?!”

Narrator

Mr Wit exits the PE office; still clutching the pupils' homework as though it was a piece of *evidence* in a court case. Making his way to the boys' changing room, where the male staff room is located, Mr Wit slammed the homework on a disused table and claimed:

Mr Wit

"I've seen it all now Sprakey! *Unbelievable*"

Narrator

The sports hall had fallen silent. The pupils had left and most of the PE staff were relaxing in the staff room. Mr Sprake followed Mr Wit into the male staff room and the conversation continued.

Mr Sprake

"I honestly don't see what the issue is?! It's literally some homework. *Every* subject sets homework."

Mr Wit

"Yeah but Sprakey, you're new. You're young and you're ambitious. I get it. But let the experienced teacher give you some advice. It just can't happen mate! I mean, have you even thought about the workload involved with this?! We do enough fixtures as it is. Homework just doesn't belong in PE".

Narrator

This is where Mr Sprake's inner dialogue began: What message does it send to the pupils if PE teachers are mocking the idea of homework in their subject? What message does it send to the school hierarchy, who already view PE as a less important subject with a lower academic status? What message does it send to the wider community about the educational value of PE?

Each pupil completed the homework task without question and to their best ability. Perhaps it is not the pupils who are resistant to change, but rather it is the staff who are unwilling to deviate from the status quo. A sad part of this story is that the incident discouraged Mr Sprake from setting PE homework again.

Incidentally, it was during a staff meeting later in the day when the PE staff were informed at short notice that the sports hall would be "taken off" them during the

coming days due to mock exams. With clear disdain for the way in which PE is viewed in school, Mr Wit asked furiously:

Mr Wit

“Oh for God’s sake. Again?! Why are we always at the bottom of the pile?!”

THE END

Some related readings to this episode:

Sprake, A. & Palmer, C. (2019). PE to Me: a concise message about the potential for learning in Physical Education. *Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies*, 13(1), pp. 57-60.

Sprake, A. & Palmer, C. (2018). Physical Education: the allegory of the classroom. *Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies*, 12(1), pp. 57-78.

Sprake, A. & Palmer, C. (2018). *Physical Education is just as important as any other school subject*. The Conversation. Retrieved from <http://theconversation.com/physical-education-is-just-as-important-as-any-other-school-subject-103187>.

Sprake, A. (2014). ‘I’ve got my kit for PE Sir, but what else is missing?’ Perceptions of Physical Education in a Secondary school. In: C, Palmer. (Ed.) *The sports monograph: critical perspectives on socio-cultural sport, coaching and Physical Education*, pp. 337-348. SSTO Publications, Preston, UK.

Reflexive note: With the support of my university colleagues, I performed this ethnodrama at a national qualitative research conference (Sprake *et al.*, 2020). I learned the significance of ethnodrama whilst *physically* performing it, which stimulated emotional responses and memories both for me and those in attendance. In reliving the experience, it felt as if I had been teleported back to the moment itself. This storied ethnodrama serves as the basis of, or catalyst for, this inquiry. The central issue was not that my use of homework to stimulate PE literacy was confronted. Rather, it was my colleagues’ unwillingness to entertain the possibility that it might have pedagogical value. Subsequent discussions also helped to shape my understanding of the issues in question. For instance, I was asked by a colleague: “Could this performance serve to reproduce stereotypes about PE teachers?” My answer was swift: “Possibly, but any stereotypes about PE teachers were there long before my ethnodrama came into being, and the first step in solving any problem is to recognise that a problem exists.”

Not only are ethnodrama and ethnotheatre becoming increasingly recognised methods in qualitative research (Saldaña, 2011) but, as Douglas (2012, p. 525) states: “We are never more present than when we embody our work and bare our reflections through the body”. Through the *performative* dimension of ethnodrama, the story of the researcher’s lived experiences was emancipated and shared through different performative modalities. The issues raised in episodes one and two, both the pupil voice chapter (Sprake, 2014) and in the ethnodrama (Sprake, 2020), have prompted deep concerns about the status of *learning* in physical education. By drawing on Braun and Clarke’s (2006) phases of thematic analysis and reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019), three initial themes have been developed and each will be subject to “logical scrutiny” (Best, 1978, p. 5). The identified themes demonstrate: (1) the power of occupational socialisation in PE; that (2) that some PE teachers deflect the low educational aspirations of the subject; and (3) that some PE teachers seem oblivious as to their role in the ‘PE problem’.

Theme One: the power of occupational socialisation

Despite many pupils reporting feelings of frustration and disillusionment with PE (Sprake, 2014), pupils seemed only too happy to contribute to the book chapter and completed their PE-based homework without query. Both of these activities were underpinned by literacy for learning. Perhaps, the pupils should be separated out from discussions about the PE community being resistant to change (Kirk, 2011) because these pupils were by no means resisting literacy in PE. Contrary to the pupils, however, it seems that PE teachers can vehemently oppose novelty or change. It has long been known that PE teachers often have fixed conceptions of PE (Kirk, 2011) but the teachers’ responses to literacy thus far borders on neophobic. Several PE teachers publicly revealed their disdain toward, and even mockery of, the notion of homework or literacy for learning in PE. As quickly as the social norms in this PE department had been challenged, they were collectively reinforced. This process can be explained in part through occupational socialisation.

Broadly defined, socialisation is “the process through which individuals learn the norms, cultures, and ideologies deemed important in a particular social setting by interacting with one another and social institutions” (Richards & Gaudreault, 2017, p. 3). In his seminal work, Lawson (1986) discussed the influence of occupational socialisation as it pertained to the physical education environment. The incidents described are characteristic of the tension-balance between what Lawson (1986) called *professional socialisation*, comprising the humanistic and value-laden ideologies associated with the workplace, and *organisational*

socialisation, which implies a process by which PE teachers are influenced by the culture of the organisation in which they work (Lawson, 1986). Regrettably, through organisational socialisation (Lawson, 1986), the researcher was deterred from setting homework in PE again. This demonstrates the power of occupational socialisation, which in part has its roots in social validation and conformity. Psychosocial conformity denotes an individual's deliberate change in attitudes to become more socially compatible with a group (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Levine, 2007). Studies on conformity seek to investigate changes in individuals' *external* behaviours or attitudes and whether these changes are accompanied by *internal* changes in attitudes or beliefs (Barrett, 2017).

Reflexive note: I experienced what can only be described as the slow surrender of individual identity, as the enveloping power of the collective began to steer my practice. Unfortunately, in this case, my *internal* beliefs were not congruent with my *external* behaviours due to the pressure of social conformity. As a result, I became deeply entrenched in cognitive dissonance; a sense of disconnect between my core values and my observable practice. What's more, my subsequent attempts to utilise literacy for meaning-making in PE were, at best, token attempts at facilitating cross-curricular links and, at worst, a relic of the practice I aspired to facilitate.

Theme Two: some PE teachers deflect the low educational aspirations of the subject

These reflective accounts have generated a paradoxical issue. The rhetoric of learning claims made in the name of PE seem unfulfilled in reality. PE is championed for its health promoting capacities (Penney & Jess, 2010), for its contribution to improved psychological health (Bailey, 2006), for potentially supporting cognitive and academic performance (Arday *et al.*, 2014) and for nurturing socio-moral development (Miller *et al.*, 1997). Moreover, whilst bolstering the holistic educational potential of PE, afPE (2019) maintains that a high-quality PE fosters the physical, moral, social, emotional, cultural and intellectual development of pupils. Whether or not this breadth of learning is achieved in practice is debatable. For instance, when Mr Wit announced: "Just look at what Sprakey is doing now! Homework...in a Year 8 PE class!" he was seemingly indifferent to the idea that the activity prescribed might contribute to the pupils' holistic development. In addition, the deflective strategy, by pointing out the number of sports "fixtures" or the implications that homework might have on "workload", seems to distract from the low educational aspirations of PE.

Against this backdrop, however, the PE community often appears duty-bound to being their own loudest advocates (Lynn *et al.*, 2007; Reston, 2015). The European Physical Education Association (EUPEA) adopts as their mantra that there is *no education without physical education* (EUPEA, 2021). The evidence of holistic learning in PE, however, remains somewhat elusive. For instance, Carol Hawman, editor of *PE Matters*, argues that the nature of current PE provision is problematic, that “as a profession we are often our own worst enemies” and “we can ask ourselves how effective we are at articulating the education, as opposed to the physical, elements of physical education” (Hawman, 2020, p. 6). It could be argued that only through genuine and collective introspection – that is, finding the answers in the places it least wants to look – will the PE community arrive at a confident consensus about how the holistic learning claims can be manifest in reality. Hawman (2020, p. 6) continues by arguing that: “we need to articulate and evidence that ‘E’ [Education], not just assume it” (Hawman, 2020, p. 6). Hawman’s implicit recognition, that the habitual assumptions of learning in PE is problematic, serves to embolden the rationale for this study and explore the role of literacy for learning in PE.

On the issue of holistic development, Spracklen (2014, p. 142) goes further and suggests there is no evidence that PE or school sport have any unique and intrinsic moral or ethical value:

[T]here is no evidence to suggest that it is a social good – in fact, there is lots of evidence to point the other way. Instead, there is an incoherent rhetorical argument made, based on the one hand, on a hidden instrumentalism, and on the other hand on romantic benevolence. The things that should be compulsory in schools do have clear moral and social goods. It is impossible to be a functioning adult member of the lifeworld without having the ability to make critical judgements, express yourself and balance evidence. In our liberal democracies, then, we have to make sure that all children are taught subjects that will make them critical thinkers: they need to be able to read, they need to be able to write...[and]...they need to have a grounding in humanities and social sciences. These enable children to become members of the lifeworld. Physical education is not one of those kinds of subjects. It is nice for those who want it, but not essential.

The purpose of highlighting Spracklen’s argument is not to labour the shortcomings of PE, but to *contend* with them in a constructive manner. If PE practitioners make a genuine commitment to a pedagogy of plurality (Quennerstedt, 2019), whereby the holistic educational elements of PE can be evidenced and articulated, PE might become an essential

subject through which pupils can develop and showcase skills and dispositions which help to shape their membership of the lifeworld.

Reflexive note: In the case of my experience as a teacher, these aspirations for PE appear more like aims and dreams (Sellers & Palmer, 2007). In attempting something new, innovative and arguably more holistic, I was overtly rebuked. Thus, there is an emerging picture that advocates of PE are all-too-ready to “defend their subject with conviction” (Whitehead, 2020, p. 112) from the echo chamber of their cave. The loud advocacy of PE seemingly diverts attention away from the low educational requests made in its name, but with the spiralling downtrend of PE in the curriculum (Youth Sport Trust, 2018) it seems the noise has only bought PE more time. Advocacy alone does not address the issues internal to the ‘PE problem’. Addressing this requires introspection combined with a willingness to change.

Theme Three: some PE teachers seem oblivious to their role as part of the ‘PE problem’.

In asking why PE is “always at the bottom of the pile”, this teacher seems oblivious to the possibility that he himself might be contributing to the ‘PE problem’. PE has long been perceived as a fringe subject (Hardman & Green, 2011) but the response from the PE community appears to be misguided and lacklustre; misguided in that PE teachers seemingly overlook their role as part of the problem (Sprake, 2017) and lacklustre in that the apathy for change is palpable. Beneath the vibrant surface of PE lies a chronic inertia. By insisting that “homework just doesn’t belong in PE”, this teacher is limiting the subject’s advancement and stifling pupils’ opportunities to develop holistic capital.

Furthermore, the incessant advocacy for sport and the importance of “fixtures” as a justification for PE serves to maintain both a delusion of learning and a distraction from the promise of holistic learning. If PE is to move beyond a *surviving* role (Hendry, 1975) and become a *thriving* curricular imperative, then the development of a culture fundamentally predicated on learning is paramount. By facilitating meaningful learning experiences whereby pupils are encouraged to communicate their learning in various ways, the holistic promise might be realised, and the status of PE might be elevated. Major roadblocks in this development, however, are teachers’ ideological barriers. Teachers’ competing philosophies invariably present challenges for change. PE teachers’ philosophies have been described “more like justificatory ideologies” which serve to “vindicate teachers’ preferred conceptions of PE” (Green, 2000, p. 124). In this case, the teacher’s preferred conception was being challenged and, as if responding to a conceptual threat, he became immediately oppositional. Resistive

attitudes towards a conceptual evolution of PE play an ostensible role in fortifying the habitual glass ceiling which prevents the subject from ascending the traditional subject hierarchy. From this perspective, it could be argued that some PE teachers act as the architects of their own downfall. Moreover, they can facilitate the pedagogical downfall of other colleagues, the pupils' learning and the overall status of PE in schools.

When either the technical or ideological aspects of a teacher's work is diminished, it can be highly disheartening. This process can be understood sociologically as proletarianization (Derber, 1983) which denotes the "escalation of disempowering work practices" (Macdonald, 1995, p. 130). With continual sarcastic questions such as: "What's *Sprakey* doing in PE next?", the PE department increasingly resembled Foucault's *panopticon* (1975). Both the actual and perceived threat of surveillance impeded future attempts to incorporate literacy for learning in PE. The persistent condemnation of such approaches resulted in both pervasive and persuasive power relations. Comments such as: "we do enough as it is without asking for additional written work" or concerns about how the pupil voice work "might reflect badly on the department" led to a sense of disillusionment. Eventually, the hegemony of traditional PE practice triumphed over the aspirations of an NQT.

Reflexive note: Over time, I grew weary and doubtful about the value of my own role as a PE teacher. I needed to break free from the echo chamber, climb out of the cave and see PE for what it could be. By this point I was invited to apply for a role as an Associate Lecturer at the University of Central Lancashire and enrol on a PhD, an opportunity that I could not refuse, even though it was described as "career suicide" by a colleague in the school setting. These personal accounts have helped to frame the study, in that I am increasingly convinced that the 'PE problem' has its roots in PE culture. Through my own lived experience, I have empirically witnessed the fissures between rhetoric and reality and these gaps must be recognised and addressed in order to not only safeguard but enhance the future of PE.

The claim that PE teachers have yet to adopt reflexive approaches (Hargreaves, 1982; Dyson, 2006; Evans, 2017) is substantiated in this study so far and even the most willing PE teachers commonly revert back to their original pedagogical approaches, having struggled with conceptual shifts in their teaching (Casey, 2014). The intensifying instability of PE within the curriculum (Youth Sport Trust, 2018) is ironically synchronous with the PE community's oppositional demeanour, which has left the educational progress of PE "trapped in a paradoxical stalemate" (Sprake & Palmer, 2018a, p. 58). Put another way, while the status

of PE seems habitually vulnerable, the PE community seems loathed to change. For instance, during a collective discussion whilst attending a PE conference in 2018, the researcher observed one PE teacher declare: “Ofsted just don’t care about us! We need to be banging on the SLT [Senior Leadership Team] doors and demanding that they observe PE when they come to school!”. This is one example of how the PE community appears fixated on the wrongs of others, which serves to mask or drown out the low educational aspirations of the subject. In deflecting attention away from their own shortcomings, the PE community seems unwilling to look inward for growth, precisely at a time when introspection is needed most (Kahneman, 2011).

One possible explanation for this is the notion of *deliberate ignorance*, characterised as “the wilful decision not to know, as opposed to the inability to access information or disinterest in the question” (Gigerenzer & Garcia-Retamero, 2017, p. 180). Of the central motives for deliberate ignorance are “to avoid potentially bad news, particularly when one has no means of preventing it” and “to profit strategically from remaining ignorant” (Gigerenzer & Garcia-Retamero, 2017, p. 181). The issue of what, how and whether pupils learn in PE has been a prominent issue for considerable time (Nyberg & Larsson, 2014) and, with no robust means of mitigating this ‘bad news’, perhaps the PE community has been profiting strategically by *looking the other way* whilst in the knowledge that the holistic learning outcomes of PE are but dogmatic claims (Sellers & Palmer, 2008). In holding external factors culpable of worsening ‘PE problem’, the PE community simultaneously reveals a disinclination to acknowledge its own role as part of the problem.

Postal Surveys

Postal surveys were completed by teachers (n=8) and pupils (n=9) in which they were asked to reflect on the place of literacy for learning in PE. A bespoke survey was created for both the teachers and pupils. Pupil responses were elicited from across the primary and secondary transition point in the PE pathway. Participants were identified using purposive sampling (Fetterman, 2020), based on their prior involvement with authoring or co-authoring a chapter in *The Sports Monograph* book (Palmer, 2014). Their prior experience with the amalgamation of literacy and PE was deemed significant for the study. The following discussions gives primacy to the participants’ voices (Pope, 2013), from which theoretical insights will be derived inductively (Lichtman, 2013).

Pupils' Perspectives

Nine pupils completed the survey in which they were asked a series of six questions relating to their learning experiences in PE. When asked about how they felt being invited to write in a chapter for *The Sports Monograph*, pupils were overwhelmingly positive and excited to express themselves. For instance, one Year 6 pupil commented: "I remember being excited about my poem being published in a book because I have always liked the idea of becoming an author. I think it was valuable to my education because I had an opportunity that could benefit me in the future." Already it seems that PE could serve as a fruitful catalyst for writing. Far from being meaningless or boring, PE-based literacy was perceived as exciting, valuable and educationally relevant. Another pupil in Year 8 signalled the perceptual disconnect between PE and wider areas of the curriculum: "I was pleased because I enjoy PE and wanted a way to connect it to different topics of learning." Perhaps by bridging the conceptual gap between school subjects, PE might unearth its educational potential and become a key driver in learning through literacy as an integrated pedagogy.

Siedentop, Hastie and van der Mars (2004) make a compelling case for the value of an *integrated curriculum*, whereby school subjects are integrated, their boundaries blurred, and whereby the facilitation of learning is based on broader themes such as fairness and justice. From a PE perspective, this thematic integration could be manifest through literacy, but literacy and PE are seldom integrated in practice (National Literacy Trust, 2018). For instance, when asked whether they had been given the opportunity to write about PE and sport since their publication, pupils commented: "I have had opportunities in PE and literacy, but only separately" or "Not really, because in our English lessons we were writing about books that aren't to do with sport." Upon first glance, the familiar detachment between PE and literacy might appear as common-sense. The point here is to make the familiar strange by engaging in *social defamiliarization* (Gunderson, 2020) and problematizing the taken-for-granted practices in PE.

In problematising the familiar, it seems that literacy is not only underutilised by PE teachers, but they might also view it with contempt, as one pupil remarked: "my PE teacher has used writing as a threat a couple of times, instead of being valuable, to make people in the lesson be quiet." This pupil's experience seems diametrically opposed to the desirable integration of learning modes in PE (Siedentop, Hastie & van der Mars, 2004). Far from experiencing a pedagogy of plurality (Quennerstedt, 2019), where literacy serves as a conduit for learning, this vignette implies a deliberate attempt by the teacher to maintain some form

of conceptual detachment between PE and literacy. By using literacy as punishment, the teacher infers that literacy – much like written homework – is pedagogically incompatible with the nature and purposes of PE, thus implicitly reinforcing the pedagogical hegemony of the subject.

Pupils did of course have positive things to say about PE. When asked about the role of PE in schools, several comments pertained to what PE is viewed as *good for*, with pupils commenting: PE is useful for “encouraging students to exercise”; it “helps kids be active but also social skills”; it is “important for fitness” and helps “let off steam”; it encourages “a healthy mind but a healthy body as well”; and that it is good for “teaching kids about teamwork and sport-related skills”. For the pupils, at least, there is some consistency in the ambiguity surrounding the role of PE, relating to notions of exercise, being active, fitness, health, social skills, sport and stress relief. However, Hawman (2020, p. 6) asks: “why, when most adults would have experienced physical education in school, the general population...seems unaware of what exactly it is and how it differs from physical activity, exercise, fitness and sport”. The essence of PE, therefore, is confusing not only to the *adults* but also to the *pupils* who experience it. One pupil outlined: “PE is a way for me to relax and have fun with sport in a way that is engaging”. The notion of ‘relaxing’ in PE gives rise to more avenues for scrutiny. Perhaps those who declare the need for a more robust articulation of the value of PE, as well as the need to evidence the educational outcomes of the subject, are more preoccupied with trying to convince others – not least themselves – that PE is educationally valuable in its current form, than with ensuring that the educational worth of the subject is unambiguously communicated. The day-to-day practice of PE is seldom aligned with its holistic educational claims and purporting that the subject cultivates broad outcomes is perhaps misleading. As it stands, the activities undertaken in the name of PE appear to demonstrate *pedagogical incongruence*. The narrow conception of learning in PE is so entrenched in the cultural fabric that stripping back the learning claims might seem a sensible idea. Not least because, against the backdrop of its all-encompassing outcomes (afPE, 2019), the *busy, happy and good* phenomenon (Placek, 1983) seems alive and well.

It became very clear that pupils were keenly in favour of any opportunities to write *in* or *about* PE again. One pupil insisted: “it would be very valuable to me because I enjoy PE and also enjoy writing about it”. Another pupil claimed: “it would be valuable because it would let me show what I have learned and help me progress in my education and excel in my learning”. The former comment signals an enjoyment of writing with PE as the catalyst

and the latter demonstrates that by using literacy pupils can evidence what they have learned. However, as ‘Mr Wit’ feared, the pupils’ comments might reflect badly on the department as they might expose a dearth of learning evidence in the subject. There is little doubt that the pupils who completed this survey both welcome and value the idea of literacy for learning in PE. Whether it is facilitated in practice, however, is the responsibility of the teachers.

Teachers’ Perspectives

Eight teachers completed the staff survey in which they shared their views about literacy for learning in PE. Having mentored one of their pupils in co-authoring a written piece about physical education, their insights were deemed important for the study. Responses were largely positive, but caution was raised about the practical limitations of integrating literacy with PE. For instance, one teacher remarked: “The nature of PE allows staff to develop pupils’ confidence, self-esteem, inter-personal skills, fitness, as well as trying to develop literacy skills. However, it can be difficult practically to implement both.” There were several counter-arguments to this position, with one teacher insisting: “There are no strong arguments to suggest that literacy cannot be integrated into PE.” In fact, some respondents questioned the integrity of PE teachers. One teacher said: “it comes down to a lack of creativity and laziness and most PE teachers take the easy option”. Another teacher remarked: “I remember when I was 9 years old being asked to write about the history of football in PE. I loved this and was able to be creative but I’m not sure this is possible in PE today as the curriculum is developed by uncreative people.” Comments such as these continued:

- If PE teachers are making allowances for all other subjects who do ask for homework, so as to not overload the pupils, then the teachers themselves are killing any potential in their subject - if it claims to be education in practical and logistical terms.
- PE teachers need to be receptive to the fact that literacy development can quite easily be incorporated into PE.

Teachers were asked to reflect on their experiences of supporting pupils in writing about physical education and whether these activities might impact upon the value of PE. One teacher insisted: “it would only add to the value of PE as it provides a stimulus and the opportunity to add some theoretical content where possible – sometimes this is lost in a practical setting”. If theoretical content is lost in the practical setting, and presuming it is viewed as a valuable element of PE, then consideration of where and when it can be facilitated

would seem necessary. The degree to which physicality or intellect is prioritised in PE is, of course, dependent on a hierarchy of values. Policy makers, school leadership teams, PE departments and teachers themselves all comprise a vastly complex web of ideas and beliefs about the nature and purpose of PE. Whether the “P” or the “E” is given primacy in physical education, or whether they are deliberately integrated, is depended on a set of views and values about the quintessence of human flourishing in both the subject and in school.

The mind-body problem is one of the most longstanding and perennial issues in philosophy (Honderich, 1995; Hergenhahn & Henley, 2014). Detailed explorations of the mind-body problem began with the ancient Greeks, notably Plato and Aristotle, and continued through the Age of the Enlightenment with René Descartes, but the challenge of understanding how the mind and body are related persisted well into the twentieth century (Barrett, 2017). In more recent years, neurophysiological research has convincingly demonstrated that mental life is essentially built on the central nervous system (Honderich, 1995). Contemporary research indicates that the mind can only be understood in relation to the fact that it resides within a body (Keefer, Landau, Sullivan & Rothschild, 2014; Barrett, 2017) and that sensory experiences are the seat of reasoning and mental processes (Varela, Thompson & Roch, 1991; Barrett, 2017). Put another way, Barrett (2017, p. 46) argues that “mental processes do not take place in a vacuum-like state that is isolated or disconnected from the body or the environment”. Consequently, the activities typically associated with PE are rife with opportunities to facilitate intellectual reasoning. The challenge is whether PE can move beyond the mind-body binary and seize upon the rich meaning-making possibilities associated with embodiment. Realising this both practically and pedagogically would involve more than the acquisition of skills and the development of techniques which enable pupils to *run faster or throw further*.

There is growing conceptual interest in embodied pedagogies (Garrett & Wrench, 2016) and the body is increasingly recognised as vital to knowledge production (Wilcox, 2009). The intellect and lived experiences are increasingly viewed as interconnected with individuals’ embodied ways of knowing (Horn & Wilburn, 2005; Thorburn, 2008). These developments seemingly bode well for PE as they recognise that sensory engagement is crucial not only for the stimulation of mental processes but also for their affective influence on those mental processes. PE is uniquely placed to capitalise on sensory experiences in the pursuit of meaning. However, in order for Hawman’s (2020) appeal to be operationalised – that is, for the *education* in PE to be more clearly articulated and strongly evidenced – then the

physicality of learning should perhaps be a stimulus for, not a break from, intellectual enquiry. Philosophically this would align with a monist view of human nature, whereby the body and mind are both conceptually indivisible and mutually valuable in learning (Whitehead, 2010). However, in postulating a holistic learning experience in PE, it appears that physical educators are themselves caught up in a web of Cartesian dualism. The nomological primacy of the *body* over the *mind* falls short of the claimed plurality of outcomes.

Whitehead (2010) argues for the wholesale rejection of dualism and a move toward monism as an overarching PE philosophy. The rejection of dualism, however, has created an interesting paradox in that, by making such a strong case for *the physical* in learning, the potential for physicality as a source of intellectual engagement has seemingly been banished to other areas of the curriculum. In doing so the justificatory essence of PE has increasingly turned its back on ‘the mind’ – or at least on the notion that intellectual activities are a valuable conduit for learning in the subject – which has seemingly resulted in limited pedagogical practice whilst arrogantly claiming holistic educational outcomes. Invariably, both pedagogical and ideological commitments in PE are underpinned by teachers’ beliefs about what is educationally meaningful and by their notions of intelligence.

Ryle’s (1949) theoretical account of intelligence challenges what he called the *absurdity* of Cartesian rationalism, arguing that the classic doctrine of mind-body dualism is based on mistaken foundations. For Ryles (1949), conceiving both actions and cognitive processes in the same logical category – in this case of *substances* – is a category mistake because the body and mind cannot be conflated as belonging to the same logical category. That is, the body is comprised of physical properties and occupies physical space while being bound by the laws of physics, whereas the mind is nonmaterial, neither bound by physical space nor by the laws of physics and thus the mind should not be regarded as an *object* made up of an immaterial *substance*. On this basis, Ryle (1949, p. 11) accepts that every human is both a body and a mind “harnessed together” but rejects notions of body and mind representing different types of existence:

It is perfectly proper to say, in one logical tone of voice, that there exist minds and to say, in another logical tone of voice, that there exist bodies. But these expressions do not indicate two different species of existence, for ‘existence’ is not a generic word like ‘coloured’ or ‘sexed’ (Ryle, 1949, p. 17).

Attacking the classic theory of mind, therefore, Ryle (1949, p. 34) describes the hegemony of dualism as “the dogma of the Ghost in the Machine” and went so far as to label dualism as the “philosopher’s myth” (Ryle, 1949, p. 13). Instead, he argues that individuals live through two “collateral histories”:

A person therefore lives through two collateral histories, one consisting of what happens in and to his body, the other consisting of what happens in and to his mind. The first is public, the second private. The events in the first history are events in the physical world, those in the second are events in the mental world (Ryle, 1949, p. 11).

Ryle’s account has been used to theorise about the role and value of PE. For instance, Stolz (2014) draws upon Ryle’s account – which contends that actions, tacit knowledge and *know how* should not be treated the same as cognitive processes – in order to defend the educational utility of judging actions, skills and performance in PE. A question remains, however, as to the breadth of the term ‘action’. While Stolz (2014) uses Ryle’s account to justify the place of ‘doing’ something in education, he seemingly overlooks the fact that there are many other things pupils can ‘do’ in the name of learning which stretch beyond experiences of being judged on the aesthetic or performative quality of their physical actions. For instance, pupils could *do* and *perform* artwork, dramatized representations or writing activities which stem from physical experiences in PE. Put another way, if action is defined in educational terms as conscious deliberate movement (Best, 1978) and literacy comprises a range of embodied activities (Syverson, 2008) then the act of sweeping a paint brush, for instance, to embody and communicate meaning-making born of PE experiences, arguably falls within the remit of PE. There are no educational gatekeepers denying the intellectual potential born of physical experience as a means of lifting the status of reasoning as part of a physical education. It is surely not beyond the wit of the PE profession to recognise these ‘collateral histories’ as vital aspects of pupils’ holistic education and to move toward a plurality of learning experiences which embrace these collateral histories and, crucially, *go public* with their *collateral present* and *futures*.

Ryle (1949, p. 12) also highlights the different realities of physical and mental existence, which has implications for notions of learning in PE:

It is a necessary feature of what has physical existence that it is in space and time; it is a necessary feature of what has mental existence that it is in time but not in space. What has physical existence is composed of matter, or else is a function of matter;

what has mental existence consists of consciousness, or else is a function of consciousness.

The point here is to bring the consciousness of mental existence into physical existence through the tangible communication of what is said to be learned in PE. Ryle (1949, p. 16) argued that: “Effective possession of a piece of knowledge—that involves knowing how to use that knowledge, when required, for the solution of other theoretical or practical problems” (Ryle, 1946, p. 16). Literacy could serve as a meaningful conduit of information, for reflecting the *mental existence* of pupils into a tangible, physical product ready to be interpreted and judged as a valuable part of whole child development born of PE. However, seemingly anchored to notions of physical performance, skill acquisition and sports skills development, it would seem that the PE world, too, is haunted by Descartes’ ghost.

In terms of literacy for learning, one teacher suggested: “the enterprise can only enhance the whole process of learning in PE.” Perhaps it is time for PE to occupy a transversal relationship with subjects across the school curriculum. Teachers in this survey strongly suggest that literacy should be an essential feature of PE practice, particularly if the subject intends to evidence that learning has taken place. One teacher insisted: “every teacher is a teacher of English, so the problem is not *whether*, but *how*.” This sentiment reflects the national literacy drive outlined previously, in which the use of writing as a tool for thought is the responsibility of *all* subjects, including PE (DfES, 2004). Another teacher echoed this point by emphasising its importance for the pupils: “there is a place for literacy in every subject – it can be used to spark their interests and make them more interested in literacy.” Another teacher made the case for the timely importance of literacy in PE: “More than ever – literacy levels are weaker than ever before”. On purely instrumental grounds, therefore, the importance of literacy spreads to areas of socioeconomics, social justice and health. For instance, low literacy levels are linked with shorter life expectancy (Gilbert, Teravainen, Clark & Shaw, 2018), poor physical and mental health, economic disadvantage and low aspirations (Dugdale & Clark, 2008). In the interest of holistic development, therefore, literacy might be the key to unlocking the educational door that traditional PE practice holds shut.

Of course, literacy is not the sole focus of PE and there are many outcomes for which PE is used. One teacher highlighted the ideological conflicts in PE (MacPhail & Lawson, 2020) by arguing: “there are very strong competing agendas that PE has to work with (obesity, mental health, sport, competition) but does PE generate any evidence that learning, or even

some thinking, has taken place about these issues?” This is a pertinent question and it could be argued that literacy might serve as the educational conduit in this case, as another teacher remarked: “literacy provides evidence that some cognitive effort has taken place, just as it does with every other subject in school. Therefore, if PE is to remain a subject, it needs to consider the value of learning through literacy.” It could be argued, as another teacher puts it, that: “PE needs to join up the circle of action (as a deliberate movement) and academia”.

These comments serve as a warning from the chalkface that PE still occupies an insecure position in the curriculum. Houlihan (1997, p. 243) discusses the ambiguity and curricular insecurity of PE and its teachers in schools, stating that “despite many recent attempts to strengthen the academic credentials of PE...in the curriculum, it has proved extremely difficult to shed the perception of PE that it...is of a qualitatively different character to other subjects”. He goes further by suggesting that Peters’ influential comments (1966, p. 159) which placed PE outside of the “serious” educational pursuits compelled the advocates of PE to adopt a defensive position (Houlihan, 1997). This defensive position has been documented through the researcher’s own empirical experiences, including the departmental response to PE homework and the pupil voice chapter, as well as in relevant literature (Whitehead, 2020). The point here is not to strongarm PE into a state of ‘academicism’ but to unshackle its holistic educational potential. The power of literacy for learning in PE is perhaps best summarised by a teacher who has *lived it* in practice. Commenting on the broader value and potential impact of asking pupils to write in and about PE for *The Sports Monograph* book (Palmer, 2014), this teacher states:

I feel that literacy in PE is paramount and this project showed that it could be included across the whole academic spectrum. Literacy encourages extended learning, and research knowledge was shared especially at the summative stage. Students shared stories and experiences and felt they have made valuable contributions. The Sports Monograph led to a whole-school approach to literacy, poetry and healthy eating/living and ranged over a broad spectrum of subjects.

That a whole-school approach to literacy was instigated by a PE-based request for literacy demonstrates the potential of PE as a catalyst for literacy in learning. PE, it seems, has underestimated its own educational potential and, instead of putting pupils off, it seems to capture their intellectual curiosity about physical culture, as one teacher explains: “the process went hand-in-hand with my role as a PE teacher – one of the year 7 pupils who took part in this project has since chosen GCSE PE”.

Responses from the surveys suggest that there is, at the very least, reasonable scope to incorporate literacy into PE as a means of consolidating and evidencing pupils' learning. Some staff commented on the practical limitations, yet the pupils were resoundingly in favour of the idea. That PE is subject to *competing agendas* illustrates how PE has become a multi-purpose subject to achieve multi-faceted benefits (Sprake & Palmer, 2018a). Nevertheless, with the fruitful outcomes of literacy in PE already on display, it would seem unwise to continue citing practical limitations as a barrier when literacy might serve to liberate its educational potential.

In summary, confusion persists about the role and educational contribution of PE. Pupils are not resistant to literacy in PE. On the contrary, they seem keen to integrate the physicality of learning with literacy but tend to experience these as separate curricular entities. As a subject PE is an underutilised catalyst for literacy in learning, and teachers who have witnessed the value of literacy for learning in PE have seemingly become advocates for it. Finally, by reinforcing a sense of pedagogical hegemony, some teachers appear to make deliberate attempts to keep PE and literacy conceptually detached.

To investigate further the place of learning and literacy in PE, interviews were deemed an appropriate next step in the scoping exercise. The interview is perhaps the most widely used data collection technique in the human and social sciences (Brinkmann, 2017). More specifically, the researcher opted for semistructured interviews which are methodologically congruent with the research paradigm. Semistructured interviews are useful methods, firstly, of capturing the dialogic nature of authentic human interaction and, secondly, for making the researcher more visible in the co-creation of knowledge (Brinkmann, 2017). Additionally, semistructured interviews are flexible enough to accommodate for, and ascribe value to, any dialogue that spills beyond the formal interview structure (Parker, 2005). The researcher is also cognisant of the inductive *spill over* of prior knowledge-producing activities and, as a result, enters the next episode "with an open mind, not an empty head" (Fetterman, 2010, p. 1).

Interviews with Secondary PE Teachers

Using semistructured interviews, episode four elicits the views of two separate teachers of secondary PE about the state and status of the subject. The teachers were selected using a blend of purposive (Fetterman, 2020) and convenience sampling (Richards & Morse, 2013), on the basis that they are both PE teachers with 'insider' insights from within the PE

community (purposive) and on account of their personal affiliations with the researcher (convenience). Creswell (2012) stresses the need to protect participant identities throughout the research and, by using pseudonyms, researchers can maintain the anonymity of participants (Thomas & Hodges, 2010; Fetterman, 2020). Therefore, both teachers have been given pseudonyms and will be named hereafter as Miss Hayes and Mr Phillips. Furthermore, by using pseudonyms such as *Miss Hayes* as opposed to, for example, *Teacher 1* or *Participant A*, the researcher aims to create and preserve the qualitative essence of data. There is of course a balancing act between the ethical necessity for protecting participants' identities and the methodological necessity for transparency regarding important variables such as gender and occupation (Allen & Wiles, 2016). Therefore, the participants have been assigned pseudonyms which protect their identities without obscuring potentially important nuances.

Some aspects of the following discussion will be presented using creative nonfiction. Cheney (2001, p. 1) argues that creative nonfiction enables the telling of factual stories whilst using the “compelling qualities and emotional vibrancy” of fiction. If successful, this method of writing can help the reader develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Cheney, 2001). The term ‘creative’, however, should not be conflated with fictitious accounts of the interviews. On the contrary, creative nonfiction involves rigorous analysis and is “deeply committed to the truth” (Caulley, 2008, p. 426) and stories are, after all, data with a soul (Brown, 2010). To paint a holistic and reflexive account of the research experience (Grønmo, 2020), this episode employs a multisensory approach to research (Eberle & Maeder, 2011) and attempts to *write in* the realities of the field.

Interview with Miss Hayes: Monday 3rd April 2017

Arriving at the school at 3.30pm sharp, as requested, I exited my car and began walking toward the school reception. The clouds appeared tired and heavy following a long day of holding in the rain. Entering the reception area, I overheard the soft murmurings of administrative staff reflecting on the day's events and, with a brief opportunity to absorb my surroundings, I noticed a small waiting room covered in framed school photographs and awards. To the left of the reception hatch stood a tall and proud cabinet containing various inscribed trophies and awards; the sporting achievements of the school were on deliberate and unmistakable display.

Having been a PE teacher and having visited various schools previously, the trophy cabinet seemingly provides an opportunity to boast the school's sporting achievements and is

a common feature in school reception areas. PE teachers, including myself, feel tremendous pride in their teams' sporting victories. With the research in mind, however, I did wonder what evidence exists of pupils' learning in PE and how this too might be displayed in such a manner. This short moment of calm reflection was suddenly interrupted by the sharp sound of the reception hatch doors being opened and, with a big smile on her face, the receptionist asked: "Hi, can I help you?"

Approaching with a smile, I replied: "Yes please, I am here to see Miss Hayes. She's expecting me". The receptionist informed Miss Hayes by telephone that I had arrived and then asked me: "Do you want to take a seat? She's heading over now". Shortly after, a pupil bounded into the reception area with both his school bag and a JD Sports bag which, in my experience, could only be carrying one thing: his PE kit. Sure enough, I asked the pupil: "Have you done PE today, then?" The pupil, as tired as the clouds, said: "Yeah". "What were you learning in PE today, then?", I asked, to which he replied: "Football". With a closed-lipped smile and a polite nod, I instantly recalled Alex's description of PE as an "arid, endless desert of football" (Sprake, 2014, p. 339). As quick as the conversation began, it was over. The pupil showed no intention of supplementing his laboured response with any details about what he had learned in PE. I am, of course, a stranger to him, but his curious lack of curiosity about learning in PE suggests that he too might be experiencing the 'endless desert of football' and may be parched for an educational drink. Approximately five minutes later, bursting through the reception doors, Miss Hayes held the door open for me and shouted: "Hi Andy! How are you? Do you want to come through?"

Leaping from my seat, I replied: "I'm great thank you, Miss, how are you?" Marching three steps ahead of me, I followed her across the brief courtyard to the main school entrance, which is separate from the reception area. "I'm good, yeah! Busy as ever!", she said. "Let's use the canteen for the interview if that's okay because the PE office is still being used. Do you want a cup of tea?". Only too happy to oblige, I said: "That would be great, thank you and the canteen is fine!" Once Miss Hayes had made two cups of tea, we sat down in the area where the pupils have lunch. Every sound reverberated across the dining hall, but it seemed that Miss Hayes was enjoying this moment of calm. "Okay Andy, ready when you are", she said whilst shifting her seat for more comfort. The following section presents a synthesised analysis of Miss Hayes' comments regarding PE in her school.

Braun and Clarke’s (2006) method for thematic analysis, underpinned by their recent promotion of the need for reflexivity (Braun & Clarke, 2019), was used to generate five themes from the interview with Miss Hayes. That is, from the data extracts and clusters, initial codes were developed which subsequently informed the central organising concepts and, finally, themes were generated through reflexive thematic analysis. For the reader’s convenience, Figure 9 provides an example of how the data were coded and demonstrates an audit trail for the development of central themes used in this study when applying reflexive thematic analysis:

Initial Codes (Grouped based on clustering below)	Conceptual Categories (Condensed into general concepts)	Themes (Presented as central themes)
PE as enjoyment PE as sport-centric PE for participation PE for being active PE for unwinding	Central organising concept: PE FOR <i>THIS, THAT</i> AND <i>THE OTHER</i>	1. A Crisis of Identity
Hidden skills Organisational skills Leadership Assumption of learning Unconscious learning	Central organising concept: PE AND THE ASSUMPTION OF HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT	2. Pupils’ holistic development is reduced to taken-for- granted assumptions
Physical Skills Performance Technique Fitness Sport Tactical awareness Peer assessment Assessment challenges	Central organising concept: MECHANISTIC WAYS OF DEMONSTRATING AND ASSESSING LEARNING IN PE	3. The Mechanistic Measures of Learning in PE
Verbal communication is enough Homework has no impact No need to assess in other ways PE is practical and that’s that Teaching and learning, but not in PE	Central organising concept: PE SHOULD BE LEFT ALONE	5. Literacy for Learning, but not in PE
The higher ups need to change PE perceptions Negative impressions of PE PE is not valued Academic pressure impacting upon extra-curricular sport Negative stereotypes Pupils vote with their feet PE is vulnerable	Central organising concept: THE PE STIGMA CONTINUES AND PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE VALUE OF PE ARE NEGATIVE	4. The Persistence of the PE Stigma

Figure 9: Audit Trail of Reflexive Thematic Analysis

First, it seems that physical education has a crisis of identity; second, pupils' holistic development is reduced to taken-for-granted assumptions; third, pupils' learning in PE is demonstrated via mechanistic means; fourth, the value of literacy for learning is clear, but not in PE; and, fifth, there is a persistent stigma of physical education. Each theme will now be discussed in turn, integrating relevant literature and theory in response to the generated data.

Theme 1: A Crisis of Identity

In a brief conversation about the purpose of PE in school, Miss Hayes described various roles that PE plays. Firstly, she explained: “we’re trying to promote the importance of being active and gaining a sense of enjoyment” but also that PE is “about trying to develop sporting skills in a range of areas”. It is widely acknowledged that the promotion of healthy lifestyles is associated with the role of PE professionals (Martins *et al.*, 2018; UNESCO, 2015) and that “pro-sport” ideologies permeate PE policy and practice (Green, 2002, p. 37). The former is echoed by Miss Hayes’ next comment: “we’ve just done health related fitness, sorry we call it exercising safely now, which used to be called HRF, and obviously that topic allows us to talk about why we need to exercise and why it’s important.” Miss Hayes also signals the PE-for-sport ethos in relation to teacher recruitment: “Lots of people want to be PE teachers because, more than ever, they enjoy sport, so people are trying to get into the profession”. It has long been understood that prospective PE teachers enter the profession on account of their experiences of sport and that such experiences are instrumental in shaping their teaching philosophies (Armour & Jones, 1998).

There are concerns, however, that the sportified PE experience might appeal more as an entertainment opportunity rather than an educational one (Sprake & Temple, 2016). To this end, Miss Hayes remarked: “we talk, particularly to the girls, about *stress relief*. PE is not an exam, y’know? They’re not taking an exam in it unless it’s for GCSE, so using it as a way of *unwinding*.” For pupils who do not take PE as a GCSE subject, she added: “It’s more about asking ‘are they taking part?’, exercising, valuing the importance of being active in their everyday life.” It seems the educational outputs of PE, at least those outside the realm of GCSE PE, are couched in ambiguity and taken-for-granted assumptions. Yet, Miss Hayes indicates that many *outsiders* struggle to see the value of PE: “some people who aren’t PE-minded can’t always see the benefits of taking part in sport. I think some classroom teachers, not all of them, but some are still quite closed off to thinking that you just run around with a ball outside.” It is difficult not to notice these somewhat contradictory statements, that the focus is on *taking part* and *exercising*, but that it is somehow more than *running around*. She

insisted that: “Some people, even now, still have that false image of what PE is about really” and that PE develops “hidden skills”. This ostensibly false image, however, may have been created through a perpetual crisis of identity about the aims and purpose of PE and it is perhaps time for the hidden skills to come out of the shadows.

Theme 2: Pupils’ holistic development is reduced to taken-for-granted assumptions

Miss Hayes continued by saying: “I think some schools underestimate the importance of PE in developing the whole student.” Explaining how pupils can develop leadership and organisational skills, she explained: “they can go and help each other out without actually realising that they’ve actually developed those skills such as leadership and organisation”. The implication is that holistic development occurs, but both as a by-product of other activities and without the pupils being aware of it. For Miss Hayes, PE develops “all those hidden skills; you can’t just put a tick in a box, or touch it, but it just happens”. Furthermore, she argues that PE “teaches a lot of skills, like the hidden skills that I’ve just mentioned which I think some children who are intelligent pick up on”. If holistic development *just happens* and relies on *intelligent* pupils to recognise when it is happening, then perhaps PE overestimates the degree to which it develops students holistically. It is arguably the responsibility of teachers to make clear the holistic and intended learning outcomes. As the following theme indicates, however, these broader outcomes appear to be suppressed by mechanistic terminology associated with identifying pupils as physically educated.

Theme 3: The Mechanistic Measures of Learning in PE

Identifying what constitutes a physically educated person is problematic (Fisher, Repond & Diniz, 2011). Klein (2006) suggests several terms associated with a physically educated person, including, but not limited to, being a responsible, competent and independent individual, being educated in physical activities and sports, and being responsible for their own physical activity and health. Each of these terms can be problematised, of course. For instance, judging the degree to which a pupil is *responsible* is clearly laden with values and how their *responsibleness* is communicated to the world is also unclear.

In the case of Miss Hayes, however, a range of mechanistic terms such as skill, technique and fitness were used to explain how pupils’ learning in PE can be demonstrated: “well, obviously, the most obvious one is physically, y’know? Can they do X skill? and can they execute it to the right technical model?” She argued that pupils “show their learning through performance; so, executing the skill.” The slipperiness of assessment in PE also came

to the fore when Miss Hayes commented on the transition between primary and secondary school:

So, when they come in from Key Stage 2 they are placed on a pathway based on their Key Stage 2 SAT results. Now, because, that isn't always a true indicator of *PE-ability*, here in year 7 we do our own fitness tests to give us a baseline test to give us an indicator which our data manager uses rather than just using Key Stage 2 data. So, when they come in year 7, the first 3 to 4 weeks we are doing standard fitness tests. So, y'know, 30m sprint, sit and reach tests, alternate hand wall toss. We used to measure about 7 components of fitness but now we've reduced it down thinking 'do they have any impact on anything?' We changed it to a 6-minute Cooper run instead of 12 minutes and, from the numbers they get, our head of faculty has a computer system which then equates their results to certain points.

Assessment is a complex issue in education (Dann, 2014) and is a notoriously challenging issue in PE (Hay & Penney, 2009). This extract, however, serves to illustrate a narrow view of what constitutes a physically educated person. On the one hand, Miss Hayes claims that PE is undervalued in its contribution to whole child development whereas, on the other hand, she describes a mechanistic and narrowly conceptualised account of what pupils are essentially assessed on, from the moment they arrive in secondary school. For instance, she remarks: "in PE you do notice sometimes parents asking 'why haven't they been picked for a school team?', and you think to yourself, well, y'know, they're not quite as *able* as other people and that's an unfortunate part of life!"

She does recognise that "some pupils can't *perform* it but they can *explain* it so they will be able to show their learning through verbally explaining to somebody else." Reducing how pupils learn in PE to either physical performance or explaining the technical aspects of a physical performance, which they may not be able to do, seems to fall considerably short of the holistic claims made by and on behalf of the subject (Bailey, 2006; Bailey *et al.*, 2009; afPE, 2019; Gray *et al.*, 2021). However, the ambiguity surrounding the *what*, *how* and *why* of assessment in PE is captured in her comment on professional judgement:

I find that we have criteria but, in my own professional judgement, I look at them as an all-round sports person. Do they have good tactical awareness? Have they got the skills in sports that we teach? Can they lead? I tend to look at those things as well as set criteria. It's a tricky one, assessing, because it's not, it doesn't always fit into, you're doing such a broad range of things.

It appears that Miss Hayes' teaching philosophy is underpinned by the development of sporting ability, or the sportification of PE (Griggs & Ward, 2012). It seems an oxymoron, however, that she rejects the notion of PE as simply running around with a ball whilst, at the same time, using her professional judgement to assess whether pupils are all-round sports people. Asked whether there might be alternative ways in which pupils might demonstrate or communicate their learning, either through cross-curricular links or through literacy, Miss Hayes remarked:

In terms of cross-curricular links you would then have to ask them to do a written piece of work. I think if you were trying to assess pupils' learning in another way, and I don't know what the value of that is really. In the past I've set pupils homework in PE and said: 'go away and learn the position of netball and draw me a netball diagram'. Sometimes it works, sometimes I wonder if it's made an impact. Do they now go onto the netball court and show me? I'm not always sure it's had an impact.

The value of literacy for learning in PE cannot be reduced to asking the pupils to identify the positions played in netball, or the shape of a court. Such educational expectations of pupils are too low. The moral or ethical dilemmas born of a netball experience might well have more fruitful results. This comment signals Miss Hayes' conceptual disparity between physical education and writing. Compared with the staff who completed the previous survey in this study, Miss Hayes perhaps embodies the ideological conflict within the PE community (MacPhail & Lawson, 2020). By immediately questioning the value of literacy for learning in PE, she indicates that literacy is not currently on her pedagogical radar, and her previous efforts to integrate literacy and homework in PE were a means to an end – that is, literacy is the *means* and improved sports performance is the *end*. She elaborates:

In a pure PE sense of the word, I don't know if you need to assess in a different way. From my point of view, PE is practical. It's a physical education so you're demonstrating your physical skills – that's what it means. For me, you should assess what they can do on a practical level.

This statement is perhaps indicative of the cultural resistance to change (Kirk, 2011). Of course, developing embodied competence in sports and skill-based activities may not need literacy, but the wider aspects of learning in PE might no longer be *hidden* if literacy became an integrated aspect of the PE learning menu. Criticising the PE community's preoccupation with performative practices, Evans (2013, pp. 84-85) states: "Comparison and

commodification of performance and corporeal perfection, the main aspects of educational ‘performativity’ now encoded in the curriculum of PE have become the order of the day”. It seems that Miss Hayes believes the menu is already crowded:

Sometimes people try to put too many additional things into PE now, which isn’t always a good use of time. The best way to learn things is to do. And that’s what I think we need to do. Sometimes, in lessons, we have to do this *teaching and learning* which is brilliant and needed but it’s not always lending itself to PE.

If teaching and learning does not lend itself to PE, then rudimentary questions can be asked about its place as an educational subject in schools. PE habitually involves some form of physical action but methods to evidence the wider learning claims, such as moral or citizenship development, have neither manifested in practice nor garnered ‘public’ recognition. Of course, there are practical limitations as to the pedagogical approaches that can realistically be implemented in the small window of curriculum opportunity, but the issue here is with the root cause of limited PE time. Perhaps it is PE that needs to lend itself to teaching and learning. Learning, not practical convenience, should be the ultimate driver behind PE practice. Education is an already crowded space but teaching and learning are of central importance. If teaching and learning is viewed as something that is in the way, then it is unsurprising that the status of PE is under continuous scrutiny and that the stigma about PE as a non-serious educational pursuit continues.

Theme 4: The Persistent Stigma of PE

A pervasive issue in most school curricula is the existence of a traditional curriculum hierarchy, which is based on the epistemological assumption that abstract subjects of a propositional nature, such as maths or physics, are inherently more valuable than corporeal subjects like physical education (Bleazby, 2015). These hierarchies can also be understood as a form of “curricular hegemony” (Sprake & Palmer, 2012, p. 75) which, from a Gramscian perspective, denotes an ideological arena in which school subjects seek to assert their educative value whilst, at the same time, implicitly accept the traditional subject hierarchy as being common-sense. A consequence of all hierarchies, however, is that those at the bottom are invariably displaced, or even stigmatized. The term stigma can be defined as the “situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance” (Goffman, 1963, p. 9) and, for Miss Hayes, PE is yet to be fully accepted as an educational imperative. She asks: “Is it as valued as other subjects? I’d say no because we don’t get given as much time as other subjects”. Miss Hayes appears to acknowledge the marginal status of PE generally (Ozolinš & Stolz,

2013) and, by using the term “we”, she signals that this creates a shared sense of displacement and collective identity. Collective identity can be defined as “an individual’s cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution” (Polletta & Jasper, 2001, p. 285). In defending this collective position, she goes further and criticises external perceptions of PE: “In the general day-to-day running of PE, people just have the impression that you just go out and kick a ball about”. However, Miss Hayes’ conceptual ambiguity surrounding the role of PE is once again demonstrated in that she not only conflates PE with sport, but also with extra-curricular fixtures:

Pressure of academic success is getting in the way of sports fixtures. It’s hard. I don’t play as many fixtures as I used to. Pupils achieving has a detrimental effect on extra-curricular provision. Are we allowed to take pupils out early for fixtures? No. Obviously it’s because they’re missing learning time. So is the role of PE as valuable? No. Teachers can’t get cover to take pupils to events. I now know that I wouldn’t ask for a fixture. My fears are that it could be the end of extra-curricular school sport.

In addition, despite Miss Hayes’ own conceptual disparity between PE and writing, she seemingly attributes some of the low status of PE to external factors. For instance, she remarks: “For those who think that reading is really important, they might think ‘why would you come to PE’? There’s still those stereotypes”. The stigma associated with PE as a non-serious pursuit continues to lead teachers like Miss Hayes to feelings of concern over curricular insecurity:

I hope it doesn’t come off the curriculum because it’s so important. The enjoyment of it is so important because it’s not an academic subject. Later on, it can be academic but not at Key Stage 3. They have an opportunity to explore things that aren’t behind a desk and I think that’s crucial.

However, the stigma of PE is seemingly felt by the pupils too, as Miss Hayes continues: “The GCSE children know that PE may not be as important as English, Maths and Science. So, when we are doing revision lessons, they will often vote and go to English, Maths and Science. PE is not the same value as other subjects. It’s a shame but that’s how it’s perceived.” Perhaps the pupils’ experiences at the chalkface are misaligned with the holistic rhetoric regarding the broader aims of PE. Perhaps pupils have internalised the perceived value of each school subject which manifests in their attitudes towards it in their education. This is emphasised in that pupils are apparently voting to devote more time to other subjects

in order to prepare for their ostensibly more important assessments. A key point is to address *why* PE is perceived in this way and what can be done to change this perception. Notwithstanding the value of PE, nor justifying the presence of curricular hegemony, it is perhaps time for the PE community to recognise an axiomatic truth regarding the hierarchy of school subjects, outlined by Bleazby (2015, p. 677):

[W]hile the status of particular school subjects can fluctuate, depending on how they are configured, there is a fundamental element of the curriculum hierarchy that remains constant: *i.e., the more abstract, theoretical, cognitive, objective, universal and certain a subject's content appears, the higher is its status; while the lower end of the curriculum hierarchy has always been dominated by subjects associated with concreteness, practicality, corporeality, subjectiveness and, thus, contentiousness.*

If the PE community is seriously committed to shaking off its persistent stigma – that is, the stigma that PE is less educationally valuable than other curriculum subjects – then it must look inward and realise the learning opportunities waiting on its own front door. Perhaps Sir Ken Robinson (Robinson, 2015, p. xvi) puts it more encouragingly in his book *Creative Schools: Revolutionizing Education from the Ground Up*. Whilst the title speaks for itself, his words serve as a timely reminder that the destiny of PE may well be in its own hands:

If you want to change education, it's important to recognize what sort of system it is. It is neither monolithic nor unchanging, which is why you can do something about it. It has many faces, many intersecting interests, and many potential points of innovation. Knowing this helps to explain why and how you can change it.

One potential point of innovation in PE, though it is far from 'innovative' in all other subjects across the curriculum, is to utilise the educational currency of literacy for pupils to demonstrate the breadth of learning made possible in the physical context. The teachers who completed the survey, for instance, were overwhelmingly in favour of embedding literacy into PE and this is no doubt partly due to witnessing the success of this practice in their own work. Having published alongside their pupils in the *Sports Monograph* book and having seen their pupils immersed in learning born of their physicality (Palmer, 2014), these teachers have seen the educational blind spot of PE and brought its *hidden skills* into view.

Through literacy, the crevasse between rhetoric and reality might be bridged, and the traditional curriculum hierarchy flattened. According to Miss Hayes, however, pupils “do use literacy in PE because, obviously we are asking them to explain things so that's them talking

to us. I know it's not the *writing* component, but they're verbally explaining which is their literacy skills." Verbal expressions can be understood as part of the broad-church of literacy, but what Miss Hayes is referring to here is *oracy*. Oracy is certainly an important component of learning communication in PE (Sprake & Palmer, 2019) but this too is limiting of the subject's holistic potential.

In addressing this issue for PE, the physicality of learning need not be lost. However, the holistic ambitions of PE might be realised by integrating the *abstract, theoretical* and *cognitive* dimensions of learning with the *concrete, practical* and *corporeal* experiences of the subject. This, of course, will only be made possible through genuine introspection on the part of physical educators, something which Miss Hayes has openly struggled with: "You know what has been nice? Being given the chance to actually reflect on my role as a PE teacher, because you never get chance to do it on the job."

Interview with Mr Phillips: Tuesday 11th April 2017

The rich, earthy aroma of freshly ground coffee hit me like a wave. I entered the coffee shop at 7.45am, having agreed to meet Mr Phillips at 8am. I arrived early to secure a comfortable seating area, preferably where we wouldn't get disturbed and so that I could buy him a coffee for his arrival. He teaches in a secondary school not too far from here but on this particular morning his 'breakfast club' was not going ahead, affording him a small window in which to take part in the interview. I toiled with the seating arrangements in trying to ensure that Mr Phillips felt comfortable when he arrived, leaving him with the comfortable sofa and enough room to 'escape' should he feel boxed in. Not a second after I placed our coffees on the table, Mr Phillips walked into the coffee shop at precisely 8am and addressed me from across the room. "Morning Andy, mate! How are you?", he asked. After we shook hands and greeted each other, we sat down. "Thanks for the coffee mate, I'm gonna need this today". Before I had the opportunity to discuss the interview, Mr Phillips began speaking, so, with his permission, I hit the 'record' button. He immediately seemed very relaxed; legs crossed, coffee in hand and speaking freely and openly about his experiences teaching PE, namely his eye-opening experiences in recent years relating to behaviour problems, issues with other PE staff not pulling their weight, and the increasing precarity of contract arrangements; that latter is yet another issue that PE teachers are facing in the contemporary workplace (Kirk, 2020).

Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) method for thematic analysis, four themes were developed from the interview with Mr Phillips: first, like Miss Hayes, he views the central role of PE as *fostering sports skills and wellbeing*; second, amidst the power of occupational socialisation, he is concerned with the *preservation of the self*; thirdly, he too believes that *PE is not valued like other subjects*; and, fourthly, when it comes to pupil assessment and the demonstration of learning in PE, it is like *the blind leading the blind*.

Theme 1: Physical Education for Sport and Wellbeing

Despite afPE's best efforts to continually distinguish between physical education, physical activity and school sport (afPE, 2020), there remains perhaps some ideological confusion. Mr Phillips' opening comments about the role of PE were clearly entangled with *sport*, and that the emphasis on *physical activity* is a primary justification for the importance of *physical education*. Whilst physical activity and sport might provide the context for learning (afPE, 2020), it is the learning that appears subordinate to the activity. Much like Miss Hayes, Mr Phillips views the role of PE as an introduction to sports, but also highlights the restrictive nature of contemporary PE practice:

I think that at Key Stage 3 you are trying to introduce a broad range of sports, but now even that's being shaped by GCSE, which is a shame because the weighting has shifted. I'm having to tailor my curriculum to the sports that we have to deliver in Y10 and 11, which is not a bad thing but at the same time it's quite restrictive.

Mr Phillips also explained that the aim at Key Stage 3 "is just about engaging them in practical sports" and "to try and make as many sports accessible, fun and enjoyable" as possible. "Once you get your kids into extra-curricular", he continued, "your team's there, and they build up that team culture." Like Miss Hayes, his comments signal a deep-rooted commitment to the PE-for-sport ethos and the place of extra-curricular sport is clearly at the forefront of both teachers' minds. For Mr Phillips, the emotional wellbeing and health implications were also foregrounded:

You're trying to offer them a range and one of the biggest things I believe in are the emotional benefits that you get from participating in sports, not just team sports but any physical activity. So, the mental health side is huge for me and I've always been a big believer in that. I mean you feel different even just going for a run by yourself, so that's huge and it's something I would try to get across to my pupils as much as I can.

Mental health is a broad concept which stretches beyond the remit of this study. Nevertheless, it is an increasingly important field and has become a significant focus in educational programmes (Biddle *et al.*, 2019). Given the increasing evidence that physical activity and exercise have both mood-enhancing effects and beneficial effects on mental health promotion (Pascoe *et al.*, 2020) it is unsurprising that PE gets embroiled with discussions about mental health promotion. Clearly, an absence of general wellbeing can impact upon pupils' learning (Gutman & Vorhaus, 2012) but, again, using the promotion of mental health as a buttress for the role of PE in schools seems to fall short of the evidence that learning has taken place. Incidentally, literacy and language are synonymous with pupils' wellbeing and can directly challenge educational disadvantage (Smith & Ellis, 2018). Mr Phillips then remarked: "Key Stage 4 is obviously something completely different. As much as you want them to enjoy PE, and obviously that's my main aim, you've got to get through the syllabus." The notion of *getting through* the syllabus is well-known colloquial issue in schools but Mr Phillips gives rise to the habitual indolence that he witnessed as a teacher of PE and how challenging the status quo would be difficult.

Theme 2: Teachers' Preservation of the Self

Reflecting on his experiences in a previous school, Mr Phillips criticised the practice he observed. Discussing his colleagues' strategic indolence in PE, he remarked:

[T]he department was made up of about 10 staff and I feel that staff were, well they were, cutting corners and it really bugged me. I was at the very bottom of the pecking order and I would do my job to the best of my ability while people above me were cutting corners. I mean, there's a guy there now, and he walks out of lessons, like, we're doing dodgeball and, they just do it together. They might combine three classes, so instead of having 20 kids they'll have a full sports hall with 60 kids, and one teacher would always leave the lesson and do other things. It's horrendous.

Given these unfavourable insights into the everyday realities of PE, it is perhaps unsurprising that pupils *vote with their feet* and focus more of their attention on other subject areas, as Miss Hayes pointed to previously. In addition to their strategic indolence, Mr Phillips explains how the PE teacher's role is embroiled with performativity in that, when Ofsted are due to inspect a school, teachers will perform differently:

When you're not being observed, you don't always do what you would do if you were being observed. Which is, I don't know, something bugs me about that. About

how you can *perform* on the day. And *everyone does it*, you're not just observed based on what you would do day in day out. You would pull things out that you wouldn't normally do because you would plan extra. That's just the way it is and that's what people do.

This 'front stage' persona is indicative of Goffman's (1959) impression management, whereby PE teachers perform on the day by presenting themselves as highly professional. In essence, teachers *smile for the cameras*. Such accounts give rise to a potentially problematic PE culture, if of course such practice is commonplace. Not only are teachers caught up in the *presentation* of the self (Goffman, 1959), but also *self-preservation*. That is, schools act as influential arenas for socialisation experiences, and, in PE, the hegemony of occupational socialisation is in full swing for Mr Phillips because, rather than directly challenging poor practice, he chose to ignore it for the likely reason of maintaining rapport with his colleagues. On whether PE could do anything to solve its marginal status from within, by changing the practices carried out in its name, he remarked:

[Y]ou're fighting a losing battle because if you try to replace something in the curriculum, you don't want to undermine your subject if that makes sense. But then you're not gonna get a lot of teachers agreeing. If they don't share the same belief as you, then you don't want to undermine your subject. It sounds stupid but it really does depend on who you're speaking to.

Mr Phillips' reasons for not seeking to implement change do not appear to be based upon on empirical experiences, as he does not draw on any specific examples. Rather, his concerns that any challenge to the status quo would be like fighting a losing battle, or that it might undermine PE, seems to be based on conjecture. His comment does signal the power of occupational socialisation, however, and is resemblant of the researcher's *Homework in PE* saga. In terms of addressing the problems from within, Mr Phillips maintains that: "It goes back to your time and your effort; I don't have a lot at the moment and there's a lot of things with my new role as second in department that I have to do". Mr Phillips seems to use time, or a lack of, as a central barrier to implementing any pedagogical change. Perhaps more importantly, he signals to the potential resistance by other teachers, that it would be like fighting a losing battle and that trying to affect change might be viewed as undermining their subject. Whilst there is clear recognition that implementing change would require planning, time and effort, there is little in the way of impetus for affecting change. Perhaps Mr Phillips, like others in the PE community, strategically profits from deliberate ignorance (Gigerenzer & Garcia-Retamero, 2017). If seeking to implement change from within PE feels like fighting

a losing battle, then changing external perceptions about its educational merit is perhaps a war that is all but lost.

Theme 3: Physical Education is not ‘valued’ like other subjects

Much like Miss Hayes, Mr Phillips signals discontent about the status of PE in comparison to other subject areas: “there are a lot of instances where you don’t feel as important” and PE is “not valued enough by head teachers, or the whole school”. Mr Phillips was visibly frustrated at feeling unimportant and his comments reflect previously highlighted research which points to PE teachers’ self-worth and motivation decreasing because of feeling marginalised in schools (Mäkelä & Whipp, 2015; Whipp *et al.*, 2007).

The school facilities were also a site of contention. Mr Phillips explained: “we’ve got to facilitate what we can at certain times, and we lose the sports hall after Easter for exams. So that’s becoming quite hard”. Sports halls are frequently usurped by other subject areas for the purpose of exams, but Mr Phillips spoke of this like it was an insignificant and common-sense arrangement. His passive acceptance of losing the sports hall for exams in other subjects is perhaps indicative of curricular hegemony (Sprake & Walker, 2015) in that PE teachers themselves accept it as common-sense, despite some unease or frustration. Perhaps the lack of strong resistance also indicates an implicit form of acceptance that other subjects are in fact more important for pupils’ education because they are able to evidence what is being learned. Recognising the practical limitations schools face when facilitating exams for large pupil cohorts, he did suggest that “a central venue for exams” would be useful in protecting the PE classroom. He also suggested that “if it was an ideal world, and everything was run by those with a PE background, then it would have a whole-school approach”. The latter part of his statement, relating to the ‘ideal world’ run by those with a PE background is a little disconcerting; perhaps it is exactly this socialised PE background which is the problem.

Theme 4: When it comes to learning in PE, it’s like the blind leading the blind

Discussing how pupils’ learning in PE is demonstrated and assessed, Mr Phillips shared Miss Hayes’ view that the main focal points are skills, technique and performance. He stated: “There’s things that you would look for in terms of skills in isolation and then putting the skills into practice, so conditioned games. So, you just scaffold their learning in a way, making it gradually harder”. Expanding further, he remarked:

[A]t Key Stage 3 it’s really important that it’s visible. At the same time, you want them to understand how and why a skill is performed. I like to use a bit of Kagan

at the end. I like to have whiteboards or post-it notes, if you can, it's not always practical, and get them to write down something at the end of the lesson based on their learning.

In discussing his own practice, Mr Phillips indicates some commitment to 'doing' and 'thinking'. On the issue of learning and assessment in PE more broadly, he suggested: "It's a bit of the blind leading the blind at the moment". Whilst recognising the ambiguity of assessing pupils in practical environments, Mr Phillips argues that the guidance is overly vague and that the margin for disagreement between teachers in the standardisation process can seriously affect pupil outcomes. This issue is indicative of the "slipperiness of movement" (Best, 1978, p. 26), whereby physical 'action' is deliberate, but 'movement' is not always deliberate. Whether or not teachers can differentiate between a pupil's deliberate action in order to achieve a certain level versus their coincidental movement in response, say, to a stimulus is clearly debatable. His concerns about a lack of clarity or certainty reflect the *guesswork* for measuring learning in PE, the learning that Talbot (2010) argues is intangible. It is perhaps time to produce tangible learning evidence, particularly if the outcomes of PE are to be holistic. For instance, Mr Phillips refers to the emotional development of pupils and how this aspect of learning is not a point of focus in practice: "I think that is something that we *could* do, that we *don't* do".

Interestingly thus far, there has been no mention of the term critical thinking as a core area for development in PE, which is interesting given that critical thinking has been synonymous with the overarching aims of education since the late twentieth century (Hare, 2000). Lodewyk (2009, p. 18) argues the need to foster critical thinking in PE, that various forms of knowledge should be encouraged in the PE context and that developing pupils' critical thinking in PE has the potential to equip them with the skills necessary for "the resolution of the challenges they will face in other academic subjects and in life". However, what Lodewyk seemingly overlooks is the potential for PE to become a deliberate facilitator of academic enquiry in and of itself and thus he overlooks the breadth of learning that PE could facilitate.

Reflexive note: The confusion about learning in PE reminds me of some additional data collection, which occurred naturally whilst attending an international physical education conference in September 2017. The occasion provided a fortuitous and yet timely opportunity to conduct *opportunistic* research (Anderson, 2006). As both a presenter and delegate at the conference, I was able to engage in informal discussions with international

colleagues and students. Incidentally, prior to my conference presentation, I asked a group of six undergraduate PE students: “What did you learn in Physical Education?” All six students looked at each other, visibly puzzled by the question, until one student boldly stated – “nothing!” The other five students immediately burst into laughter, as though they were all in agreement. This brief interaction, five minutes before my presentation, reaffirmed that the issues in question were significant and it would seem that the branches the ‘PE problem’ have international reach. Each student was enrolled at the time on a University course with the view to becoming teachers of PE. Albeit it a brief encounter, it has resonance for this study in that the comments add to the narrative that *learning* in PE is perhaps an afterthought. Following the conference, and back on home soil, it was time to carry out a *field visit* in preparation for an extended researcher in residence phase.

Primary School Field Visit

A field visit was arranged as a means of building rapport with the school community and *getting to* the fabric of the PE environment, gaining a sense of the everyday realities of PE in a primary school. Capitalising on the researcher’s prior knowledge of the research participants (Coe *et al*, 2021), this visit offered an opportunity to strengthen the pre-existing rapport with the known “gatekeepers” (Gratton & Jones, 2010, p. 200) and doubled-up as a fieldwork rehearsal. Field observations enable the researcher to get close to the lived experiences of the phenomena being researched (Palmer & Grecic, 2014). Field notes were recorded during the visit, which were subsequently analysed to generate an initial sense of the school setting.

The researcher was warmly greeted by the Head Teacher and the staff member responsible for PE in the school. Upon entry to the school, both staff were immediately keen to draw attention to the school’s trophy cabinet which, much like in Miss Hayes’ high school, was also displayed at the entrance to the school. During a tour of the school, the abundance of learning evidence on display from all subjects was clear to see, but the visible contributions stemming from PE were non-existent. A Change4Life Campaign was visible on a display board, but this was tucked away behind a door leading to the school canteen. Upon entering a traditional classroom, an unorthodox PE lesson was taking place. The pupils had been asked to research a sport of their choice, focusing on its history, rules and origins, a task in which the pupils were clearly engrossed. Through the classroom window, a more traditional PE lesson was taking place and yet the vibrancy and noises outside could not detract from pupils’ engagement with the intellectual activities occurring inside. Interestingly, the classroom

teacher's first remark seemed somewhat apologetic: "we don't *normally* do PE like this, we would normally be outside, but the school nativity play is taking up our sports hall!"

Reflexive note: Having enjoyed the opportunity to observe class-based PE, it seemed appropriate to go outside and look at the PE lesson taking place outside. This is where I encountered a somewhat withdrawn pupil, with bright red hair, standing against the wall and holding the ends of his jumper to keep his fingers warm. Asking: "Are you OK?", he replied with a shivering nod. This brief interaction reminded me of an undergraduate student, Levi Hobby, who published his personal reflections of PE. During a freezing cold PE lesson, focused on rugby, he asked the teacher – described as Mr D – whether they could go back inside, for which he was punished by being made to do laps. He described: "The pain of running on the frozen ground in my studded football boots was memorable just like it was just yesterday. It was like trying to run on a load of upturned plugs" (Palmer *et al.*, 2016, p. 83).

Back indoors at breaktime, of notable interest was the school magazine which enabled pupils to publish their learning and share school activities with the wider school community, including parents and caregivers. With topics ranging from global politics to arts-based learning, an abundance of learning evidence covers the pages spanning all subject disciplines; all except physical education. Perhaps the closest contribution that PE made to the magazine was in the 'Sports News' section, again celebrating the sporting achievements of the school. In the interest of making the familiar strange, this seemed an appropriate issue to note down for future reference; perhaps the PE staff might consider submitting something for the next edition. For now, however, the field visit gives the impression that, like secondary school, PE in the primary sector may also be closely tied with sport, and, whilst the other subjects are providing a plethora of learning evidence, PE seemingly falls short.

Reflexive note: At lunchtime, I overheard a member of staff asking, rather curiously, one of my *gatekeepers*, the lead PE teacher, what I was doing in the school. She quickly reassured them: "no, no he's not here to observe us as teachers, he's more interested in physical education itself". This reminded me of the 'social roles' played by the researcher (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995) and of the potential influence I was having on the environment.

At 3.15pm, or ‘home time’ as it is called in schools, several staff entered the staff room and were beginning their daily marking of textbooks. This is where the PE specialist seemingly sprung to life: “Time for quick brew before the big comp, Mr Sprake!”, she said. The pupils had been training for an indoor athletics competition, and the teacher seemed anxious to get going. Messages of “good luck” filled the room as she left, coat in hand, for the *big comp*.

Reflexive note: Conducting this field observation left me with an overwhelming sense that I could never fully harness the richness of my experiences in the school. The potential data which could be generated from the minutia of social interaction, the display boards (or lack of in the case of PE) or the general behaviour of the pupils in each lesson is incalculably rich. However, I left with a general sense that PE, even in primary school, is closely tied with sport and sporting achievement. For many, this might seem like common-sense, but the relentless affiliation between PE and sport reflects some time-worn concerns; that emphasising sport and competitive success can lead to finite outcomes that champion the elite performers whilst alienating others (Capel, 2000; Wright, 2004). The PE lessons I observed were well organised and typical of PE practice, but I left with a sense that something was missing: evidence of learning.

I thanked the head Teacher for welcoming me to the school and she insisted that I am welcome back “any time” to conduct further research and, to my surprise, asked if I would like to “lead on some PE lessons and experiment with different approaches”. Two weeks later, on the 11th December 2017, I returned to the school following an invitation to watch the school’s nativity. Again, this was an opportunity to engage in some more opportunistic research (Lüders, 2004) and to continue building rapport. I took my notepad and, whilst in the queue outside the school, I briefly spoke to a married couple who were lining up to watch their daughter. Explaining my reasons for attending, the husband stated: “My wife used to be a PE teacher, until she got injured. She was the best squash player. She played for Merseyside but after her injury she had to retrain, only *this time* as a *teacher!*” This served as a rare insight into the ‘public’ perception of PE teachers – that is, *PE teachers* are not always viewed as *real teachers*.

These opportunities have provided me with an opportunity to get *to* the fabric of the PE world. The fact that I was invited back, not only to observe the day-to-day practices of PE but also to facilitate curricular innovation, presents an opportunity to get *inside* the fabric.

That is, I am developing a sense of trust and rapport with the school staff. The intention for this study was to gain access where opportunity permits, and this is an opportunity which I fully intend to seize.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed the experiences and findings from a scoping exercise, informed by a combination of the researcher's personal experiences and observations, as well as the perspectives of pupils, teachers and PE stakeholders. In doing so, this chapter has revealed some concerning issues regarding the state and status of learning in physical education.

It should be noted that the 'PE problem' is not a singular issue. It comprises a set of interrelated issues, from which four overarching themes have been developed. Firstly, the low status of physical education in schools shows no signs of improvement. This is in part due to the philosophical and ideological confusion about the role and nature of the subject, which seemingly lingers it with a perpetual crisis of identity. Conceiving PE as a vehicle for sports introduction, physical activity, physical and mental health alongside other outcomes such as citizenship, moral and spiritual development (Bailey, 2006; Bailey *et al.*, 2009; afPE, 2019; Gray *et al.*, 2021) seemingly serves to exacerbate the 'PE problem'. Secondly, despite the holistic learning claims made in the name of PE, it does not seem to be holistic in practice. At the chalkface PE seems habitually imbued with sports performance and is bereft of intellectual meaning-making. If PE is to be championed for its holistic outcomes, then it must not only afford pupils the opportunity to *use* their minds, but it must also *inform* their minds. Thirdly, the pupils are ready and willing to engage with intellectual requests made in relation to PE, sport and culture. It is simply a question of whether the PE community is willing to take a leap of faith. Fourthly, PE teachers seem not only resistant to change but also well versed in strategic indolence. Being hesitant to adopt reflexive and introspective approaches to their work, PE teachers appear to be wilfully ignorant of their own role as part of the 'PE problem'. To this end, the hegemony of occupational socialisation reinforces traditional PE practice, even when faced with rational scrutiny. Consequently, the persistent stigma of PE as a non-serious educational pursuit shows no signs of reprieve.

These are troubling times for physical education. The data collection activities thus far indicate that the immediate future of PE is likely to involve *more of the same* (Kirk, 2011). That is, traditional approaches focusing on sports introduction, skill acquisition and health-

related activities, with little pedagogical commitment to holistic outcomes. Furthermore, the spiralling downtrend of time allocated to PE in the curriculum (Youth Sport Trust, 2018) suggests the marginal status of PE is only intensifying. To date, the PE profession has failed to notice the role it plays as part of the problem (Sprake, 2017) and a conceptual recalibration seems long overdue if the *education* in PE is to be manifest beyond the four walls of a sports hall. If PE hopes to have a thriving future, assuming it continues surviving, then PE teachers must mobilise to create a culture predicated on learning. This cannot and will not be achieved by passively accepting sports performance and health promotion as the central pillars of PE. Instead, PE needs to go further and facilitate meaningful and pluralistic learning experiences whereby pupils are encouraged to communicate their learning voices in diverse ways. The point is neither to venerate nor bend to the Petersian view of education – one purely made up of ‘factual’ knowledge – but to encourage a plurality of experiences through which pupils can express or communicate their learning in PE. This might be termed a spirit level pedagogy, whereby the holistic ambitions of PE are equally balanced and enacted.

Future Directions: researcher in residence

The data in phase one have revealed issues for further consideration. The interpretive thematic analysis and inductive approaches have resulted in deeper philosophical questioning about the status of PE and the place of literacy for learning: How might the holistic learning potential of PE be explored and evidenced? Where does the resistance to PE-based literacy come from, and what are the implications of this resistance? What are the justifications for the lack of learning evidence in PE? What are pupils’ perceptions about what PE can teach them? What might the future of PE look like if its wider educational claims are evidenced? What might the future of PE look like if it offers ‘more of the same’? Can the Allegory of the Cave serve as a useful metaphor to describe the delusions of learning in PE? The latter question will serve as a philosophical backdrop to the investigation into the learning culture of PE, in that comparisons between physical education and Plato’s Cave will be drawn to highlight aspects of the ‘PE problem’.

Phases Two and Three of this research will involve two separate and prolonged phases of fieldwork as a *researcher in residence*, whereby the researcher can explore ‘The Place of Learning and Literacy in Physical Education’, both in a primary school and a secondary school setting. These schools will enable the researcher to engage in “ethnographic visiting” (Sugden & Tomlinson, 2002, p. 12) in order to weave himself into the everyday fabric of the PE world and ask deeper philosophical questions about PE.

The PhD phase will conclude once the research aims have been achieved across both the primary and secondary schools. The researcher is hoping to develop some new pedagogical approaches for PE, which will enable pupils to communicate their learning through literacy. If successful, the educational products may serve as a timely mirror to current PE practice and leave the PE community with the burden of justification as to why it does not expect more from its pupils. Though it is a unique and perhaps provocative contribution to the body of knowledge in PE, it is not intended to be polemical. Instead, the researcher hopes to stimulate further dialogue. To this end, the table below has been created to demonstrate how the ongoing research in Phase One has been disseminated via several academic outputs. The reason for its inclusion is to demonstrate an ongoing commitment to engaging in transparent dialogue about the issues raised in the PE context.

Publications to date using data accrued during Phase One

	Data Collection Strategies	Date	Published / Disseminated
Phase One	Preface and ethnodrama - The 'issue' of homework in PE	2014-2017	Sprake, A., Keeling, J., Lee, D., Pryle, J. & Palmer, C. (2020). <i>Homework, in PE! Are you 'avin' a laugh?</i> Public Engagement and Performance Conference "Flesh Out – Connections". The Hepworth, Wakefield, Yorkshire. 20th -21st March.
	Pupil voice research as a teacher of PE - Resistance by close colleagues	2014	Sprake, A. (2014). 'I've got my kit for PE Sir, but what else is missing?' Perceptions of Physical Education in a Secondary school. In: C, Palmer. (Ed.). <i>The sports monograph: critical perspectives on socio-cultural sport, coaching and Physical Education</i> , pp. 337-348. SSTO Publications, Preston, UK.
	Postal Surveys for MPhil phase (to staff and pupils who contributed and/or supported the Sports Monograph chapter in 2014).	2017	Sprake, A. & Palmer, C. (2018). Physical Education: the allegory of the classroom. <i>Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies</i> , 12(1), pp. 57-78.
	Interview 1 with a secondary teacher	2017	Sprake, A. & Palmer, C. (2018). Physical Education: the allegory of the classroom. <i>Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies</i> , 12(1), pp. 57-78.
	Interview 2 with a different secondary teacher	2017	Sprake, A. & Palmer, C. (2018) Physical Education: the allegory of the classroom. <i>Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies</i> , 12(1), pp. 57-78.

Chapter Four

Phase Two:

Researcher in Residence (Primary School)

This chapter builds upon the findings of Phase One by discussing the insights developed through eight subsequent episodes of data collection in Phase Two. These episodes include: focus groups with teachers; the narrative account of a Literacy Coordinator in a secondary school; a twelve-week period of data collecting using ethnographic tools in a primary school in the North West of England; an authentic focus group with pupils in the *learning moment*; the contribution of PE to a school magazine; an unstructured interview with a primary school Head Teacher; a Celebration Assembly which communicated pupils' learning across the school; and, finally, the primary school Head Teacher's reflective comments about the fieldwork. Reflexivity is woven through the discussions and the participants' voices are given primacy, forming the vertical thread of the inquiry. Much like in Chapter Three, each episode will be discussed in turn, revealing themes and issues as they unfold through an inductive process. A brief outline of each episode of data collection has been provided for the reader's convenience:

Phase Two	Associated Research Activities
Data Collection	
Episode	
Episode One	<p>Focus groups with teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus Group 1: two primary school teachers (Mrs Porter and Mrs Carter). • Focus Group 2: two primary school teachers (Miss O'Farrell and Mrs Sharples). • Focus Group 3: three secondary PE teachers (Mr Carter, Mr Shore and Miss Parkinson).
Episode Two	Narrative account of a secondary school Literacy Coordinator (Miss Leach).
Episode Three	<p>Ethnographic visiting in a primary school:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researcher as complete participant. • Observational Field notes.
Episode Four	Focus group 4: in conversation with pupils, both in the learning moment and on the move.
Episode Five	A two-page contribution to a new section in the school magazine, Trinity Times, entitled 'Sport and Physical Education News', which was previously called 'Sport News'.
Episode Six	An unstructured interview with a primary school Head Teacher (The Head Teacher from the school where the fieldwork had taken place).
Episode Seven	A Celebration Assembly: presenting back the pupils' work to the whole school community (Audio Recorded with Head Teacher's Comments).
Episode Eight	Head Teacher's comments about the experiences and products of episode three and about the impact of publishing some of the pupils' work in the <i>Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies</i> (Going public in support of literacy for learning in physical education).

Three Focus Groups with teachers from three different schools

Focus groups 1 and 2 took place in two different primary schools, with two sets of staff, while focus group 3 occurred in a secondary school with three teachers of PE. Due to their contextual differences, focus groups 1 and 2 will be discussed together whilst focus group 3 will inform a subsequent discussion. Reflexive thematic analysis for focus groups 1 and 2 led to the development of four overarching themes: firstly, that PE is viewed as a vehicle for sports participation and health promotion; secondly, teachers have broad conceptual expectations of PE, despite facilitating narrow and restrictive practices; thirdly, there is a perpetually negative stigma of PE; and, fourthly, literacy could serve as a cross-curricular bridge to enhance the status of the subject in school.

Both focus groups 1 and 2 included two staff members from two desperate primary schools. Focus group 1 comprised a Deputy Head Teacher, Mrs Porter, and the PE-Lead Practitioner, Mrs Carter (pseudonyms). Focus group 2 comprised a Head Teacher, Mrs Slater, and a general classroom teacher, Miss O’Farrell (also pseudonyms). All participants were eager to contribute to the discussions about the role of PE in primary education. The focus groups quickly took an informal and conversational tone. The environment was relaxed, and the participants led much of the conversation (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003; McNamara, 2009; Turner, 2010).

Theme 1: PE is viewed as a vehicle for sports participation and health promotion

Both focus groups revealed an underlying conceptualisation that PE is a vehicle for sports participation and health promotion. For instance, whilst discussing the role of PE, Mrs Porter (FG1) stated: “I think we are all about giving them a taste or a flavour, so it continues in high school. You have that lifelong interest in something. Whether that’s orienteering, or dance or traditional sports.” Emphasising the centrality of sport in PE, she elaborated:

We compete in rugby against rugby clubs. We won the cup this year. We are now winning the plates. So, we’ve seen that progression. Although there is a difference between school sport and physical education, I think if you get your physical education right then you’re going to engage more people in school sport because they’ll want to do it.

Mrs Slater (FG2) echoed the view of PE-for-sports participation and health promotion, arguing: “It’s encompassing the healthy lifestyle as well as physical education and

competitive sport. I think it's the whole view on a healthy lifestyle." She then expanded on the PE-sport connection in her school:

We employed a sports apprentice 4 years ago because we wanted to *up* the value of sport. He came to us with A-Levels, he didn't want to be a teacher, but he had a passion for sport. We saw an improvement of the quality of PE in our school. He then did a Level 3 teaching assistant qualification. He has gone on to do his Level 5 sports qualification. He is now in a position to lead what we are planning to do from September.

Hiring a sports apprentice, who has no desire to be a teacher, to facilitate and lead on PE developments perhaps demonstrates the firm grip that sport has over PE culture. Mrs Carter reflected on her own experience of PE as a pupil, stating: "I know when I used to do PE, if you didn't like PE then you didn't like PE. As soon as it was PE we used to cry." Mrs Porter (FG1) then noted the risks of a sportified curriculum by commenting: "The children who are more likely to be disengaged are the ones where sport isn't their thing. But we do it at a level for them, so they feel comfortable and relaxed in their environment." However, she also explained the value of PE for non-academic pupils: "The kid that sits there and sees someone get 20 out of 20 every week in maths, just put them on a sports field. They need an equal chance to feel success."

Reflexive note: During this interview, I worked consciously not to show judgement of the teachers' opinions. I tried to give them more room to speak freely and without interruption. Indeed, key to successful focus groups is the researcher's ability to facilitate dialogue between participants and to act as a moderator (Cronin, 2016). To this end, I have included a verbatim conversation between the two teachers to demonstrate the free-flowing nature of the interview. Discussing the primary role of PE in schools, both Mrs Porter and Mrs Carter (FG1) expanded through dialogue:

Mrs Carter:

It's great for the development of the whole child. Not just physical development but emotionally, socially because you have to work with other children – the whole package, y'know...intellectually. A physically educated child can do physical things but they can think for themselves and think about others. It's the whole picture isn't it.

Researcher:

...and how are those other areas measured in terms of learning? The intellectual or social etc. How do we know?

Mrs Porter:

You're not gonna get a spreadsheet that you can print off like you get with English, Maths and Science but...

Mrs Carter:

...when you're assessing children in PE there are certain things you can measure like 'can they throw a ball?'; 'can they catch a ball?' It's skills that you'd use in the classroom. When I'm with the children I remind them that this is our classroom.

Because it's PE, it's not just physical, we talk to each other, we challenge each other to think, we model, we peer-assess, it's...

Mrs Porter:

...it's peer-coaching and the interaction with learning. Bring them into an English lesson and when they are working with their peer, or their writing coach, the coach will say 'yeah yeah you've hit this and this, we now need to move it on'.

Again, it's developing a language in children that will help them move on.

Mrs Carter:

I think that physical education is such an important part of the curriculum. Sometimes, I know not with *this* school, but I would say in a lot of schools you run out of time, so we'll just forget PE. In the past it was like "*it's only PE*". Well for some children, PE is the highlight of their week; those students who struggle *academically*.

The sentiment that the less academically inclined pupils are able to shine in PE was echoed in focus group 2, where Miss O'Farrell remarked: "I think it gives those children who aren't your A-Typical pupils, i.e. maths, English, science, a chance to shine. Like our young man that we spoke to before."

Reflexive note: Miss O'Farrell was referring to a pupil that we had spoken to prior to the interview. I know Miss O'Farrell personally, she is aware of my professional role and thus she asked for my input with a specific pupil, prior to the interview. I managed to offer some pastoral guidance to a pupil who was struggling with losing in sport. This went down very well with the teachers and, I believe, created a warm and friendly interview environment.

This is also an example of how the researcher's role is neither fixed nor static and is in fact malleable and changeable based on the social environment in which they find themselves.

The chronic insistence of the PE community to differentiate between academic and sporty pupils is not new (Walsh, 2019; Stirrup, 2020; Williams, 1996) but this should not be used as a means of bolstering the place and supposed value of PE in the curriculum. Such dichotomies about pupils' capacities might serve to perpetuate the marginalisation of PE in the curricular landscape. Conceptualising PE as a suitable environment for the ostensibly *non-academic* pupils does little to bolster the holistic value of the subject. On the contrary, it potentially serves to reduce the subject to little more than recreation, as Mrs Carter demonstrates:

Get them out and get their sports *done* and then it comes back to sitting in the classroom. Get the sport and physical activity *out of the way* and you will reap the rewards later in the day in terms of classroom concentration.

There is of course some basis for this claim as there is no shortage of research into the benefits of exercise and physical activity on wider school goals. For instance, publishing in *Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology*, Hill *et al* (2011) conducted two large-scale randomized controlled trials and made the case that classroom-based exercise initiatives can positively impact children's cognitive function. However, this position seemingly does little to strengthen the foothold of PE as an educational opportunity, never mind an imperative. Dodd (2015, p. 193) makes a compelling case for PE in schools by highlighting what he views as the holistic benefits of human motion, which he describes "the act of moving, any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscle contraction". Yet the term 'motion' seems inappropriate in an educational sense because 'motion', on account of its mere occurrence, does not equate to intelligent or deliberate human movement. The term *movement* does not denote conscious readiness to perform for others to judge, and so Best's (1978) term *action* seems more appropriate in a school setting because it involves deliberate decisions to which individuals are accountable. Of course, actions have consequences, whether aesthetic, performative or otherwise. Perhaps therefore the actions in physical education could lead to more learning consequences, an academic consequence of deliberate physical action.

Theme 2: Broad expectations and narrow practices

In both focus groups, teachers expressed their belief that PE contributes to a broad range of outcomes. However, when discussing how the broader aspects of PE might be

communicated, there is little evidence of broad pedagogy and, aside from assessing whether pupils can throw and catch, there is little in the way of learning evidence. Mrs Carter elaborated on this with an example from her practice:

Obviously, at the end of the lesson, like the lesson I just did, it was an invasion type lesson and there were 4 children, 5 spots. They had a ball and had to pass the ball and move. We decided as a group what skills we need for a game. To move it on, I stopped them and asked them about how we can move it on. I haven't got a piece of paper saying 'so-and-so said that' but my AfL [Assessment for Learning] shows that I was questioning them.

Despite viewing PE as a means of contributing to whole child development, these teachers discuss their practice in the narrow terms of skill acquisition and performance. Of course, questioning pupils and developing their oracy skills can be a valuable part of the PE jigsaw (Coral & Lleixà, 2016) but these examples seemingly fall short of the holistic PE promise (afPE, 2019). Mrs Porter also linked sporting experiences with wider aspects of learning:

I think PE also tackles emotional intelligence as well because there is no other platform that can teach winning and losing, and I know we can talk a lot about physical development, and all that, but, ultimately in any sport there is a winner and a loser. It doesn't matter if you keep it so that everyone is a winner – the children know. It's about developing that skill set in them.

Developing resilience is an important goal, of course, but whether there is any evidence that this occurs remains to be seen. Perhaps allowing pupils some time for reflection, discussion and writing about these experiences would bolster their learning and produce some evidence of intellectual engagement. The paradox between broad educational promises and narrow practices in PE gives rise to a lack of learning evidence and, consequently, it is perhaps unsurprising that PE, according to Mrs Slater (FG2), “can get a rough deal as a result of other subjects.” The lack of conceptual clarity about the educational efficacy of PE is illustrated through Mrs Porter's comment on the purpose of developing bodily control:

[If] children do not have a sense of control over their body then they cannot sit in a chair and learn. That is fundamental to life in a primary school, we give them a chair from the age of 5 and expect them to be able to sit still and listen for a period of time. But if that child doesn't have the skill set then you're not gonna get your academic achievement because they're not learning constructively.

Body awareness is an underpinning aspect of PE (Bergentoft, 2018). It encourages pupils to be physically active (Stodden *et al.*, 2008), it supports the development of skilled movements (Claxton, Troy & Dupree, 2006), it can enhance pupils' appreciation of different movements and how they can be performed (Parviainen, 2002) and it can foster both preventative health benefits (Mehling *et al.*, 2011) and health maintenance (Kirk, 2020). However, the rationale for developing pupils' bodily control would seem, for Mrs Porter, to be a means of getting them to "sit in a chair and learn". On the one hand, this position assumes that learning is achieved by sitting in a chair, and, on the other hand, it assumes that the role of PE is to serve as a buttress for other, more important, aspects of learning. Neither of these standpoints recognise PE as a potential stimulus for intellectual pursuits. The potential for physicality to become a catalyst for learning in PE should not be overlooked, as the human senses are vital for learning.

Through haptics - derived from the Greek *haptikos*, meaning being able to touch or grasp - and aesthetics - derived from the Greek *aisthētikos*, meaning sense perception - the physicality of learning in PE is paramount for sense making (Palmer *et al.*, 2014). Yet there continues to be little evidence of what *sense* pupils have made from their experiences in PE. The latter part of Mrs Porter's comment suggests that the *skill set* pupils develop in PE is or should be designed to ensure that pupils can *sit still and listen* for the purpose of *academic achievement* elsewhere in the curriculum. This seemingly aligns with a behaviourist view of education, where pupils are passive learners, but says little about what pupils learn in PE as a piece of the educational jigsaw.

Through active play, for instance, children can develop a variety of holistic educational outcomes, including literacy, numeracy as well as social, emotional and creative skills (Marbina, Church & Tayler, 2011). Dodd (2015) makes a strong case for physicality in education based on the acquisition of *human capital*. This pertains to physical, emotional, individual, social, intellectual and financial capital that can be achieved through physicality in learning. However, what Dodd (2015) seemingly overlooks is that the physicality in learning, be it in PE or otherwise, can be a source of intellectual enquiry in and of itself; not merely a branch upon which other subjects can pick the fruits. To emphasise, the physical labour of PE should not be viewed as the means of production from which other subjects yield fruitful results. Yet, this principle is seemingly used as a form of 'justification smuggling' to maintain the position of PE in the curricular milieu. Mrs Carter's comment about getting sport and physical activity, and by proxy PE, *out of the way* is evidence enough of the deep-seated

cultural indifference shown towards PE for learning, and of where PE currently sits in the traditional curriculum hierarchy (Bleazby, 2015). Mrs Carter then proceeded to discuss her staff in a positive light: “We are fortunate. I have a staff base that are skilled and open to learning and change. We have that culture already there.”

Reflexive note: It would seem, therefore, that this school will serve as an ideal site for extended fieldwork activities. Having built a seemingly good rapport with participants, they seem happy to discuss matters relating to PE in an uninhibited way. I am looking forward to my ethnographic visiting at this school; the teachers are very receptive and supportive of my being there.

Theme 3: The perpetual negative stigma of PE

During both focus groups, teachers hinted at the lower status of PE when compared with other subjects. As outlined, Mrs Carter (FG1) stated: “In the past, people thought *it’s only PE*” and such comments indicate the widely recognised issue surrounding the low status of PE in school culture (Armour & Jones, 1998; Ozolinš & Stolz, 2013; UNESCO, 2014). This issue was reiterated by Mrs Slater (FG2) who explained that PE is not seen as valuable to other subjects because “the focus is English and Maths, English and Maths, English and Maths”. It would seem therefore that there may be cultural perceptions of PE as a less valuable educational endeavour and the need for alternative pedagogies might be intensifying. Based on the insights of this study so far, it would seem that the perpetual negative stigma of PE exists at both primary and secondary levels.

Theme 4: Literacy could serve as a cross-curricular bridge

Discussing their efforts to implement interdisciplinary approaches to learning, such as ‘active maths’, Mrs Porter explained that “PE can lend itself to lots of other things.” This is an example of what Siedentop, Hastie and van der Mars (2004, p. 149) would call an interdisciplinary curriculum, whereby teachers seek to “cross-fertilize knowledge and skills among subjects”. This method of learning facilitation is ostensibly positive, particularly if PE intends to produce holistic outcomes (Bailey, 2006; Bailey *et al.*, 2009; afPE, 2019; Gray *et al.*, 2021). When asked whether literacy has a place in PE, Mrs Slater (FG2) exclaimed: “Definitely! I do think that our teachers are equipped with the skills to do that. Then the demands are for cross-curricular bridges with all subjects, so they are using PE as a vehicle to learn.” The positive reaction to this question was interesting and Mrs Sharples (FG2) was seemingly keen to emphasise the *learning* in physical education as well as the potential to build

cross-curricular bridges, or indeed blurring the lines, between subject areas. Using PE as a *vehicle to learn* is an ostensibly good starting point in addressing concerns about its educational legitimacy.

Mrs Slater (FG2) also expanded on this by saying: “It’s down to the creativity of your staff to blend the PE and literacy objectives seamlessly.” The interdisciplinary curriculum is one step in the right direction, but perhaps the next step might be to offer an integrative curriculum, underpinned by and organised around themes or *big ideas* (Beane, 1997). Such themes or big ideas might range from personal issues to social justice and equality, and teachers from across the curriculum would be aware of what themes the other teachers are exploring (Siedentop, Hastie & van der Mars, 2004). More recently, approaches such as this have been termed Phenomenon-Based Learning, or PhBL for short. With its roots in the Finish education system (Christou, 2020), PhBL and can be characterised as an approach to learning facilitation which deliberately blurs the boundaries between subjects, and which fosters learner-driven approaches to studying phenomena in a holistic manner (Mattila & Silander, 2015; Lonka, 2018; Moilanen, 2015). This approach would enable schools to provide a thematic education whereby the pupils can explore various themes, through a variety of modalities, whilst tapping into their individual talents in the communication of their learning. There is a clear recognition of the territory wars over curricular space and that the *rough deal* PE gets is likely tied up in its peripheral status. Perhaps too the fact that subjects vie for curricular relevance is part and parcel of the problem and the focus may need to shift toward integrative approaches which place the learner at the centre of learning, as opposed to discrete subjects competing for pupils’ attention.

The practical issues of evidencing learning in PE, however, by avoiding the use of spreadsheets, for example, were raised by Mrs Porter (FG1). It has been argued that learning in PE is difficult to measure because learning in PE is intangible (Talbot, 2010) but the lack of learning evidence is perhaps at the heart of the ‘PE problem’. Interestingly, Mrs Carter signalled the lower status of PE in two ways; firstly, that teachers can *run out of time* and so, presumably, avoid PE all together and that, secondly, the perception that *it’s only PE* resembles previous discussions in this study. PE being the highlight of the week for some pupils, those who struggle academically, for instance, does not necessarily equate to significant learning value. Therefore, integrating PE with literacy could be a positive step forward. Mrs Slater (FG2) commented: “It would have to be positive. I can’t say whether it would increase engagement. Maybe looking at high-profile athletes etc. would help. Perhaps using athletes

to get the initial interest and then getting the pupils to write about what they have done would create a valuable literacy link.” The conversational nature of this interview bore similarity to participatory action research, in which researchers and school practitioners collaborate through inquiries to address specific problems in educational settings (Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon, 2014). The teachers were generating their own actions to address a recognised problem. As a result, the teachers were seemingly empowered by the interview process to affect change in their own school community.

Focus Group 3: three teachers of Secondary PE

The third focus group comprised three experienced PE teachers in a secondary school. Interpretive reflexive thematic analysis for focus group 3 led to the development of five overarching themes: first, that PE has many aims; second, that the status of PE is taking a dive; third, resentment toward non-specialists; fourth, PE assessment is based on physical performance; and, fifth, that literacy for learning in PE is viewed as a burden. Due to the animated nature of teachers’ responses in this focus group, it was transcribed using Jefferson’s transcription system (2004). Using this system of transcription, both *what* was said and *how* it was said is captured, providing a more detailed account of the complex interactions taking place. Inferences were then drawn from the way in which messages were transmitted by the interviewees.

Reflexive note: “D’ya wan’a brew pal?”, asked one of the teachers. At the end of what was clearly a busy day for the staff I was warmly invited into the PE office, which created a relaxed tone for the focus group. As the kettle was boiling, I placed my dictaphone next to the scattered paperwork on the elongated staff desk. Prior to the recording taking place, I had an informal chat with the participants, informing them that I used to be a teacher of secondary PE and that I have a genuine empathy for the challenges faced in the PE community. This was a conscious effort to fast-track myself toward the ‘insider’ end of the continuum, as opposed to being an ‘outsider’, or worse an ‘imposer’. Discussing the uncertainties and tensions associated with insider/outsider research, Edwards and Shoreander (2014, p. 274) argue that having “a feel for unspoken codes of behaviour and values” as well as “local knowledge” can enable researchers to form “established relationships of acceptance, trust and empathy”, all of which can be important for the construction of knowledge.

Theme 1: PE has many aims

The conversation began by asking the teachers to share their views on the role of physical education in school. The clumsy and authentic nature of this discussion has been captured verbatim:

Mr Shore:

Well it should be to develop qualities, transferable qualities such as self-confidence, self-esteem=

Miss Parkinson:

=TEAM WORK!

Mr Shore:

=team work and things that can be continued in later life, not just in PE but throughout the curriculum and then beyond school=

Miss Parkinson:

=and not only that; educating them about how important it is to have a healthy, active lifestyle.

Mr Carter:

Yeah, I think that as well, obviously, that's more the bigger picture. I see our role as tapping into talent that other lessons can't. Y'know, in terms of practical talent and getting the best for students going through school.

Researcher:

So what kind of talents? What kind of...

Mr Carter:

→ The most able students. Getting them into local clubs, whether it be a local football club or an athletics club for students who have potentially never ran on a track.

Miss Parkinson:

Yeah, and getting girls playing netball and in ladies' leagues. Like, gymnastics and, obviously because of equipment, not all schools have everything so it's a local centre that a lot of our girls are encouraged to attend. We have a high-level swimmer, but we don't have a pool. Swimming isn't a sport that is pushed but from my background, being a lifeguard, I think it should be.

Mr Carter:

It all comes back down to development doesn't it? Erm, using sport to...erm....what's the word....erm.....increase the students' overall experience of school and personality really. You know, playing a sport in a team situation, there are going to be demands on them that can't be placed on them in other lessons. Dealing with not being passed the ball or dealing with doing well, as well.

Mr Shore:

Dealing with how to deal with defeat and learning from failure.

Researcher:

I noticed that 'Resilience' is one of your...

Mr Shore:

=Yeah the Five Values, yeah. [Five Values of the school philosophy].

Mr Carter:

Learning how to win well, as well=

Miss Parkinson:

=sportsmanship

Mr Carter:

You know, when you play against other schools you try to put your thoughts into your teams that you manage at school. It stands out like a sore thumb sometimes when other schools aren't=

Mr Shore:

=some schools aren't used to interacting with others, they aren't used to competing. When they win their behaviour is strange.

Researcher:

Mr Shore, a minute ago you mentioned something about development “throughout the curriculum”. Could you elaborate on that?

Mr Shore:

It’s the basic concepts, you know, like, health, healthy body healthy mind so if that underpins everything... I mean, I know myself that I exercise every day, I have to do that, it’s a way of life for me. If you can do that then you’re more alert, as you can tell by myself(h). I mean it does have an impact across the school, like behaviour, confidence, how children come across.

The discussion above has been included in its entirety to demonstrate the convoluted and uncertain navigation towards answering the question. Simply put, the teachers’ responses about the role of PE included the development of *team work*, encouraging pupils to lead *healthy, active lifestyles*, developing *practical talent*, pushing the *most able pupils* and getting them into clubs, developing *personality*, learning how to *deal with defeat*, developing *sportsmanship*, understanding the importance of *exercise* and, finally, developing *confidence*. The list of factors associated with the role of PE seemed more like spontaneous cherry-picking of the terminology used to justify PE in the curriculum, with no clear and consistent message about the role of PE in schools. Green (2000) has explored the challenges associated with understanding PE teachers’ everyday philosophies and it would seem that the educational element of the terminology used to explain the role of PE remains questionable.

Theme 2: the status of PE is taking a dive

The conversation then changed direction somewhat, as Mr Shore signalled the lower status of PE in schools: “I don’t think it’s always seen by schools. Over the last 5 or 6 years, PE has taken a bit of a dive”. Miss Parkinson then interjected:

...which is a massive shame because, y’know, the success of the Olympics. It was all talked about and they advertised about obesity levels in kids and, erm, you’d think it would be pushed and being thought more of and get a bit of a higher profile.

That PE is taking a “dive” and is perhaps the invisible subject in schools reflects the notion that PE is enduring a spiralling downtrend (Youth Sport Trust, 2018). Miss Parkinson extended this point to suggest that PE is not considered a high priority in schools. Referring to both the Olympics and childhood obesity in order to make a valuation of PE suggests that

combatting childhood obesity and promoting sports participation and talent pathways are perhaps the go-to philosophies for Miss Parkinson. When asked where they think that PE sits in relation to other subjects in the curriculum. Mr Shore was first to address the issue:

I don't wanna get political but there has been a big change over the last 5 or 6 years since the Conservatives have been back in and funding has been taken away. We went through a period where there was a push for sports colleges etc. and, at the Olympic stage, it was very successful but I feel that's all been taken away. It's gradually whittling down and PE is being gradually numbed down in the curriculum, it's being reduced. The national curriculum used to state that you had to teach 2 hours of PE a week, and now it's just an optional thing; it's just recommended. So, many schools just focus on English and Maths, and PE just becomes one lesson a week; we've just got one lesson a week in year 7 now and that's non-specialist teaching lessons. So it's all gradually going down. It's not just in this school.

There is clearly a sense that funding and government support is important for Mr Shore and that he views PE as being whittled down and reduced in schools. There is a sense of *learned helplessness* among these teachers - that is, the spiralling acquisition of pessimistic attitudes (Peterson, Maier & Seligman, 1993) - and judging by Mr Shore's comments it would appear that the ability to affect change feels beyond the purview of his department. The tone of Mr Shore's voice was also significant; becoming more sombre, as the reality of his situation seemingly revealed itself in parallel with his explanation. Perhaps the numbing down of PE in the curriculum is the consequence of PE providing an educationally numbing experience. Mr Carter quickly commented:

I mean not that it's ever been priority number 1 with the curriculum in my experience, but it's standing in the school has slowly become less of a focus in terms of timetabling which then knocks on to extra-curricular as well. The quality of provision for fixtures and activities is being squeezed. Schools just seem to want to get through the odd couple of events and everything else is geared towards GCSE results.

Mr Carter articulates a similar view in that PE has a weak standing in the school, but interestingly he refers immediately to the impact this has on extra-curricular activities. He is clearly concerned that 'the school' seems indifferent to extra-curricular events and is more interested in examination results. The researcher then questioned whether or not PE is becoming more *marginalised* and Mr Carter's response was clear: "In this district, definitely".

Whilst this question might have seemed somewhat loaded, it was met with such an impassioned response that it seems unlikely that the question influenced Mr Carter's response beyond his pre-existing opinion.

Theme 3: resentment toward non-specialists

The researcher used this opportunity to shift the focus of discussion toward the pupils and asked what the teachers believed the impact that all of this might be having on the children. The main thrust of their responses revolved around the impact on extra-curricular provision and the issue of non-specialist teachers teaching PE. For instance, Miss Parkinson remarked:

I think a lot of it has come down to time and schools having their CPD meetings on certain nights is making it more difficult. Plus, the amount of red-tape we've got to do now; tablets for kids, information we've got to take; it's just very much a case of, there's a lot more hoops to jump through just to go and play a friendly netball match. So there's barriers there.

This issue was then swiftly taken over by a discussion about the apparent lack of PE specialists teaching the subject:

Mr Shore:

You've got non-specialists on. I've only seen a group of small year 7s. I don't even know half of them.

Miss Parkinson:

I've not taught any Year 7s so I can't even pin-point the ones I want to pick for teams.

Mr Shore:

We've got competitions and awards evenings and we don't even know who the kids are. They're saying "well, Gary from Science takes them"=

Miss Parkinson:

=Yeah and "Alice from Maths takes them"

Mr Carter:

That's the impact, Andy [directed at the researcher]. When you've got a kid who, like you guys don't know here, they're potentially picking their GCSE options in March Year 8; they've had NO specialist PE, potentially played 3 or 4 games of football, and only football. Then they're looking at picking PE as a subject.

Miss Parkinson:

And some of the top, clever kids are also being pushed towards triple science and if they do that then they can't even pick GCSE PE. So there's lots of things that affect it.

There is a palpable sense of frustration at the idea of non-specialist teachers teaching PE. The proliferation of non-specialists teaching PE in the primary sector is well documented (Smith, 2015; Ward & Quennerstedt, 2015) although not a new issue (Jones & Green, 2017). However, using non-specialists to teach secondary PE is not so widespread, which could be somewhat embarrassing for the PE teachers as it seemed to undermine them as professionals. It is interesting to note that the issues of curricular marginalisation did not stimulate any conversations about the impact that this has on the quality of teaching and learning within the curriculum time. Instead, the teachers were solely focused on the impact that it has had on extra-curricular provision, which is seemingly a priority for these teachers. Furthermore, Miss Parkinson's final point here is significant and suggest that the PE department sense that the "clever kids" are being taken away from them in order to study *more serious* academic subjects. Perhaps this issue is the result of a lack of intellectual challenge in PE. Miss Parkinson added: "Then we've got the sports hall being taken up for *exams* and we're not the only one. Even the new buildings lose their sports halls for exams." With her eyes rolled, the long emphasis on the word "*exams*" indicates that this is an age-old issue which frustrates PE teachers, and reiterates Mr Phillips' remarks from Phase One. The notion of exams prompted a discussion about assessment in PE.

Theme 4: PE assessment is based on physical performance

When asked about the way in which pupils demonstrate what they have learned in physical education, the responses ranged from physical demonstrations and Q&A sessions, to the application of skills in competitive situations, whether pupils take up sport or if they attend extra-curricular clubs. In addition, terms like sportsmanship and winning well and losing well were also mentioned. Essentially, however, assessment in PE came down to physical performance, as Mr Carter explained:

The more able pupils consistently demonstrate skills and success. If that's what you mean, Andy, in terms of how they display it? Also, your less able pupils demonstrate less accuracy or consistency. In GCSE you've got topic tests.

Reflexive note: As a researcher, responding to the moment, I used information that the teachers had shared earlier in the interview to subtly weave in a discussion about the broader potential of PE:

The practical demonstration is a key aspect in terms of the performance side of PE, but I think Miss Parkinson you mentioned "sportsmanship" and Mr Carter you mentioned "winning well and losing well", so you are seemingly tapping into the moral and social areas of PE. Are pupils demonstrating those areas of learning as well?

This question was seemingly shunned by Mr Carter: "I think it's mixed, depending on the nature of the child". From here, terms such as leadership, pupils as motivators and behaviour were briefly mentioned, but nothing relating to how pupils learn *about*, *through* and *in* movement were discussed. Mr Shore was happy to let his guard down at this point and be honest about the difference between a typical teaching episode compared with a lesson in which you are being observed: "When you're being observed, ideally you want to bring them in [the wider aspects of learning such as moral development] but it becomes a bit contrived when you're trying to say *let's show perseverance* here". Mr Carter echoed the point: "Yeah, *come on, boys, we're 1-0 down but let's persevere*". This was said in a sarcastic tone and the teachers laughed in agreement. The notion of being observed and how this impacts teacher behaviour was raised in a previous interview with Mr Phillips, but the teachers in this focus group seem flippant to the idea of embedding whole-school values in PE. Such collegial solidarity reveals a collective ideology which could be explained by figurational sociology – that is, "the assumption that people and their activities are best viewed in terms of the networks of social relationships (or *figurations*) of which they are always and inevitably a part" (Green, 2002, p. 66). The collective, or figurational, response to notions of literacy in PE was much stronger.

Theme 5: literacy for learning in PE is viewed as a burden

"Do you have any thoughts on literacy in PE?", I asked. At this point, the teachers gradually became more animated and visibly uncomfortable. The attitudinal shift between the primary and secondary teachers was palpable. Miss Parkinson took the lead:

I can tell you what we do? Obviously, we don't have books. In Key Stage 4 we are quite shocked with their level of literacy, though. We've got textbooks with a reading age of 15 but we look at our data and some of them have a reading age of 9. They're not 'setted' in GCSE PE so you can have someone who is predicted a 3 next to someone who is predicted a 7. So, there's a wide range in literacy ability. Again, though, those people with a low level of literacy can be very good practically. So, it's doesn't always link very well, with us being physical as well as academic.

By asserting the apparently *obvious* idea that books do not have a place in physical education, Miss Parkinson perhaps demonstrates a cultural norm within the PE community. Cultural norms typically involve the unwritten or unspoken rules or standards which guide social behaviours (Cialdini & Trost, 1998; Hogg, 2010) but in this instance the unspoken norm was articulated, revealing insights into the everyday consensus regarding literacy for learning in PE. Across the curricular landscape, literacy is a shared currency for pupils to communicate their sense making and thus literacy is a cultural norm in *education* – but seemingly not in physical education at the hands of these practitioners. Furthermore, Mrs Sharples presents somewhat of an oxymoron. If it is *obvious* that literacy is not an educational focus in physical education, then her *shock* at the low literacy levels in GCSE PE is seemingly misplaced. This problem is captured by Driver (2019, np) who asserts that PE teachers are “often experts at modelling high-quality speaking and listening at KS3, but at KS4 PE presents advanced reading and writing demands in a scientific context. PE content knowledge is realised through text, diagrams, photos and data as well as pitch-side analysis.” All school subjects have their own unique vocabularies. The Education Endowment Foundation (2019, p. 4) refers to this as subject disciplinary literacy and provide information of the need for literacy across the curriculum as well as guidance about its implementation:

1. Literacy is key to learning across all subjects in secondary school and a strong predictor of outcomes in later life
2. Disciplinary literacy is an approach to improving literacy across the curriculum that emphasises the importance of subject specific support
3. All teachers should be supported to understand how to teach students to read, write and communicate effectively in their subjects
4. School leaders can help teachers by ensuring training related to literacy prioritises subject specificity over general approaches

If pupils' disciplinary literacy in PE is left undeveloped throughout Key Stage 3 – and, for that matter, throughout their primary school physical education as well – then it is likely to impede their learning at Key Stage 4. These issues give rise to an opportunity for making the familiar strange.

Much like in previous interviews, pupils are seemingly divided by the teachers into academic and non-academic, or *sporty*, categories. This dualist view of the learner is perhaps a contributing factor in the 'PE problem'. The integration of physicality and intellectual pursuits would ostensibly address two problems: first, it would answer the call for PE to be a holistic enterprise, allowing for the full richness of human flourishing in learning; and, secondly, it would alleviate the unhelpful dichotomy between academic and non-academic pupils in the PE context, whereby all pupils could flourish in various and equally valued ways. The conversation continued and, as the teachers became somewhat more agitated, their resistance to literacy for learning in PE was made more explicit:

Mr Carter:

For Key Stage 3, I want pupils to come in and *do* PE, from a *physical* point of view. If I was responsible for planning Key Stage 3 PE, I would want the pupils to experience skills from a game and demonstrate them in a game situation. Literacy would be secondary for me.

Miss Parkinson:

Yeah [nodding her head in agreement]

Mr Carter:

If something like *perseverance* came in during a game then brilliant, but I think there's much more of a place for it elsewhere.

Mr Shore:

We went through a stage of doing ↓booklets, passports, doing pupil voice=

Miss Parkinson:

=Yeah, like you're asking them to ↑write?! In a PE lesson?! A PRACTICAL PE lesson!

Mr Carter:

You're losing half your PE lesson when they should be out, *doing*.

Mr Shore:

We were challenged once to set homework in PE, ↑and mark it! You know, which eats into your lesson time.

Mr Carter:

I've got a 5 and a 3-year-old and I want them doing PE when they come to school (.) and that's how I feel.

The sentiments above were clearly shared by all three PE teachers. For them, PE is a 'practical-only' subject and there is clear contempt for any academic or intellectual encroachment on PE. These activities, it would seem, belong "elsewhere" and literacy should be viewed as "secondary" to the *doing* of PE. Tormented by his memories of using booklets, learning passports and engaging in pupil voice activities, Mr Shore made it abundantly clear that literacy, in his view, does not belong in PE. Echoed profusely by Miss Parkinson who clearly believes that writing, in a practical PE lesson, is counterintuitive. Finally, Mr Shore complained that the staff were once "challenged" to set homework in PE and that they were required to mark it. This apparently bizarre concept was lambasted by all teachers in the focus group, a similar scenario to the scripted ethnodrama in Phase One and one where homework is viewed as an unwelcome infringement of PE tradition. The teachers also debated the value of key words in a PE lesson. Whilst some disagreement occurred about the practicality of using key words on the sports field, it was nonetheless agreed that teachers should not have to write them down, rather they should explain them verbally - anything more would seem a too strenuous task. Mr Carter followed this up by stating: "I'll be honest as well. With literacy now and key words and strategies to help students, it's brilliant for GCSE, the way the weighting is, I'm all for it. But for Key Stage 3 I see it as absolutely different." This conversation culminated in a rapturous joke about literacy in PE, when Mr Shore loudly commented: "They all know how to spell gastrocnemius, but they can't get passed level 2 on't bloody bleep test!"

Reflexive note: Mindful of maintain rapport, I sensitively revealed that my final question also related to literacy. The atmosphere was tense. The moment I mentioned “literacy” again, Mr Carter leaned back in his chair. The slow creaking of his chair and the wry smile with which he pressed his lips together seemed to reflect his weariness with the topic. Nevertheless, I felt like the staff had been ‘eased in’ to the discussion about literacy in PE, and so felt confident to pursue the issue. So, having built a reasonable rapport with the staff, I made a clear and deliberate act to bring about a specific line of inquiry, where my research focus came clearly into view:

Would there be no scope for literacy to communicate pupils’ learning? We could be talking about artwork, poetry, it doesn’t necessarily need to be an essay. Is there scope, do you think, for pupils in this school to be given the opportunities to reflect on their learning through literacy, that contributes to what we would call a physically educated child? Earlier, you [directed at Miss Parkinson] mentioned the pupils who are weak in terms of literacy but can be outstanding practical performers. Well, what if we looked at it the other way round, where there was a pupil who is a really creative writer, not very good practically, but could discuss the ethical and moral issues in PE and sport really well?

Responses were hesitant and somewhat resistive and the practical limitations of embedding literacy were immediately raised. For instance, Miss Parkinson remarked:

It’s how you mix that into one lesson with that group of students, if you’ve got a group of them students, ideally, putting them in the same situation where you want, well, for me, practical outcomes; can you do both at the same time?

Mr Carter interjected by stating: “I don’t think there is a scope for our students to reflect much on that.” As a potential means of deflection, Mr Shore sought clarification about the line of questioning, which led to an interesting dialogue:

Mr Shore:

Are you talking about embedding this in English, cross-curricular and PSHE [Personal, Social and Health Education] days or something like that? Yeah
[positive]=

Mr Carter:

=[Correcting Mr Shore] into OUR subject.

Researcher:

Quite possibly. My personal view is that nothing needs to change in the sports hall or out there [referring to the AstroTurf and playing fields]

Mr Carter:

Yeah, yeah [nodding in agreement]

Researcher:

I'm just trying to explore new ways in which we might be able to communicate the value of what's taking place in PE, perhaps through an art lesson, an English lesson or=

Mr Carter:

=or a whole-school day

Mr Shore:

Yeah, we have collapsed days you see, timetable do it. We have PSHE days and it could be integrated into that couldn't it?

Mr Carter:

Yeah, we could take a thing for a day, quite easily - yeah definitely! I think a lot of it comes from experience though, doesn't it Andy, like, how you react to being sent off or being given 'out' at something. You'd like to think that the student learns from that experience so the next time it happens, there's a better reaction and so on=

Mr Shore:

Yeah, like Zidane and Cantona?! They learned from experience!
[subsequent laughter].

The ambiguous, low-resolution lens through which PE teachers seemingly judge what is being learned in their subject is perhaps in need of sharpening. For instance, that Mr Carter suggested "you'd like to think that students learn" is a rather vague claim for the educational contribution of PE. The notion of cross-curricular links, however, produced a more positive tone and Mr Shore seemed to appreciate the potential value of an interdisciplinary or

integrative curriculum and Mr Carter continued the point by *shifting the burden* of literacy onto other practitioners:

I think with the PSHE days, definitely. Sarah (pseudonym) who does that is very flexible and open-minded. She has a focus for each year group. There will be a PSHE focus every week, and every half term there will be a day where they reflect upon what they do in form time. There's no reason why we couldn't ask whether PE could be considered for a topic with a year group and then have that PSHE day for that year group. If I'm being honest, though, in terms of the chance for pupils to be able to reflect on it and why, I think most of them would say there isn't a chance. You just do your PE, it happens, and then you sort of move on.

While Mr Carter seemingly recognises the potential value in building *cross-curricular bridges* with other curriculum areas, and actively pushes for PE to act as a central conduit for learning throughout the school, he nonetheless recedes back into his initial outlook. Even while applauding his wider school colleagues for being “flexible and open-minded”, Mr Carter appears either ignorant of, or indifferent to, his ideological rigidity. Moreover, the idea that “you just do your PE, it happens, and then you sort of move on” signals a sense of sleepwalking through learning (Sprake, 2014). Despite some flicker of hope, these teachers have seemingly conceded to ideological possession based on the culturally ingrained axioms about the role of PE; perhaps they are too comfortable in the cave. The interview drew to a close with informal pleasantries, and ended with an interesting revelation:

Researcher:

Well, thanks again for today.

Miss Parkinson:

I can give you one of the ‘desk helpers’ that we use to promote literacy across the school, every classroom has one.

Researcher:

Oh great, thank you, and thanks again for today.

Mr Carter:

No worries, no worries

Mr Shore:

Come to think of it, we could probably develop one of these literacy sheets for PE
couldn't we?

::End of recording::

Episode Two: Narrative Account of a Secondary School Literacy Coordinator

Seeking more information about the opportunities for, and barriers to, literacy in PE, episode two explores the short narrative account of Miss Leach (pseudonym), a Literacy Coordinator from a different secondary school in the North West of England. Narrative inquiry was deemed appropriate due to Miss Leach's time constraints and, methodologically, this section embraces the notion of qualitative researchers as "bricoleurs" in that their representations of data can arise from multiple fragments (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 11). Therefore, Miss Leach's narrative account is a fragment of a larger research story.

Developing pupils' literacy skills has long been a primary goal of education (Ofsted, 2013b). Literacy is at the heart of the learning process, but frequently overlooked is that reading, writing, speaking and listening are "embodied activities, not merely cognitive processes" (Syverson, 2008, p. 111). This is an important point of departure for any inquiry about the potential value of literacy in the physical education context. That is, learning activities of the intellectual variety are themselves embodied activities and, by appreciating this, scholars of PE might be emboldened to broaden their scope as to what constitutes a physical education. Given the all-pervasive use of literacy in learning, many schools in the UK now employ Literacy Coordinators who are responsible for fostering joined-up approaches to developing literacy across the school. The Literacy Coordinator's role is viewed as crucial for school improvement and they generally have whole-school responsibilities. One issue with this role is that, by definition, the term Literacy Coordinator can create the perception that promoting literacy is someone else's role. Despite their assertion that literacy is a shared role between educators, Ofsted (2013) recognise the cultural resistance that Head Teachers face when seeking to implement whole-school approaches to literacy. This is particularly challenging when it comes to physical education teachers, as Miss Leach explains:

As the Literacy Coordinator, I strive to develop a whole-school approach to the discipline [Literacy], but there are two barriers that I come up against regularly.

Firstly, *whole-school* by its definition means collaborating with every subject, even those that don't see literacy as something which is integral or even relevant to their teaching. Secondly, the term *literacy* itself is still a vague or confusing concept to many as it encompasses such a breadth of skills. When I got the role, I wanted to liaise with the PE department and ask for advice about how we could use information from PE to engage some of our more reluctant learners in the English department, especially with regard to reading materials that they could access and enjoy. I wanted to develop debate stimuli about particular athletes and sporting events which could be used in English whilst also proving the worth of PE in cross-curricular links. Having researched the AQA PE GCSE syllabus, key skills that are being tested in the new GCSE include 'evaluation and analysis' - skills that will depend on highly competent literacy levels. Plus, the OCR specification actually makes it clear that it encourages the 'development of strong literacy and numeracy skills'. With all this in mind, it's entirely relevant to work alongside departments in order to develop a whole-school approach. Sadly, I haven't managed to curate any productive outcome yet. Communication is stilted with emails getting no response. The attitude that "literacy is an obligation of English" is prevalent and the fact that there are no marks to be gained for spelling, punctuation and grammar in the GCSE exam makes literacy appear as though it's automatically irrelevant to this subject.

At this juncture it seems evident that PE teachers' ideologies and praxis are not only resistant to change (Kirk, 2011), but also resistant to collaboration. In this case, their unwillingness to engage with Miss Leach, a staff member from the wider school community who is actively striving to bolster the educational efficacy of PE, demonstrates that PE teachers are a tight-knit community of *insiders* (Palmer, 2010), impervious to the influence of other subjects, or *outsiders*. However, the reluctance to engage in cross-curricular activities which, incidentally, might assist PE in its pursuit of holistic outcomes, is perhaps indicative of why PE is often viewed as a "non-serious pursuit in educational terms compared to other subjects" (Stolz, 2014, p. 1). If PE teachers do not take seriously the broader educational capacity of their subject, then it will not be taken seriously by the wider school community. When attempts to collaborate get "no response", it reveals a much deeper issue. Worse than being unproductive, it seems unprofessional, and such issues only compound the 'PE problem'.

In the previous focus group, Miss Parkinson outlined that her PE department is often "shocked" at pupils' low literacy levels in GCSE PE but that literacy does not link well with the subject. However, Miss Leach's research into the exam syllabi for PE demonstrates that pupils' success in GCSE PE will "depend on highly competent literacy levels". It would seem therefore that addressing the 'PE problem' could start with a reconceptualization of learning

in PE and an appreciation of the necessity for subject disciplinary literacy as a conduit for meaning-making and evidence of learning. Miss Leach's experience also gives rise to a paradoxical issue. On the one hand, PE teachers have for a long time been aware of the peripheral status of their subject (Armour & Jones, 1998) whilst, on the other hand, they appear reluctant to expand their networks (or figurations) to collaborate with other subject areas. This is particularly pertinent when considering that the genesis of collaboration was the integration of PE and English, a subject which comfortably resides in the upper echelons of the traditional subject hierarchy (Bleazby, 2015).

In securing a stronger foothold in the curricular landscape, perhaps it is time for PE to learn from the subjects at the apex. The role of a teacher is to be a teacher first and a subject specialist second (Whitehead, 2020). In the PE context, it could be argued that equal affordance should be given to the *educationally* physical and physical *activities*; these two phrases need not be viewed as divorced in school. By the same token, the value of literacy in PE should not be understated (James & Manson, 2015). The objective of the physical action in PE – denoting human movement with *intent* – should be for pupils to learn something, and evidence of this learning is in the execution of physical actions and in the theorising and communicating of ideas about those actions, as well as broader aspects of learning that can be gleaned from them. PE should facilitate two things: *doing* and *theorising*, just like in every other subject. Doing so would empower learners to analyse, synthesise and communicate their learning and would also integrate PE as a central aspect of their lives (Ballinger & Deeney, 2006).

In their book *Literacy: Reading the Word, and the World* Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo (1987, viii) seek to transcend the etymological content and mechanical conceptualisation of the word *literacy* by calling for a conceptual re-think of the term; one which views literacy as “the relationship of learners to the world”. Making a strong case for literacy in PE, Ballinger and Deeney (2006) argue that all teachers, including teachers of PE, are teachers of literacy, and that if PE teachers could only embrace the learning power of literacy then physical education would be integrated into all aspects of pupils' lives. That is, pupils might view their experiences in PE as an opportunity for deeper reflection and literacy could provide the platform on which their learning can be shared and communicated to the world. Failure to acknowledge this pedagogical potential could, at best, be viewed as habitual indolence and, at worst, as robbing the pupils of their educational entitlement. The intentional avoidance of other educational opportunities in PE, particularly those in which pupils might

be empowered to explore new and novel ways of communicating their learning, is simultaneously detrimental to the pupils' learning and to the overall status of physical education in schools.

Taking this into account it seems unsurprising that the allocated curricular time for secondary physical education has been spiralling downward in recent years (Youth Sport Trust, 2018). The issues raised have implications beyond the lack of demonstrable evidence of learning. It impacts upon pupils' engagement with the subject as a whole, as Miss Leach continues:

In my experience, PE has developed as a subject which, unlike English for example, lacks the ability to be evidenced. English appears to be more continually assessed through the use of in-depth marking and a core set of realisable skills that consistently develop over five years in the secondary sector. PE just appears to provide activities; whether students engage, develop or access higher levels of cognitive skill seems secondary to the action of simply doing. Consequently, fewer students are able to feel successful and satisfied in their learning in PE as they are unable to access it. The downfall of this, and I have witnessed with many students, is that they become disengaged early on in PE, more readily than they do in other subjects, where more variety is covered and they aren't as selective or celebratory of a smaller group of gifted students.

Miss Leach's account offers a rare insight into how PE might be viewed from the perspective of other staff in schools. The notion that PE "just appears to provide activities" and that any intellectual engagement is "secondary to the action of simply doing" raises serious concerns about the perceived value of PE. In the previous focus group, Mr Carter stressed: "I want pupils to come in and *do* PE from a physical point of view" and that "you just do your PE, it happens, and then you sort of move on." In practice, this signals a passive experience of PE which is forgotten soon after. What's more, his comment implies a shared cultural axiom that *doing* in PE is more important than *thinking*. This appears congruent with Mrs Carter's view, in Phase One, that PE is a lifeline for pupils who struggle academically. However, that PE has become an activity-centred learning space is an issue that Whitehead (2020) has attested and problematized. What Whitehead seemingly overlooks is that physical education is an undervalued source of fruitful intellectual enquiry and that this might offer a legitimate conduit for both learning experiences and evidence, which Miss Lynch argues is lacking in current PE practice. The PE community needs either to demonstrate more convincing evidence that by "simply doing" pupils are *de facto* learning,

or alternatively it needs the pedagogical agility to provide opportunities for pupils to “develop or access higher levels of cognitive skill”. The former has been tried: the latter has not. Whilst this might raise broader questions relating to what it means to be physically educated, it certainly holds up a damning mirror to the high-quality and holistic education that is claimed in the name of PE (afPE, 2019).

Episode Three: Ethnographic Visiting in a Primary School (Researcher in Residence)

Episode three comprises various research activities pertaining to ethnographic visiting in a primary school. This is the same primary school where both Mrs Porter and Mrs Cater (FG1) teach, so rapport had already been established. This episode began with a meeting at the school with the Head Teacher and associated staff. The remit was to discuss the nature of the study and the symbiotic opportunities it might afford. This is a crucial aspect of relationship-building which Mills and Morton (2013) describe as ethnographic reciprocity. Having previously been offered the opportunity to facilitate some unorthodox PE lessons, it was agreed that the research activities would have two simultaneous functions; the researcher would engage in participant observation whilst occupying the joint role of researcher and teacher. The co-constructed plan was to facilitate a condensed curriculum of novel approaches to physical education.

Reflexive note: The school were delighted about our arrangement and we discussed the appropriate days and times for me to attend the school. We agreed that Wednesday afternoons would be most appropriate, where I would be given responsibility for two classes, a Year 5 class and a Year 6 class, and each lesson would be one hour in duration. This approach is characterised by Sugden and Tomlinson (2002, p. 12) as “ethnographic visiting”. It was also agreed that I would take advantage of opportunistic data collection opportunities as and when they arose. This fortuitous position was made possible through the positive relationships formed in the early stages of research, building trust and rapport. It is argued that forming effective relationships with gatekeepers in the field not only enables fieldwork to take place, but they are also integral to its success (Mills & Morton, 2013).

The condensed curriculum of novel approaches to teaching PE was inspired by several overlapping areas in the literature: first, by Kinchin and O’Sullivan’s (2003) innovative approach to embedding cultural studies in physical education; second, by seeking to apply phenomenon-based learning in the PE setting (Christou, 2020); and third, by implementing

what Siedentop, Hastie and van der Mars (2004) term the *interdisciplinary* and *integrative* curriculum in PE. On the latter point, the way in which knowledge and skills are typically fragmented into separate subjects in schools does not necessarily reflect the way in which things work outside of school (Siedentop, Hastie & van der Mars, 2004). An interdisciplinary curriculum involves simple combinations of skills and knowledge from various curriculum areas into one learning episode or scheme of work. An integrated curriculum involves the creation of thematic learning, involving big ideas (Beane, 1997) such as morals and social justice, and ensuring that teachers across the curriculum are aware of what other teachers are planning, all with the view to build cross-curricular bridges through literacy. For instance, a PE teacher might introduce bigger ideas and questions associated with PE experiences. This might be achieved by encouraging pupils to reflect on ethical issues associated with physical culture and to present their ideas through various modes of expression, such as performance, writing, speaking and listening activities. Finally, Schiro's (2008) discussions about the conflicting visions and enduring concerns of curriculum theory were considered. He argues that there are four predominant curriculum ideologies, including: the *scholar academic* ideology, the *social efficiency* ideology, the *learner-centred* ideology and the *social reconstruction* ideology. A detailed discussion about these competing ideologies is beyond the scope of this study, but the ethos behind the condensed curriculum in this fieldwork is underpinned by the learner-centred ideology. Learner-centred ideologies are underpinned by the belief that "worthwhile knowledge takes the form of personal meanings" whereby learners are encouraged to engaged in "personal creative self-expression in response to experience" (Schiro, 2008, p. 177).

Reflexive note: Occupying a dual role in this study, I am mindful of the fluctuating social roles I may need to play in the field (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007). For instance, each day, whilst pupils were engaged in the learning activities, I kept my raw field notes at the front of the room on the teacher's desk, with the view to typing them up later that evening. Taking handwritten field notes at the appropriate moments during each lesson rendered my social role as a participant-as-observer, meaning that my *researcher identity* was regularly portrayed. Conversely, managing the classroom and using a whistle to gain pupils' attention where necessary (Figure 10) rendered my social role as a complete participant, meaning that my *teacher identity* came to the fore. Using the whistle provided a great deal of enjoyment and humour for the pupils as the novelty reminded that they were in a PE class.



Figure 10: A Whistle to Assert Teacher Identity

Field notes are the bricks and mortar of ethnographic visiting and it is imperative that researchers type up their field notes sooner rather than later because, as Fetterman (2020) remarks, memory can fade quickly and leaving this too long can impede the rich nuances of data. Consequently, primacy was always given to the *researcher identity*. Occupying the participant-as-observer role is an important ethnographic trait (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007) because meaningful data is less likely to slip the net. Equally, it is recognised that slipping in and out of different *identities* and switching between different positions can be advantageous and lead to more fruitful findings (Grønmo, 2020). These changeable identities in the field illustrate the notion of “liquid researchers” and how researcher identities can fluctuate based on a variety of factors (Thomson & Gunter, 2010, p. 26).

Reflexive note: I was acutely aware that the so called ‘data’ from the ethnographic visiting phase would come in various forms and in various ways. Consequently, I entered the field with an open mind and a fine methodological sieve, in the hope that I would capture as much authentic information as possible with the view to carefully sieving through it at a later stage. For the twelve weeks that followed, I was known in the school as “Mr Sprake” and the following section will discuss the constructed themes and experiences. Figure 11 presents a visual representation of the classroom environment, which was the same for both the Year 5 and Year 6 class. Weaving throughout the classroom as both a teacher and a researcher promoted reflexive practices in which I realised that the dichotomy between insider and outsider was not so straightforward; I acted as a teacher during certain points and then more specifically as a researcher during others. For instance, during one of my lessons, two pupils

had a significant falling out and, as a result, I was forced to intervene in my role as the ‘teacher’ and temporarily stop taking field notes as a ‘researcher’. This demonstrates how researchers can develop *liquid identities* in the field (Thomson & Gunter, 2010). The fluidity between the two is what Sonkar (2019) describes as the ethnographer’s malleability of identity, which explains how researchers often find themselves occupying the space in-between the insider/outsider distinction. This insider/outsider concept therefore is somewhat of a false polarity. Figure 12 also provides the reader with some richer insights into the classroom environment:

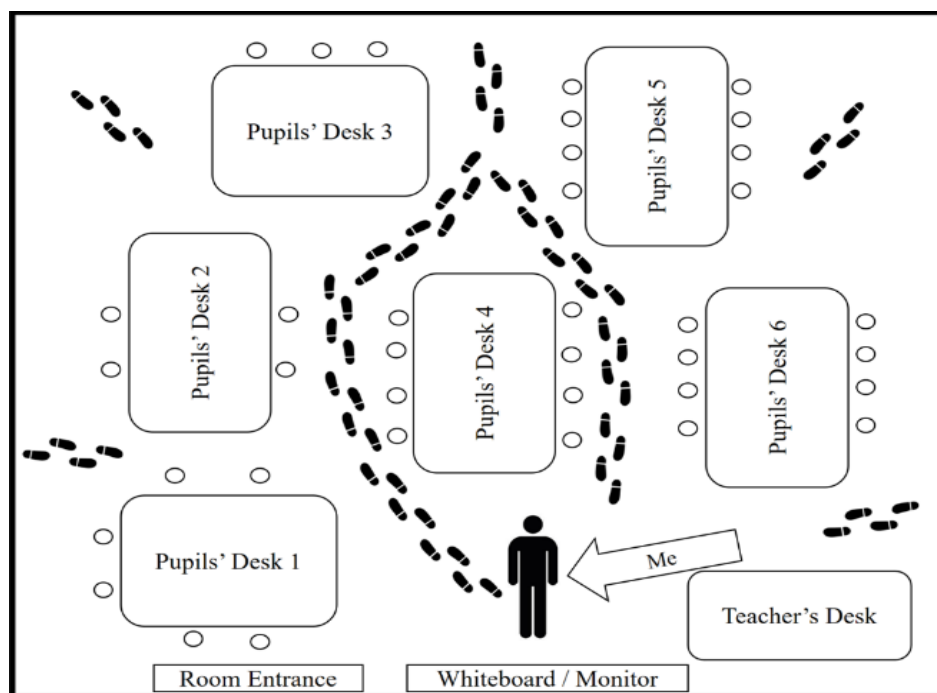


Figure 11: Visual Representation of the Classroom Environment



Figure 12: Image of the Classroom Environment

Responding to the multidisciplinary call for more transparency about *what* is being done in qualitative data analysis as well as *why* and *how* (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Malterud, 2001; Thorne, 2000; Nowell *et al.*, 2017), this episode utilises interpretive thematic analysis. *Why* this is being done at this stage is due to the volume of data collected and the modal plurality in which the data presented itself as part of the fieldwork. Hammersley and Atkinson (2019) assert that there is no set formula for the analysis of ethnographic fieldwork. Ethnographic research can generate large amounts of data, from a variety of sources, and the ethnographer's task is to "identify relationships across the whole corpus of data in order to generate understanding of the people involved and their actions" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019, p. 171). Of course, *how* these relationships, patterns or themes were established was through an interpretive lens, but unlike the narrow themes yielded from the interviews and focus group thus far, the data here are presented as broader, overarching themes to accommodate thick description and transparency. That is, the pupils' work – or *data* – will speak for itself (Palmer & Grecic, 2014). Conversely, the researcher strived for a conscious balance between the interpretive analysis and avoiding what Cope and Allison (2010, p. 84) describe as White Hat Bias, a "bias leading to the distortion of information in the service of what may be perceived to be righteous ends". This denotes the process of *cherry-picking* favourable data in order to portray the research findings in a manner which suits the researcher's ends. Instead, through earnest and inductive data analysis, the themes which are deemed relevant will be explored. Two overarching themes were developed from the fieldwork: firstly, pupils' eagerness to engage with PE as an academic enterprise; and, secondly, that support from the wider school community is vital in embedding literacy in physical education.

Theme 1: pupils' eagerness to engage with PE as an academic enterprise

In the field of developmental psychology, Jean Piaget carved a niche which he called *genetic epistemology*. This work focuses on children's natural development over time and how teachers can facilitate environments which are conducive to learning for individual children (Labbas, 2013). Piaget was convinced about the importance of fostering learner-centred environments and with advancing the need for active exploration in learning. He argued: "Children have real understanding only of that which they invent themselves" (Piaget, cited in Papert 1999, p. 105). As part of this fieldwork, pupils were offered a range of opportunities to engage in various social and cultural topics, from disability in sport to moral and ethical decisions in physical education. Pupils were also encouraged to utilise a range of modalities through which to communicate their learning, based on their own artistic

inventions so to speak. Pupils were overwhelmingly receptive toward, and enthusiastic about, engaging with physical education in new and novel ways.

Reflexive note: After my first lesson with the Year 6 pupils, Mrs Carter, the primary PE lead, said the pupils were “buzzing” about the lesson they’d had with me. The pupils had explained to her what was asked of them in the lesson, including a homework task(!) At the end of this particular day, she thanked me in front of the whole class and asked me whether or not I would be happy to attend the school again (knowing full well that I would be there next week). It was here when I noticed a group of pupils crossing their fingers at the back of the room. “Of course I will”, I replied, to which the pupils cheered.

Upon arrival at the school the following week, one pupil ecstatically said to her regular PE teacher: “Miss! Miss! I’ve done my PE homework for Mr Sprake already!” As discussed previously, homework in PE is a contentious issue, the previous reflexive accounts are testament to this, but the pupils in this study seem only too keen to engage in out-of-hours learning. At the start of the lesson, one pupil approached me personally and remarked: “Mr Sprake, I wrote *three sides* of paper for my ‘PE and Me’ story!” Setting literacy tasks in the name of PE is not as problematic as one might think. In fact, Mrs Carter insisted:

The kids have been loving these homework tasks and it just shows by the amount of pupils who are actually doing the work! All but one pupil managed to complete the task. There are more pupils doing their homework for *PE* than the other subjects!

Whether it was the novelty of PE homework, or whether the educational requests were of a motivating and personalised in nature, the fact that pupils engaged so positively speaks volumes about the potential for PE to provide intellectual tasks as part of a healthy learning menu.

Pupils’ eagerness to learn was also evident in the classroom. Despite previous teachers’ comments about workbooks being “obviously” incompatible with PE, these pupils were highly receptive to the idea. They were given workbooks in which to explore concepts in their own ways, through literacy, to make sense of various *big ideas* (Beane, 1997). In fact, in addition to weekly homework activities, PE-based crossword puzzles, song-writing and courtroom dramas, amongst other activities, literacy for learning in physical education was seamlessly integrated and some of the pupils’ work will now be shared as evidence of learning

in PE. Tilly produced a short reflective comment about the twelve-week PE curriculum: “He turns music and art into PE, and that is just incredible”. One of the early workshops revolved around pupils themselves and their own experiences of physical education. The task was to write a story called ‘PE and Me’. Pupils were given complete autonomy over their stories, but rich, descriptive language was encouraged. Harriet’s story utilised descriptive language to represent her experiences of a typical PE activity:

Walking outside, me and my classmates strolled towards the school field. Earlier that day, Mrs Carter had told us that we were doing PE on the field. I saw some miserable faces, while others were overjoyed. I stood waiting patiently for what seemed like hours, until finally she told us what we were doing. “Right! Listen up!” she said, “We are doing a game called *The Farmer and the Foxes*. The rules are that everyone is a fox, but one person is a farmer. The farmer must get the foxes before they enter the ‘safe zone’. If the foxes are tagged before they they’re in the ‘safe zone’ then they become a farmer”, Mrs Carter announced. “Got that?” Everyone nodded. “Harriet”, she cried, “you’re a fox!” I walked to the starting area, waiting for my friends. “Ready. Set. Go!”, roared Mrs Carter. Eyes darting, I waited for the perfect opportunity to run. Dashing towards the ‘safe zone’, I witnessed people to my left and right getting tagged. However, I had made it! Sweet relief filled my body. But that was only one round and there were still so many rounds left to go. Thirty minutes later. It was only me and another pupil. Everyone I knew had become a farmer. This was the final round yet everyone pressured me to win, but he was just too quick, and I lost. But I learned that day, that even if you don’t win something, it can still be a memorable moment that you can treasure for years.

Harriet’s short story breathes life into a routine primary school PE activity which enriches the embodied experience through literacy. Much like previous teachers’ perspectives, the term sport appeared to be synonymous with PE from the pupils’ perspectives. Sport was a theme which frequently appeared in the pupils’ work. For instance, Eve wrote a poem and stated: “This poem is about not giving up and to keep persevering!”:

The feeling of winning, the feeling of loss.

Just keep on trying, give that ball a toss.

Run as fast as you can, just do your best.

Don’t think of it like a maths test.

It's supposed to be fun.

Your team has nearly won.

This is your time, it's your chance to shine.

Come on, you're nearly there.

You just have to dare.

Eve's poem demonstrates some understanding about the concept and value of *perseverance* as an important trait. Unlike the secondary teachers interviewed previously, however, the notion of perseverance was brought to life through literacy. Her poem also deals with notions of winning and losing, which Mrs Porter highlighted previously, as well as being the best that you can be. That PE is not viewed in the same way as maths signals an inherently discrete conceptualisation of PE and other subjects. However, intellectual activities can clearly be integrated into PE practice. For instance, during one of the PE lessons, Grace attempted her first poem, using personification to describe a football:

Flying high

Through the sky

Skimming the ground

Skimming the sky

Getting kicked

Getting punched

By goalkeepers or strikers at the front

I'd prefer to lie around in JD

Than be kicked around and feeling unhappy.

Amelia reflected on her experiences in PE, also through poetry, and shared a chronological account of each school year:

When I was in Year 1, I was very shy
And sometimes I would cry
I normally wonder why
In Year 1, I loved sport
I never knew which sort
At the time I was very short
In Year 2, I could jump like a kangaroo
I also learned how
To adventure for a clue
In Year 3, I loved to run
It was oh so very fun
Especially under the beaming sun
In Year 4, I was gymnastics gold
On the bar, I had to keep hold
And on the vault, my flat back couldn't fold
In Year 5, I won the sprint
I looked at my mum and she had a glint
Even my brother said I was mint
In Year 6, I love all sport
And by now I'm not so short
By Mrs C, I've been taught
And learned that teamwork can never be bought.

Poems about PE and sport experiences in school were not always viewed through such a positive lens. For instance, Paul emulated the structure and phrasing of the poem *Twas the night before Christmas* to communicate his recollections about the horrors of sports day, and the shame of not performing well:

Twass the night before sports day
when all through the school
not a dinner-lady was stirring
a single bowl of gruel.
The PE kits all strewn
in the box without a care
searching in the hope
that their trainers were still there.

The children were drowning
in all of their dread
while visions of losing
raced round in their heads.
Mrs C in her tracksuit
sorting out all the races
tucked in her evil plot
to put the kids through their paces.

When out of the field
there arose such a clatter
I sprang up from my laptop
to see what was the matter.

Away to the asphalt
I flew like a flash
tore open the gates
and threw up in my sash.
I stared up at the heavens
praying for rain
I hoped this year's sports day
would be cancelled again.
When what to my wandering eyes
should appear
but a white painted track
and marquees lacking cheer.
I am balancing a beanbag
gone from my head
a shame to my family
I wish I was dead.
The promise of stickers
had now run thin
my hopes and dreams for sports day
were now lying in the bin.

Reflexive note: Upon first read of this poem, my *teacher identity* kicked in. The verse containing the phrase “I wish I was dead” was a red flag for me as an ex-teacher. Having the need to safeguard children’s wellbeing is a key aspect of the personal and professional conduct of teachers (DfE, 2013) so I raised this issue with the school leaders. Interestingly, the pupil

had indicated that the verse in question was not to be taken literally and that the pupil was exercising his “artistic licence”! Nevertheless, this issue was raised as an ethical obligation and my concerns were swiftly alleviated by the appropriate school staff.

Nevertheless, Paul’s negative experiences have implications for how pupils might perceive events such as sports day, but the way in which he used literacy as a means of expression revealed his disengagement in new ways. Pupils also used literacy to write letters to their future hypothetical PE teachers. Harriet chose to write a letter comprised entirely of questions:

Dear PE Teacher. How will you treat the people in my class? Will you treat us equally and fairly? Or will you be cruel and heartless? Will you help those who are struggling? Or will you ignore them? Will you force people to take part? Will you treat people as equals? Will you encourage people? Will you have high standards? Will fair play be encouraged? Are you kind to those around you? Will you help those in need of advice? If you see a child alone and sad, will you talk to them? Have you ever been bullied in sport? Have you had experience of this? Are you happy? Do you enjoy teaching PE? Why do you teach PE?

Questions such as these offer a glimpse into the minds of pupils, and although these questions were not answered they nevertheless pose important considerations for teachers of secondary PE. The concern about being *ignored* or being *alone and sad* are questions which all teachers are responsible for answering through their practice. In response to a published pupil voice letter entitled *Letter to a Coach* (Jones & Jones, 2014), pupils were invited to write back to the author who, at the time of writing the letter was in Year 6 but was in Year 10 during the fieldwork. Some pupils, such as Georgie, asked pertinent questions:

I wanted to ask you if there was a big difference between primary school and high school PE? Is PE just sports in high school or do you do PE where you can talk about how PE can be different?

These simple questions have profound implications for the PE community. It could be argued that PE teachers are burdened with the responsibility to answer these questions. Other pupils asked about the author’s welfare following the letter. For instance, John wrote:

Dear Alana, what I would like to know is whether you were treated differently because of what you wrote? Also, before you left primary school, did your coach change to help the elephants and the monkeys? I love the letter and I am tempted

to show it to my Grandma (she is a lion) and see if her coach did the same thing while she played for Stoke City.

The meaning-making and intellectual curiosity stemming from this task gives physical education an academic compass to navigate the learning landscape. Clearly, the concept being discussed here is *differentiation*, but explored from the pupils' perspectives. The notion of being treated differently due to sharing her thoughts perhaps indicates concerns over power in the classroom environment, and the link with John's Grandma demonstrates just how personal learning can become.

Pursuing further the notion of an integrative curriculum (Siedentop, Hastie & van der Mars, 2004), pupils were asked to produce a piece of artwork which resembled a significant issue in physical education or sport. Some of their artwork was clearly influenced by broader concepts relating to social justice:

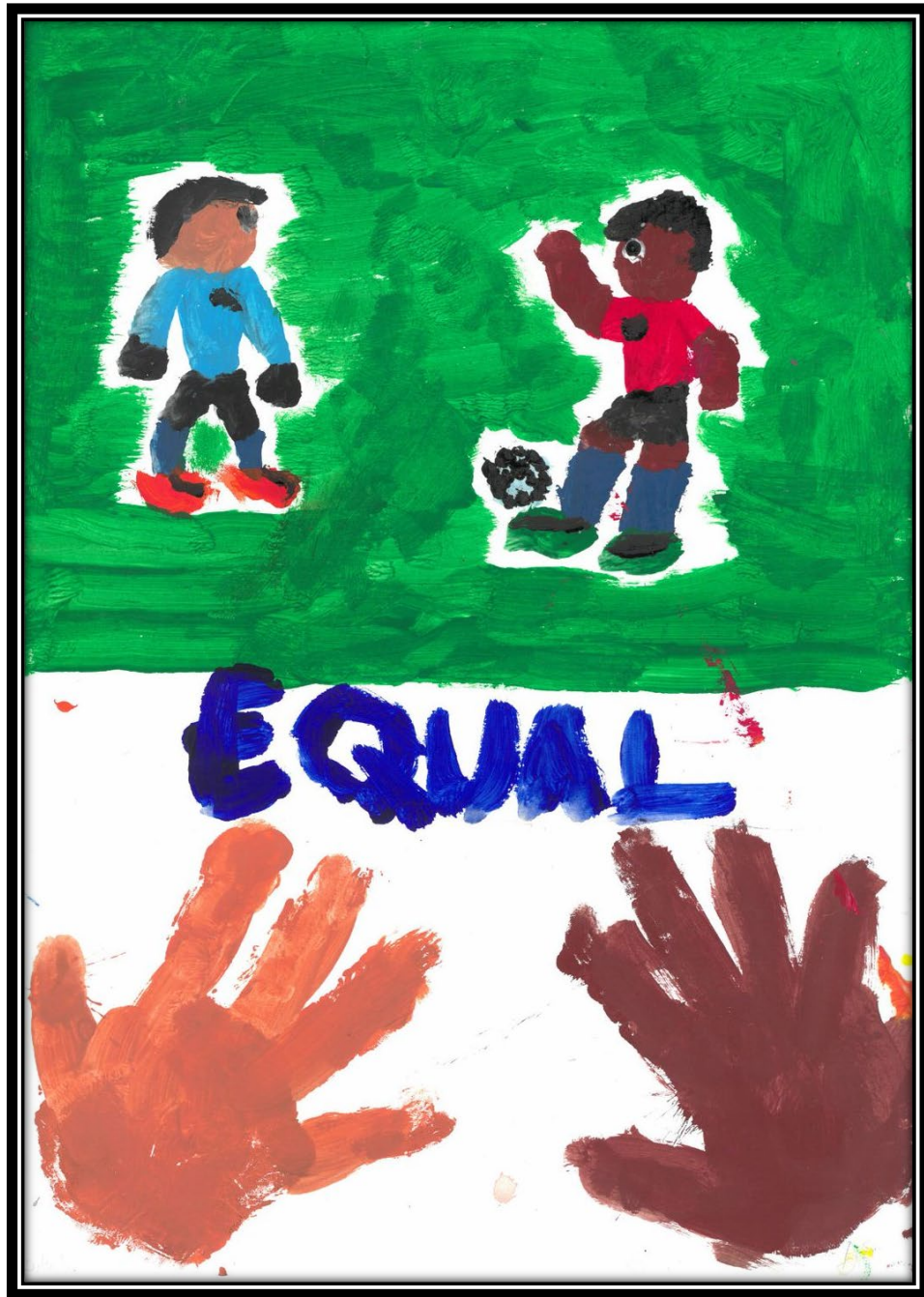


Figure 13: *Racial Equality*, by Drew – Year 6.

Drew produced a painting titled *Racial Equality* and provided a written comment in his workbook: “My artwork represents racial equality. No matter what colour skin you have, you should be treated equally. Recently, Raheem Sterling, a professional football player, was racially abused when he was playing football. Some fans shouted mean things at him. This really shouldn’t be in sport because it is not fair for everyone”. His reflective comments signal a moral knowledge (Phenix, 1964) which PE claims to nurture (afPE, 2019). Far from being an “impossible” task (Whitehead, 2020, p. 88), therefore, this example illustrates how

demonstrating the broader aspects of learning in PE is a rich possibility. Several other paintings were produced of a similar nature:



Figure 14: *Equal Chances*, by Charlotte – Year 5.

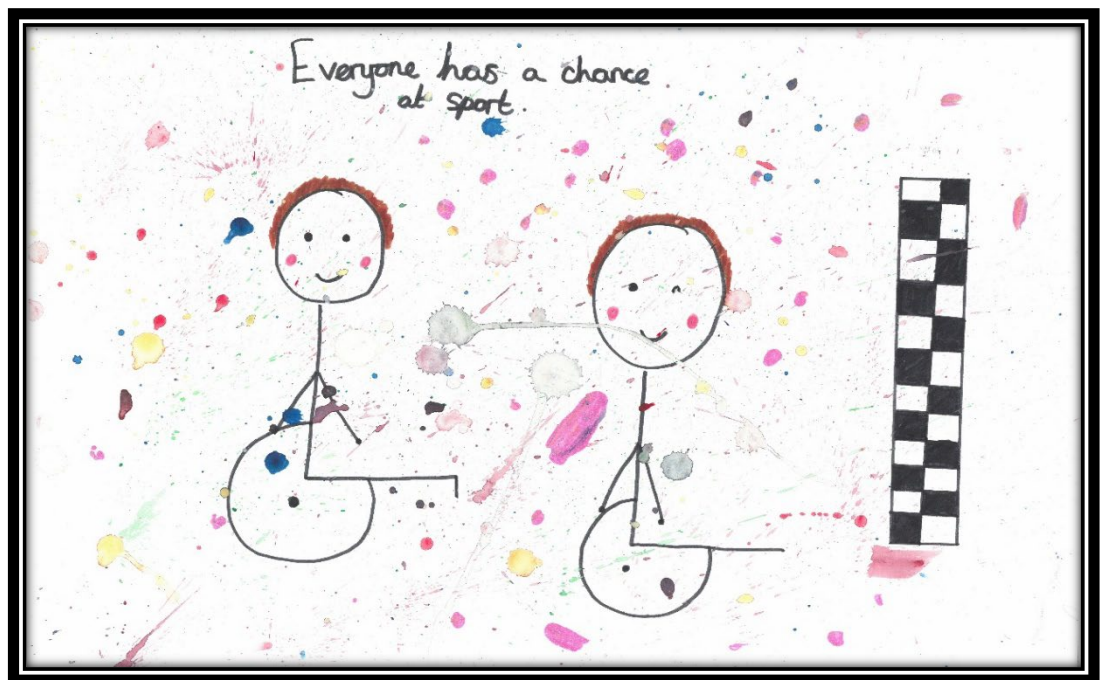


Figure 15: *Everyone has a Chance at Sport*, by Mava – Year 6.

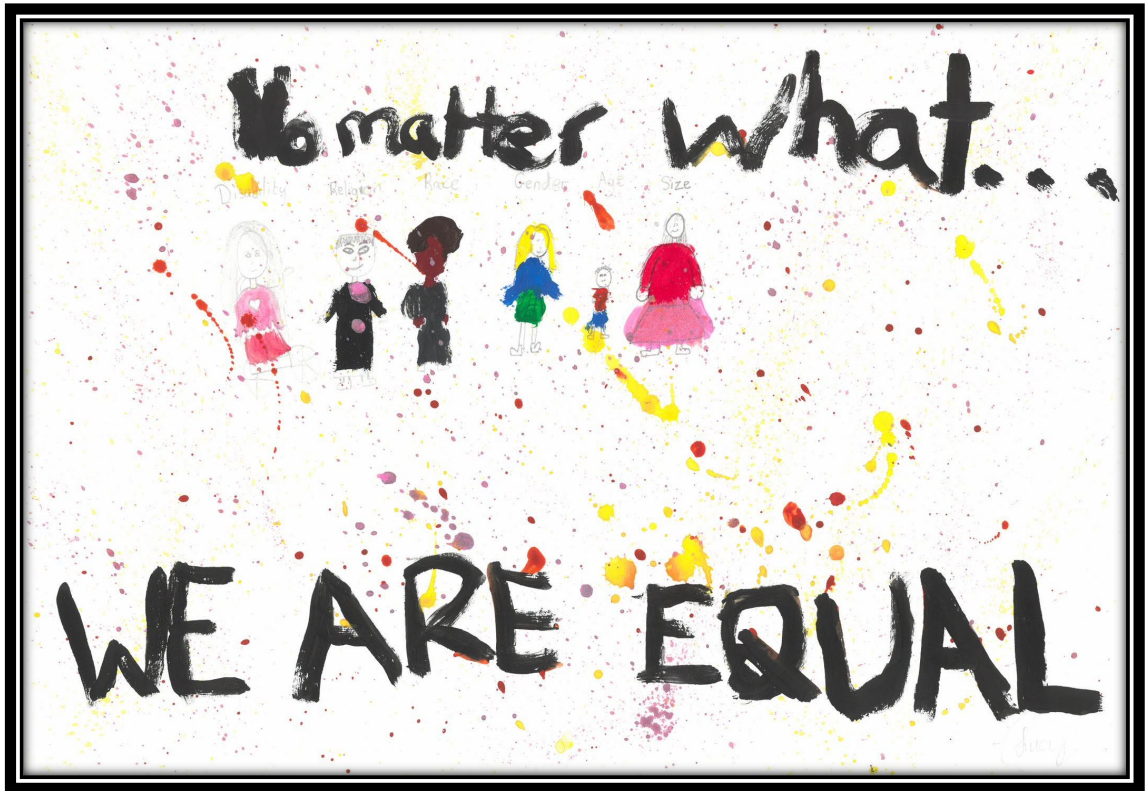


Figure 16: *We Are Equal*, by Emily – Year 5.

Figure 17 shows Jack's image which resembles the issue of performance enhancing drugs in sport. He used artwork to communicate his thoughts on the notion of *winning at all costs* and how, in the case of cheating in sport, it can lead to the perception of glory whilst provoking internal turmoil, as represented by the sad face inside the neck cord.



Figure 17: *Being 1st is not always best*, by Jack – Year 5.

Carla's image in figure 18 enabled her to communicate her general mood states before and after participating in football:



Figure 18: *Before and After*, by Carla – Year 6.



Figure 19: *Justice*, by Imogen – Year 6.

Imogen's artwork, *Justice*, was praised by the Head Teacher because the theme of 'justice' was the whole-school focus during that particular week. This demonstrates the capacity for PE to integrate big ideas as part of an integrative curriculum (Siedentop, Hastie & van der Mars, 2004). The Head Teacher pointed out specifically the heart in the centre of the image and used this artwork as an opportunity to explain to the whole class that she had been encouraging pupils to remember that justice "takes heart". Consequently, the Head Teacher used this opportunity to reaffirm the Christian values of the school and this demonstrates the capacity of PE to contribute to theological pursuits, which is fitting given the claimed spiritual developments of PE (afPE, 2019). In addition, in light of recent events relating to the Black Lives Matter movement, this image is certainly a valuable pedagogic tool which may be used to teach future students about social issues in PE.

Pupil Reflections

During the final week of fieldwork, pupils were asked to write personal reflections in their workbooks about their recent unorthodox experiences of PE. Jenson provided a highly personal account of his experiences as part of this condensed curriculum: "My favourite lesson was when we were writing poetry and music, because music is in my heart. It gave me a much better understanding about sport and PE." Jack also provided a positive reflection, stating: "PE with Mr Sprake taught me that PE can be performed in different ways other than just running around in the cold". Furthermore, Jason commented positively on the homework in PE: "The homework was fun! It was also challenging so it was the best kind of homework". Comments such as these signal not only the willingness but a desire to engage in PE as a holistic enterprise. That pupils are enthusiastic about engaging in PE-related music, poetry, letter writing, art, debates, and homework tasks demonstrates that pupils are not resistant to change.

Pupils in Year 5 also engaged fully in the use of literacy in PE. For instance, in her letter to a PE teacher, Emily offers a useful reminder to PE teachers that children's apprehensions should be alleviated:

Dear PE Teacher. My name is Emily and I have never really liked sports. I do like dodgeball and I would say I'm quite good at it, but I've never been in a competition before. I might even be the only one in my class who hasn't, so please don't expect too much from me. I can't stand the pressure from my other teammates and the pressure of my teacher that I am not good enough or that I'm doing something

wrong. I would like to be in your dodgeball team (although I highly doubt I'm going to get in). Just please don't expect too much of me, I am not that good.

Emily will clearly enter the PE arena with a lack of confidence in the subject and this is perhaps a reminder about the importance of differentiation and appropriate challenge. Another pupil, Christopher, used the 'literacy offer' in PE to reflect on a poignant moment for him personally:

I stood there, about to start the race on sports day, hoping to win. I was against the bully. On your marks, set, go! The wind rushed as I leapt forward, it went by in a flash. The bully was right next to me. The finish line was in sight, and everything slowed down. I wasn't going to win, but suddenly he slowed down as if he was tired. I surged forward and crossed the line. People were shouting my name and cheering. At me? I hadn't won, or had I? I turned around and was given a gold medal. I'll remember this day forever; the day I beat the bully.

The social complexities of the pupil community in PE are not always visible to teachers, and this story revealed a significant moment for Christopher. Perhaps more interesting at this stage are the pupils' reflections of the learning experience in PE. Timothy stated: "I've learned that PE isn't all about outdoor sport. We can express it through writing and art, too". Similarly, Emily remarked: "I learned that PE can come in different forms. The physical bit and the reflective bit. I never thought that the loud, noisy and rough PE could ever be so nice, calm and reflective. I also learned that even though you might be different, you can still take part." Phoebe opted to write a little more about the specific aspects of her learning in PE:

In our PE we have learned all sorts. We learned that people can sometimes cheat in sport, how a court case works, and we learned about people who we knew nothing about. It was quite an experience. We made PE songs to show how much we knew about what we had been learning in PE. We learned how to express ourselves by using art in PE, and I chose to paint about equality. We've learned so much and I can't wait to find out more. The future of PE is on our shoulders - we can make a difference.

The closing statement is of significant interest. In light of the notion of changing education from the ground up, perhaps Phoebe has made an extremely pertinent comment. That is, perhaps the future of PE *is* on the shoulders of primary school pupils and the shape of PE to come may well be influenced by the pupils' learning products, and thus their *expectations* of

PE in high school. Not only has there been evidence of pupil learning, but their engagement and enthusiasm has also been captured through literacy, as Rebecca elaborates:

Thank you for all of your PE lessons. I have been enjoying them all, especially the art ones. The homework you have given the class, we really like it! My mind explodes every time I do your homework and your lessons. I can't wait for your next lessons and homework we will do. It feels like an adventure. To me, all of the work you give us is an adventure. All you do is make us happy and enthusiastic about PE. You understand what I say. We join in with you. We love what you do in PE. We learn from you. You make PE more fun. I didn't really like PE until you came and turned my frown upside down.

Rebecca's comments are loaded with potential discussion points, from her comment about enjoying the homework, the sense of adventure, being understood and making PE more fun. Yet the core utility of her comment is to underlie the level of engagement and pupil satisfaction with the learning experience of alternative PE pedagogy. Jennifer, another pupil, also commented: "I have really enjoyed these PE lessons, especially doing the homework. I hope we do it next year as well". The idea that pupils could hope to repeat such pedagogical practices bodes well for this novel approach to PE. It was not only the pupils who responded well to the curriculum. Teachers also reacted very positively, particularly when PE generated more academic credibility in the school. A reflective note by Eve at the end of the twelve-week curriculum revealed that her conceptualisation of PE had been significantly broadened as a result of trying something new, but that the intellectual engagement had also resulted in a more positive relationship with the subject:

Before I started lessons with Mr Sprake, I hated PE. But Mr Sprake has encouraged me to find my creativity. Sport and PE aren't just about kicking a football or throwing a basketball, there is more of a mental side to it than what most people would think. My favourite part of mental PE was either painting or acting in a courtroom drama. I enjoyed these because we could be very creative and show our passion in a sport-related way! Overall, mental PE has changed my view of physical PE. I enjoy it a lot more now and I became a lot more involved in competitive events in school and out of school.

For Eve, the opportunity to be "creative" and view PE from different angles has seemingly had a positive impact upon her attitude towards the subject, with tangible results. From *hating* PE to *enjoying it a lot more* is a significant step, yet the biggest difference in practice was the opportunity for pupils to engage with intellectual enquiry about the subject.

This might be best captured by Paul's reflective comment, who concisely captures his feelings about the intellectual opportunities in this twelve-week curriculum, stating that the activities have "provided context to the mindlessness". For a pupil to refer to typical PE as *mindless* is interesting, both from philosophical and pedagogical perspectives. Perhaps these pupils have discovered the cave and are inviting PE teachers to venture out.

During the final day, at the end of the final PE lesson, a group of pupils spontaneously insisted on performing their poem publicly: "Mr Sprake! Mr Sprake! Please can we sing our 'PE to Me' song to you?" The rest of the pupils took note and observed with a keen interest as the pupils burst into song:

PE to me is compulsory.

It's hard to learn and it's hard to do,

but we're all in the same boat;

we're all in the same crew.

To some people it's fun and games,

to others it's just grey and plain.

It doesn't bother me,

it just passes day by day;

it just passes day by day.

PE to me is compulsory,

but now PE to me is creativity.

We're all in the same boat;

we're all in the same crew.

The unsolicited nature of this performance speaks volumes about pupils' desire to learn, express themselves and communicate their voice in a PE context, providing they are given the space, time and encouragement to do so. The performance of pupils' intellectual ideas is not only a performance to be observed, but serves as a means through which pupils can

explain, exemplify, project, know and share meaning (Alexander, 2005; Douglas, 2012) whereby the performers are able to illuminate and make connections (Nielsen, 2008). Furthermore, this poem was subsequently published in the *Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies* (see Sprake & Palmer, 2019) which demonstrates the potentially lasting legacy of learning born of PE. At this juncture, the inductive findings of this study are beginning to reaffirm King's (2021, p. 39) research, which insists: "Seeking out opportunities to link physical activity with other areas of the curriculum not only makes learning more exciting for children, it also makes efficient use of time to combine learning across different subjects". Perhaps a more telling account of the degree to which pupils engaged was evidenced by their unsolicited 'thank you' message. During the final moments of the final week, the teaching assistant caught my attention and asked: "Can I interrupt you there, Mr Sprake? We would really like to say a big thank you from Year 6, so Sarah is going to do it on behalf of all of us":

Dear Mr Sprake, we have really enjoyed your teaching and the fact that you taught us about the value of PE and sport, and that it can be learned in different ways. You didn't just ask us to talk about different sports, you also let us write letters and talk about how it makes us feel. You taught us that there is a mental side to PE and that it isn't just about kicking a ball around. You helped us to link it to things that we wouldn't usually think of, like Art, music and role play. We are all really pleased that we have been able to experience some great lessons with you, so on behalf of Year 6 I would like to say a big thank you [followed by a round of applause from the class].

Theme 2: teachers' curiosity and support

In the early stages of the fieldwork, staff were curious about the project and mildly intrigued by the notion of literacy in PE. As the weeks progressed, however, the pupils began to talk about what they had been learning in PE which resulted in a growing interest from staff across the school.

One member of staff, a teaching assistant, became increasingly empowered during the fieldwork activities to co-create learning activities and, in doing so, she became an empowered agent of change (Harada, 2017). At the end of the second week, she expressed her delight in being a part of the research: "I love what you're doing here. I've been telling the other teachers about it and I think it's giving the pupils a completely different perspective on PE. The pupils are really enjoying it too, I can tell!" Establishing rapport with fieldwork colleagues is vital in alleviating any hidden forms of power. In this case, trust was established

early which helped create a “symmetrical relationship” in which both parties were able to contribute to the vibrant learning environment (Palaiologou, 2016, p. 52).

The PE lead, Mrs Carter, also became increasingly enthusiastic about the project. At the start of the third week, she expressed with glee how the children had been “talking about PE all week” and that they are really enjoying doing their homework. Perhaps the increased academic credibility of PE provided these teachers with a more robust defence against questions about the subject’s educational worth; it certainly seemed to countervail against threats to PE their self-worth and motivation (Mäkelä & Whipp, 2015; Whipp *et al.*, 2007). Clearly very proud of her pupils at this point, and perhaps that there was something tangible to show for their learning in PE, she continued to explain that some of the pupils had been “writing poems and being really creative with their story telling”. At this point, a different staff member entered the room and overhead Mrs Carter say: “Everyone, apart from one pupil, Ellis, completed their homework”. The staff member interjected: “But Miss, he *did* do his homework this week”. Standing straight with her shoulders back, Mrs Carter responded: “Ah but he didn’t do his *PE homework* though!”. There was a palpable pride in the air and relations were good as Mrs Carter was visibly proud to announce that PE was making a valuable educational contribution. The fact that her colleague had not considered the possibility that homework might be set in PE reveals perhaps the default assumption that PE contributes little to these aspects of learning.

On the contrary, the learning products born of PE were seemingly grabbing the attention of teachers across the school. For instance, whilst the pupils’ paintings were being scanned to be included in their workbooks, the school’s Art specialist caught a glimpse and exclaimed: “Oh! Mr Sprake, these look great! I’d love to have some copies of these. I could use them in my Art report!” This demonstrates how PE could be a central driver for learning across the curriculum, if the learning activities carried out in its name were pluralistic. This incident exemplifies the kinds of pedagogical approaches conducive to an *integrative* curriculum (Siedentop, Hastie & van der Mars, 2004). That the Art teacher wants to use the learning products born of the PE context in her end-of-year report demonstrates that PE, in this case, occupied more of a central role in the school, from which other subjects could take influence. It seems that once the seed of effective and impactful pedagogy is planted, it gains momentum and support from the wider school community.

The school hierarchy were also extremely supportive of the newly opened intellectual avenues in PE. For instance, in praise of the novel PE practice, the Deputy Head teacher asserted: “We would like to think of ourselves as a flexible school who are willing to try new things, but I think we are in a nice position following the recent Ofsted inspection [graded as outstanding] as it gives us a little wiggle room because we are not as closely monitored.” The comment about wiggle room signifies that schools are perhaps more willing to take innovative pedagogical risks ‘when Ofsted is not looking’. The Head Teacher was also extremely pleased with learning activities and products, and asked: “Could we use the work that the pupils have been doing and share it in the Governor’s report, coming up in March?” Suddenly, it seemed, PE was enjoying whole-school relevance and the Head Teacher’s sense of pride signals how the status of PE might transformed if multimodal pedagogies were encouraged and implemented. Perhaps this is one rendition of a ‘radically reformed’ PE future (Kirk, 2011).

Reflexive note: The Head Teacher invited me to contribute to one of her performance management meetings, by sharing the evolving research insights. I suspect this provided an opportunity for her to share authentically the innovative approaches the school takes under her leadership, whilst proudly sharing the innovative approach to PE in her school. PE was afforded a newly found academic credibility in the primary school. The following week, pupils from years 5 and 6 were merged due to other school commitments. Utilising this opportunity, therefore, I allowed pupils to continue with their artwork and used this as a timely opportunity to capture their thoughts and experiences of the current approach to PE. I decided to conduct focus groups whilst pupils were in a state of ‘flow’. That is, whilst they were engaged in learning, I asked various questions of different pupils in order to gauge their perceptions about their current experiences of PE.

Episode Four: Focus Group 4 (in the moment and on the move)

Interviewing pupils about their learning experiences whilst simultaneously being immersed within the experience itself facilitated an interesting methodological novelty. This approach to data collection is informed by the *spatial turn* in social sciences (Ricketts Hein *et al.*, 2008) which resulted in what is termed the new mobilities paradigm (Sheller, 2014). This paradigm recognises the value of embodied movement for social research (Creswell, 2012) and borrows from the concept of walking interviews, which can be characterised as “a natural fusion of interviewing and participant observation” and act as “a powerful and unique method for engaging with space and place, and the important and nuanced meanings, experiences, values, and understanding of individuals in these domains” (King & Woodroffe, 2019, p. 3).

Reflexive note: Having built up a clear sense of rapport with the participants, I was fluidly able to occupy the dual role of teacher and researcher simultaneously (Grønmo, 2020; Sonkar; 2019). As a fully immersed participant, I was able to conduct recorded focus groups on the move and whilst pupils were fully engaged in learning. In this sense, I occupied the role of participant as observer (Junker, 1960 cited in Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 104) and captured the natural essence of the learning environment whilst pupils were in a state of ‘flow’. Indeed, as Kincheloe *et al* (2018, p. 240) state: “the process of inquiry and learning becoming integral within the classroom contexts are continuously informed and grounded by the realities that students and teachers face in schools”.

The first focus group is an account of a Year 6 PE class, the second from Year 5. Pupils were more than happy to engage in conversation, and the tone of voice was excitable and keen. Against the backdrop of clattering paint pots and healthy pupil chatter, pupils were asked if they could talk about their PE experience whilst they were working, and pupils responded openly:

Emily:

Well it’s quite interesting because, in my experience, I’ve never done PE like this before. It’s always been active, active, active, where here we actually *think* about why we are active and things like that. Some people like normal PE, but I like to study more things, so this is very, very good!

Sarah:

I think it’s great because it’s different to what you would normally do. You’d normally just be running around and doing sport, but in this you’re actually *thinking* more about sport and it’s not like we’re *not* doing PE.

Lucy:

It’s fun! It’s different because we usually just do running, like running laps and stuff like that, but actually *thinking* more about PE and sport, it’s much bigger than it seems. Because you think it’s just running and stuff but when you actually get to *learn* about it, you realise that it’s much more than that.

Each pupil referred to the term *thinking* when describing their recent PE experiences, but they overtly used juxtaposed language when describing thinking in PE. Their recent learning activities in PE made them think, and this seemingly contrasts with their regular

experiences of physical education. Traditional PE practice might offer much to *do* but perhaps little to think about (Sprake, 2014). Pupils were also asked to comment on their current PE projects, in this case pupils were engrossed in their artwork and they were asked to provide some commentary on the message behind their work. Due to the social groups that pupils were working in, the first discussion shows extracts from a conversation with some female pupils, whilst the second is taken from a conversation with some male pupils. The conversation with the female pupils went as follows:

Emily:

I've focused more about unity because I really want world unity to happen, because it would be more peaceful than it is.

Researcher:

Very nice, and do you think PE and sport can help us achieve that?

Emily:

Yeah! [giggle] Because, well, most sports help people come together.

Sarah:

Yeah! You get to understand PE a lot more. Instead of just getting split into teams, you're always talking to each other and making sure that we work together on things.

Researcher:

OK that's great. So, what's been your favourite bit so far?

Sarah:

Probably when I got to be the judge! [Referring to a courtroom drama regarding performance enhancing drugs]

Researcher:

Ah yes, the debates last week were quite eventful weren't they!

Lucy:

I like the Art!

Researcher:

Oh, you like the Art, do you? So, what is it that you're painting here then?

Lucy:

So basically, I'm going to do two gymnasts who are both on a bar together but one of them only has half a leg, to show that they can still do gymnastics.

Researcher:

Great! So, what would you say is your key message here then?

Lucy:

That everyone can take part and do the same things.

Pupils were clearly unencumbered in their autonomy, nor were they preoccupied with 'getting it right'. Wider social themes developed from their work organically, in this case the concept of *unity* and *equal access* to participation in disability sport. These themes were not 'taught', but the platform for pupils to communicate their personal interests in physical culture permitted pupils the freedom to explore and navigate their own learning – that is, to develop meaning from learning products of their own invention (Piaget, cited in Papert 1999). The following extracts have implications for a learner-centred education, where pupils demonstrate their appreciation of being offered wider educational activities than in traditional PE:

Emily:

It's good because you get to learn about different things in PE, like normally you do active PE but we don't get to sit down and learn about PE and the things that happen to you.

Sarah:

You're not as active in this PE but you think more...

Lucy:

...so it's better for your brain.

Researcher:

So do you think that PE needs a bit of both?

All pupils:

YES!

Eve:

Definitely. It's more fair for people that don't like being as active because they get to do PE but how they like it.

Emily:

I like this kind of PE!

Katie:

I really like it but I like a bit of both. At the moment we are getting a really nice mix of normal PE and this kind of PE.

Lucy:

It's really nice to be thinking and not just active.

Josie:

Yeah, like so we are not just doing.

It is clear that pupils do value traditional PE activities as part of a broad and balanced curriculum, but the pupils' recognition about the value of being able to think about and reflect on their learning in PE is significant; particularly in light of the secondary PE teachers in this chapter who believe that pupils would neither have the time to reflect on their learning nor would they gain from doing so. The next extracts are from a conversation with some of the male pupils. They were asked a similar line of questioning, by being asked to share their experiences about the previous weeks and doing PE differently:

Kyle:

I think it's really good! It's really productive.

Charlie:

It's unique! It's like, we're learning about sport without playing sport!

Adam:

I like it, because instead of wasting our time running up and down a field for no reason, and with no apparent goal...instead we are thinking about things.

Kyle:

I think it's good because it's a break from running around. You get to write in your book!

Towards being physically educated in a holistic sense, these pupils provide a reasonable starting point for recalibrating PE practice. That pupils are positive about it, recognise its uniqueness and “get” to write in their books indicates a potentially bright future for intellectual learning in PE. Adam’s comment in particular demonstrates, perhaps, the more negative affiliation with traditional learning in PE. The notion that “running up and down a field” is a “waste of time” for Adam shows some dissatisfaction, but perhaps the intellectual rationale behind such activities would motivate him to engage, with reason.

Reminding ethnographers about the transitory nature of interviews, Walford (2018, p. 6) asserts: “The phrase that someone happened to have used on a hot Monday afternoon following a double mathematics class gets wrenched out of its context and presented as if it represented the “truth” about one person’s views or understandings”. This is important to remember as pupils might say something different on another day. Whilst much of the ethnography in this study was underpinned by participant observation, the focus groups discussed here do supplement the observational analysis. Holy and Stuchlik (1983, p. 36) make a strong case for the added value of interviewing in addition to observation: “If we do not want simply to observe and report physical movements of people in temporal and spatial sequences, but to study and explain their actions, we can do it only by relating them, implicitly or explicitly, to some notions about such movements, to knowledge, beliefs, ideas or ideals”. In an effort to *explain the actions* of the pupils in this focus group, they were immersed in their learning whilst simultaneously sharing their thoughts and perhaps their reflections were positive simply because they were enjoying the educational request. Ethnography does not merely denote studying people, it involves learning from people (Spradley, 1979). The focus group has provided the researcher with a sense of confidence about the academic value of PE, and the pupils’ comments in this focus group speak for themselves. In an effort to capture the essence of the classroom, photographs were taken of both the learning environment (Figure 20) and the associated questions during the lesson (Figure 21):



Figure 20: the learning environment

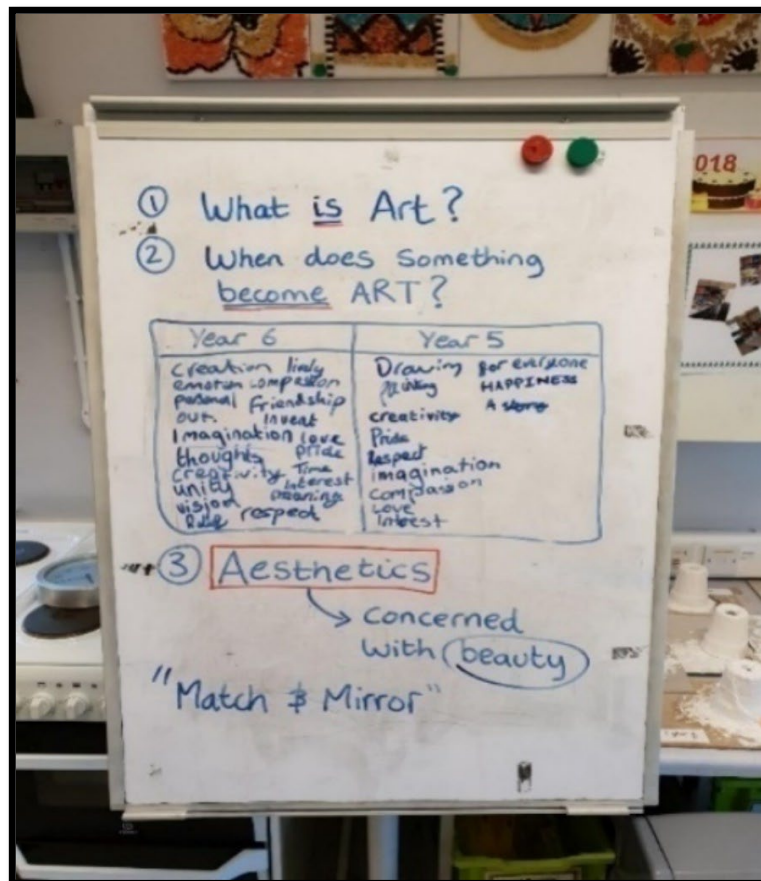


Figure 21: questions to stimulate learning

As Year 6 left the classroom, Year 5 were ready to enter the room and begin their lesson. Once they had set up and began working on their Art, the second ‘mobile’ focus group commenced, and pupils were asked to reflect on their learning in PE over the past several weeks. Comments such as “amazing” and “fun” were offered, but Stephen remarked: “Like, you wouldn’t expect this because everyone thinks of PE as just physical and loads of sport, but this is really nice to work differently. I also like the homework; to go and research different things”. That *physical* is in the name physical education is not a sufficient justification for overlooking intellectual enquiry, particularly if holistic outcomes are claimed in the name of the subject (Bailey, 2006; Bailey *et al.*, 2009; afPE, 2019; Gray *et al.*, 2021). Two other pupils, Robert and James, had waited patiently for their turn to comment:

Robert:

It’s really good! I mean, some people don’t like PE just because they’re not as good at actual physical stuff, but if *this* is more of a thing then I think people would enjoy PE more in school and do it more.

James:

Yeah! I think it’s fun because people who don’t like just running around might be really good at Art but not very good at running. And if you’re not very good at something, you enjoy it less! If we are doing Art, and other different things, then more people would enjoy it more.

Both Robert’s and James’ comments appear to validate Miss Leach’s earlier comment, that many pupils “become disengaged early on in PE, more readily than they do in other subjects, where more variety is covered and they aren’t as selective or celebratory of a smaller group of gifted students.” Perhaps more variability and pedagogical versatility would not only evidence pupils’ learning in PE but also raise the subject’s status in school.

This signals the value of a broad and balanced experience *within* the PE curriculum, from the pupils’ perspectives. The parameters of what is meant by broad and balanced must be expanded, however. This does not merely denote a widening of sporting or physical activities, but a widening conceptualisation of what learning activities might be facilitated under the physical education umbrella. The pupils in this case are relishing the opportunity to communicate their learning voice in PE, the burden would seemingly rest on the PE community to provide such opportunities in future.

Moving across the room to another table, where another group of pupils were immersed in their work, the conversation continued:

Researcher:

What about you, girls? What are your thoughts on what we are doing in PE?

Tilly:

I think it's really exciting because you don't always know what's going to happen next. You might do some Art, and then the next part you will do some gymnastics.

Elizabeth:

I like all of it because it's different to what other PE teachers teach.

Researcher:

Ok so is there anything you might say you've learned over the past few weeks in PE?

Fiona:

That Art can represent something in PE and sport and that it's not just about running around.

Researcher:

Are you talking about the message that we can send through Art, like we discussed last week?

Fiona:

Yeah! Like, my Art says that males and females can both play sport.

Researcher:

[I then read out the words on a piece of art that Elizabeth showed me]

We can all be included no matter if we are black or white. So yours has got a message about race in it, has it?

Elizabeth:

Yeah!

Researcher:

So what about you two [aimed at two other pupils on the table], what are your thoughts?

Alice:

I'm enjoying it! I was expecting something different, with someone else coming in [meaning an external teacher etc.], but we are doing things like Art and stuff!

Naomi:

It's really different to what we normally do. It's more like a mix!

Researcher:

OK so are you enjoying the mix of physical activity and classroom-based work?

All pupils:

Yeah!

Researcher:

And what have your favourite bits been?

Naomi:

Probably the painting.

Alice:

The debating was really fun!

Theo:

[Initially, Theo was not forthcoming with any comments but, as the discussion progressed, he clearly felt the confidence to say from across the table]

Please can I say something?!

Researcher:

Of course you can!

Theo:

I like the Art, because you can show what you're thinking about PE and sport. Like, what can happen or what can't happen in sport, because years ago, women weren't allowed to play football. So I like it now because women can play as well.

Researcher:

Ok great so is that what your message is through your Art?

Theo:

Yes because anyone, even people with disabilities, can play sport and should be allowed to take part.

Researcher:

So would this table like it if we carry on doing PE like this?

All pupils:

Yeah!

Whilst this conversation took place, pupils very rarely took their eyes off their own work. Being fully immersed in their artwork it seemed that pupils were not over-thinking their responses and that the conversation took a natural flow. The pupils were using Arts-based approaches to communicate their perspectives and understandings about the world of PE and sport (Palmer & Sprake, 2020). Theo's comment that, through Art, he is able to *show what he is thinking* about PE and sport carries significant educational weight and signals the importance of being able to communicate his learning. Learning in PE should not be intangible. Instead, teachers should consider ways in which to bring pupils' learning to life. Pupils' eagerness to learn in PE is matched in this case with their eagerness to share their learning, as the pupils in the following passage demonstrate:

Researcher:

[pointing out Stephan from across the table]

Now then, can you tell me more about your Art over there? It's interesting to see that you've covered your hand in paint and done a handprint on your sheet. What is it that you're trying to say with your Art?

Stephan:

Because it represents that all people are on the same level, so black people and white people are equal.

Researcher:

Ah OK so you're doing a white and a black handprint to promote equality?

Stephan:

Yeah.

Researcher:

Well that looks really good, well done.

Theo:

Do you think we will get to do a giant thing about what we've learned at the end?

Researcher:

Oh absolutely! Remember, some of you might get your work published in the School Magazine and also we are going to do an awards event.

All pupils:

Yey!

James:

I just wanted to say that I love this PE because everyone can do it. The ones who, like, can't run very well are still involved so I think it's really good.

Christopher:

[Approaching from another table]

Mr Sprake? Please can I show you my work?

This brief interaction is philosophically loaded and educationally significant. Firstly, Stephan's work, using the highly symbolic handprint and the power of touch to communicate a moral message, is what Palmer *et al* (2014, p. 36) call a "formidable combination in Man's story of learning and communicating". Langer (1966, p. 12) notably argued that the Arts can "objectify subjective reality" and that Art education "is the education of feeling". As a

pedagogical modality, therefore, Arts-based learning in the PE context has the potential to illuminate, beyond assumption, the subjective aspects of learning that have seemingly eluded PE practitioners for decades. The subjective, embodied, and sensory aspects of learning in PE may require a platform on which to become empirically communicated, and literacy might be the stage.

Secondly, Theo's question: "Do you think we will get to do a giant *thing* about what we've learned at the end?" signals a genuine pride and excitement about the prospect of publicly sharing his work. Moreover, he is clearly excited about the prospect of his learning voice being heard. The lack of learning evidence born of traditional physical education raises concern that many pupils might be *sleepwalking* their way through their experience of PE (Sprake, 2014). However, Theo's eagerness to communicate the products of his learning in PE suggest that he is wide awake. The alternative pedagogical approaches employed in this research might offer a timely antithesis to the mundanities of common PE practice.

Thirdly, James raised the important theme of inclusion by stating: "I love this PE because everyone can do it. The ones who, like, can't run very well are still involved so I think it's really good". James is pointing to the importance of a broad and balanced learning experience *within* the confines of physical education. The notion that pupils' success in PE can be evidenced in a plurality of ways would serve to support the notion of PE as a holistic educational endeavour.

Finally, Christopher's question: "Mr Sprake? Please can I show you my work?" signals a learner who is not only free of the shackles of self-doubt, but who is actively seeking dialogue and feedback on his work. The notion of encouraging students to become *feedback seekers* is a contemporary issue for teachers in Higher Education (Molloy, Boud & Henderson, 2020) and yet this primary school pupil is only too happy to seek feedback. In the case of these pupils, there is a curious sense of curiosity for learning in PE. The final conversation in this second focus group involved a separate table of male pupils, who were asked to share their thoughts about their work and their thoughts about the alternative PE practice. They were just as eager to share their thoughts:

Warren:

Mr Sprake, my work is about equality! The weighing scales represent that black and white people are equal.

Toby:

It's great because we aren't just doing sport! Last week we did role play and now we are doing Art.

Bradley:

I've liked everything that we've done so far. I'm doing a piece of Art about racing; it's hard when people want to race and the other person might not be very good. I'm going to add more to this painting so that says it's OK to do other things than race.

Finn:

I really like this PE because it's not just the runners who can do well in PE. I love the Art and loved the poetry, that was well good!

Toby:

It's better than good! Look at my work, it's showing that teams can be nice to each other and shake hands. It shows friendship and that sport can help us make friendships.

Layton:

I don't like running and I don't like *normal* PE, but I like this PE because it's different and we can express ourselves. I like to do things like this at home, so when I can do this type of thing in PE it's great! It's giving me a chance to express myself in other ways other than running and normal sports!

Simon:

It's not just about racing and all of that. It's about learning about what PE is about, not just doing sport. PE is not all about playing sport.

Layton:

I've also learned that it doesn't matter what place you come in a race. Coming first isn't always the best because people at the top can get pressured to cheat.

The pupils' animated responses are telling a story with consistency; physical education is not, and should not, be *sport-* or *activity-*centred and instead should be *learning-*centred. Ranging from the development of friendships through sport and the importance of inclusion to the pressures of racing and issues of social justice, pupils are curious to make meaning out of their experiences in PE. It might be viewed as a moral duty to provide pupils the platform on which they can create meaning born of the physicality of experience.

Reflexive note: Not only were the pupils eager to learn and eager to communicate their learning but, following the twelve-week fieldwork phase in the school, I was informed by the Head Teacher that the pupils had created an interview for me to complete, with some questions that they wanted to ask me.

Episode Five: Sport and PE News

The newly found evidence of learning was enough to secure a double page spread in the school magazine, under the heading *Sport and PE News* (Figure 22). Previous releases of the magazine made no mention of PE, and only included a page on Sports News. This demonstrates the significant impact of this project in the locality of this school; the educational presence of physical education was now standing shoulder to shoulder with subjects across the curriculum. Not only this, but the magazine featured an extension of the pupils' learning curiosity as it included an unsolicited interview that the pupils had designed for the researcher to complete. In essence, the researcher became the researched:

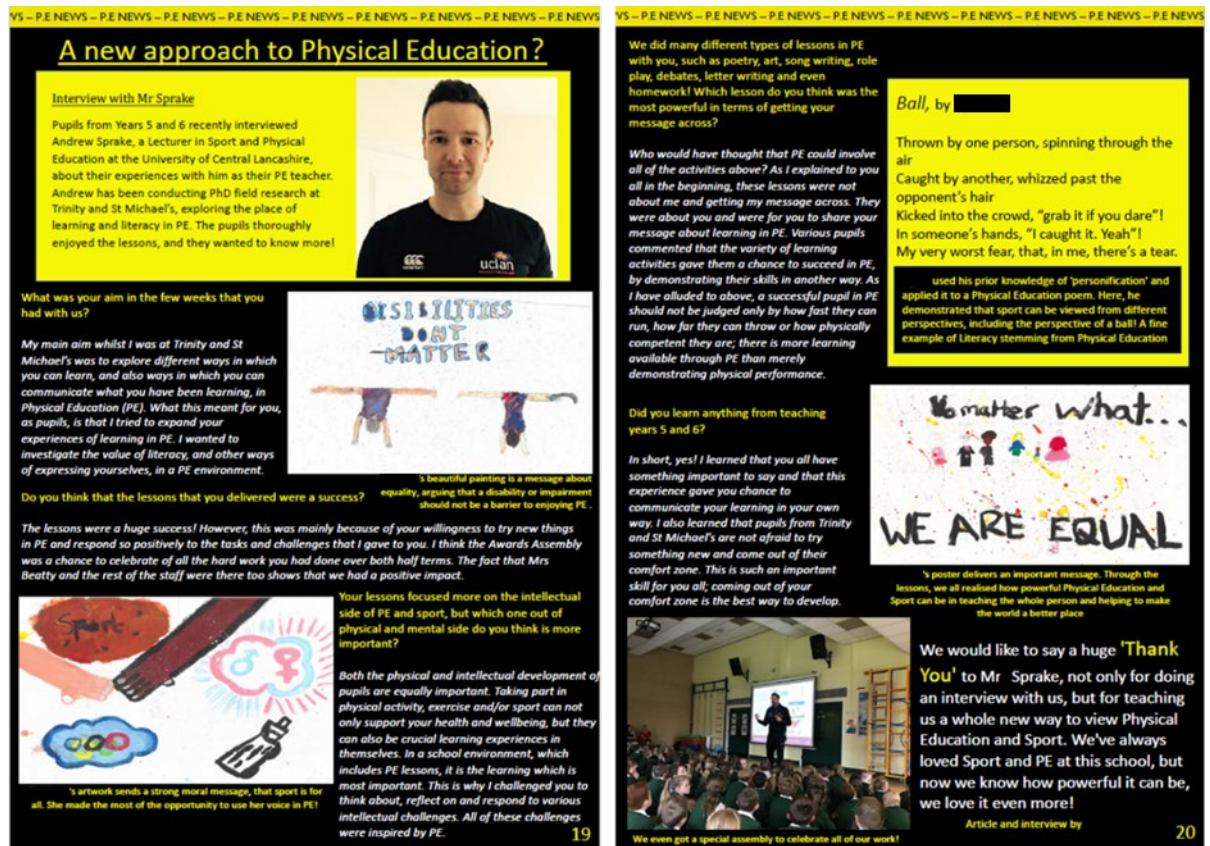


Figure 22: Sport and PE News

For the first time, both the pupils and the school had gone public with the learning born of PE. The centrality of pupil voice demonstrates a bold new step for physical education, and the curiosity that the pupils have demonstrated in this instance speak volumes to the learning culture of PE.

Episode Six: Unstructured interview with the Primary School Head Teacher

Prior to embarking on the twelve-week period of fieldwork, it was agreed with the Head Teacher that a Celebration Assembly would be an appropriate way for the whole school, both the pupils and the staff, to see the fruits of the learning labour in physical education. Toward the latter stages of the school visits, it was agreed that an informal conversation between the researcher and the Head Teacher, in preparation for the Celebration Assembly, would take place and that it would be audio recorded so as to capture the Head Teacher's views on the process and the products of learning. This decision was largely inspired by Hammersley's (1990) conceptualisation of ethnography in that data collection can be unstructured and can occur through flexible means. This minimizes any overly mechanical or forced data capture, and also allowed the researcher to absorb data in as close to the natural environment as possible. For Brewer (2000), this would constitute ethnography-*in-action* because the researcher is directly participating in the setting as well as the activities of the school. In making a joint decision about how to facilitate the Celebration Assembly, the Head Teacher made various comments on the project overall:

This is just fantastic because the whole-school agenda at the moment is *justice* and there is plenty of this coming through in the pupils' work. I remember popping into the Art room during one of your PE lessons and one of the pupils had painted the pan scales to represent justice and fair treatment. But not only that, did you notice the pivot she'd painted for her scales? It was a heart, which meant that in order to achieve this balance between people you need heart, and that was just so fantastic to see because we are always encouraging our pupils to have heart in the pursuit of justice. I can see in her work so many symbols of what we talk about in school, and it made me even more chuffed with what had been happening. I remember popping into the classroom and being really impressed by what the pupils had been doing - I remember spotting a piece of work and thinking 'wow look at that!'"

This demonstrates how effectively PE can weave itself into the fabric of school culture and how the wider school ethos can be integrated into PE practice. That the Head Teacher

recognised the educational value of the project served as a reassurance for the researcher. She continued: “This work looks fantastic. It’s great to see some of the higher ability PE pupils recognising issues of justice in PE and sport. Through this, the pupils are encouraged to have a voice.” It is interesting to note that the Head Teacher, much like the pupils, has recognised that pupils with different talents are able to come to the fore through a plurality of pedagogical approaches in PE. That is, in this case the Head Teacher is praising the *sporty* pupils for their intellectual engagement and, in the case of the pupils’ comments, the *non-sporty* pupils were able to succeed in the PE context. This demonstrates both the holistic and inclusive nature of utilising literacy in physical education. Again, the Head Teacher elaborated:

We have been talking about this across the school, about justice and how important it is for pupils to look at things from both sides. Here, we are encouraging pupils to have a voice and share their ideas. If pupils don’t have the strongest command of English, then it is unreasonable to not offer them a platform because that way you’ll never hear that pupil’s voice.

Reflecting on some of the pupils’ comments, the Head Teacher said: “Reading what the pupils have written about you and the way you taught PE, that tells me that *she* knows you value *her*. I think it says a lot.” This demonstrates the importance of facilitating an environment conducive to a sense of belonging, a standpoint which has long been understood as a vital psychological aspect of pupils’ motivations in learning (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Amelia’s aforementioned poem, for instance, took the Head Teacher’s breath away. In reading the poem out loud, she asked: “Has Amelia honestly written that poem? It’s incredible. It’s particularly great because she is generally not a happy writer.” It would appear that physical education might have unlocked an intellectual curiosity for Amelia, and many others too, something that Miss Leach is trying to achieve in secondary school. When asked to comment on her thoughts on the PE project overall, the Head Teacher was very complimentary:

It has been great! It’s so good to see PE linking so well to our whole-school themes and you can see it threading through. It’s been fantastic to see such a range of ways that pupils have been able to express their learning in PE. Another thing is that, through literacy, it has been remarkable, the amount of pupils who have produced something special who are not your typical high-flyers, I can tell you that. It has definitely been the case that pupils who do not normally stand out in PE have produced some fantastic work here, and it’s great that we are recognising their efforts.

Having the Head Teacher's support and affirmation is highly significant for the study. The public backing and enthusiasm for literacy in PE has played no small part in my ability to facilitate alternative PE lessons in this school. As a researcher, I was only too pleased to return to the school two weeks later for a Celebration Assembly.

Episode 7: A Whole-School Celebration Assembly

The Celebration Assembly provided an ideal opportunity to *go public* with the pupils' work, across the whole school. The school hall was full to the brim with Years 3 to 6 and the full staff body were in attendance. The central idea was to present the pupils' work back to the school, to share what can be achieved in the name of PE and, also, to stand shoulder to shoulder with the pupils in support of their achievements. That is, for pupils to witness a teacher's pride in their work. Each pupil received a certificate to acknowledge their participation, and some certificates were personalised to recognise outstanding work. The Head Teacher began to Assembly: "Good morning everyone", to which all pupils responded: "Good morning everybody". The Head Teacher then introduced the Celebration Assembly:

I'm sure you'll all remember that during last Friday's assembly I told you all about a conversation that I had with Mr Sprake. He has been coming in and working with Years 5 and 6 over this past school term and the work that they've been doing was just fantastic. It fitted in so well with all the other themes that we are exploring in school, and we discussed the possibility of Mr Sprake coming back to school in order to share and celebrate what really has been a fantastic experience.

The warm welcome back was indicative of the Head Teacher's public affirmation of the work that had been done in the name of PE, labelling it as "fantastic" and recognising how PE had seamlessly slotted into the wider educational aims of the school. Following a short assembly in which pupils' work had been recognised and discussed, the Head Teacher followed up with an extended message of appreciation:

Well I would like to say a huge thank you to Mr Sprake. I just can't believe that Mr Sprake came along at the time he did, because it was just what we needed. We have got so much gratitude for you coming into our school. Yes, PE can help children to get fit and healthy but there is clearly so much more to get out of it, and what you did summed that up perfectly. What's more, you allowed all of the children's voices to be heard through their work. It couldn't have been more powerfully communicated so thank you so much for helping us hone that message,

that if you involve children then they really do learn. We have something for you and it was completely spontaneous from the children - they were not asked to make you a card but they wanted to make it for you to say thank you. I'm going to ask four pupils to come out and present you with this gift.

The impact of this project, from the perspective of the Head Teacher, is clear. She outlined the wider potential of PE in learning and the power of pupil voice. As the pupils emerged from the audience to present me with a card (Figure 23) and some flowers, the Head Teacher leaned towards one pupil and asked: "Fiona, what made you want to do this for Mr Sprake?" The pupil responded without hesitation:

Well, he opened up the subject to us and that there is so much more to PE than just running around. In his lessons, we were allowed to explore ideas and there are so many people that don't like normal PE and those people have enjoyed it a lot more over these past weeks.

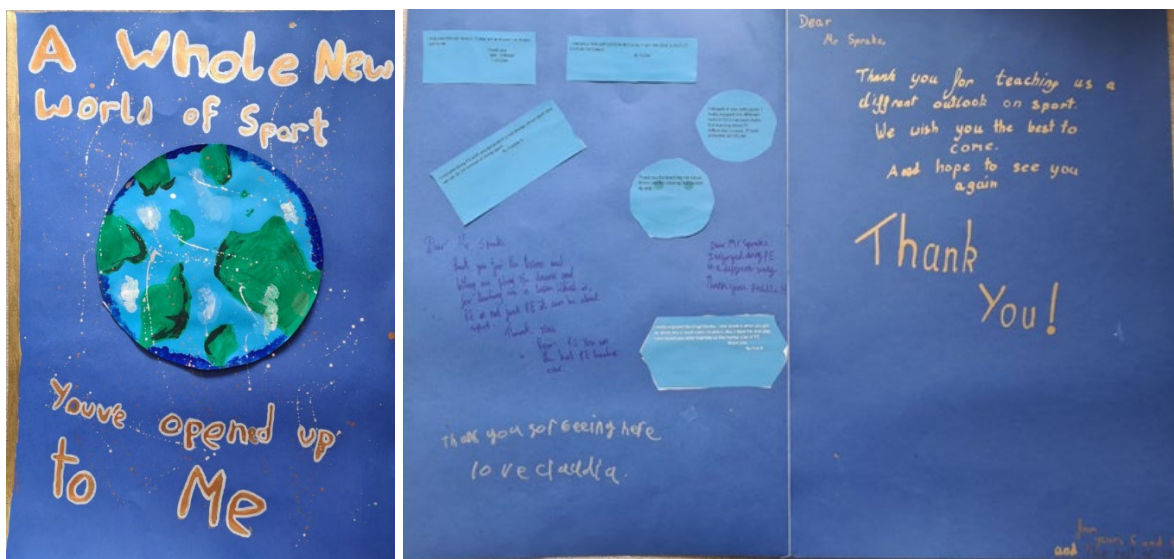


Figure 23: A Whole New World of Sport You've Opened up to Me

Fiona clearly has positive recollections of being "allowed to explore" her own ideas about physical education and sport. What's more, she made a critical observation that many pupils do not engage in the current PE format and that alternative pedagogies can provide a learning environment which is blended between the physicality of learning and the intellectual challenges which bring PE into its holistic potential. Again, this is not to slip into a dualist view of human embodiment, rather to push for learning evidence that is representative of a monist view. Prior to leaving the primary school for the last time, it was agreed between the researcher and the Head Teacher that a debrief would be useful.

Episode 8: Head Teacher's Final Reflections

“What an experience!”, the Head Teacher asserted as we entered her office and with an unremitting smile she added: “I know I speak on behalf of all the pupils and staff when I say thank you for taking the time to teach our pupils in new ways – they’ve loved it – it has been *just* fantastic”. Reaching the end point of the fieldwork was somewhat an emotional experience. In fact, leaving the field resulted in a sense of personal loss and strangeness, which Coffey and Atkinson (1996) have previously documented. This is not unusual. Having worked alongside the pupils and staff for 12 weeks, I had developed a genuine sense of collegiality and the sense of exiting the field prompted some existential questions, namely on whether or not primary education was *the career that got away*.

More importantly and upliftingly, however, the fieldwork clearly had an impact on the school. In the months that followed the fieldwork, one of the poems that the pupils had written (PE to Me) was published in the *Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies* (see Sprake & Palmer, 2019) and the Head Teacher was invited to make a public comment as part of the publication, to which she gladly responded:

It has been enlightening to see the quality of the children’s learning with PE as the driver. Responses were more spontaneous with children seeming more ready to take risks in expressing their instinctive thoughts rather than searching for the expected ‘correct’ response. The value of learning through doing is widely recognised, and it seems that the depth of thought reached another level through the typically doing context of PE. The PE context is a platform where children are accustomed to active learning with greater opportunity to directly feel and physically experience – a context which seemed to encourage the children to feel less inhibited in their responses. This was exemplified by the children when they were exploring the theme of Justice where their ability to philosophise and respond through a variety of media demonstrated a significant depth of understanding.

Of all of the pupil voice and evidence of learning in this research, the Head Teacher’s comment here is perhaps the strongest endorsement. In her longstanding role as a school leader, she has seen many pedagogical approaches and so for her to recognise “the depth of thought” that pupils reached in PE, as a result of this research, is no small testament. What’s more, an anonymous reviewer also made some supportive comments, which is indicative of the power of pupil voice in learning:

There are, quite rightly, many strong voices calling for PE to become a more influential subject in the National Curriculum; often fuelled by the growing concerns over the state of the nation's health. But, as this article demonstrates, PE has the potential to be so much more if we, as the PE community, open our eyes and ears to the opportunities around us. Just listen to the voices in the poem. Take time to reflect on your own experiences. Yes, it can be challenging. Yes, it will take effort and some collaborative thinking. But, from my experience, many staff in the Primary, and indeed the Secondary, sector have the skill-set, the passion and the desire to hear this voice and respond to the powerful message these pupils are delivering. They too want so much more from PE, they want to have the chance to show what PE means to them. If we, as the PE community, really want a change, and really want to make a difference, then putting Education right back in there, alongside the Physical, could be the real learning opportunity the pupils and the subject are waiting for.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented and analysed eight episodes of data collection, including: focus groups with teachers; the narrative account of a Literacy Coordinator in a secondary school; a twelve-week period of data collection using ethnographic tools in a primary school; a focus group with pupils in the *learning moment*; the contribution of PE to a school magazine; an unstructured interview with a primary school Head Teacher; a Celebration Assembly which communicated pupils' learning across the school; and, finally, the primary school Head Teacher's reflective comments about the fieldwork. As part of this researcher in residence phase, various findings have been discovered:

1. Across both primary and secondary school staff, there continues to be a general perception that the overarching role of PE is to provide opportunities for *sports participation* and *health promotion*. While the secondary teachers provided a more haphazard list of aims for PE, there was a shared understanding between primary and secondary staff that *sport* and *health* were underlying principles.
2. Both primary and secondary staff articulate a utopian and *holistic vision* for the outcomes of PE, but in both sectors their claims are undermined by the *narrow pedagogic practices* they offer in reality. For instance, both primary and secondary teachers express that learning and assessment in PE habitually relates to physical performance, despite claiming to develop the whole child.

3. Both primary and secondary staff expressed concerns about the persistent *PE stigma* – that is, its low curricular status in comparison to other subject areas and the general perception that PE is a non-serious educational endeavour.
4. A stark difference in attitudes between the primary and secondary staff arose with regard to *literacy for learning in PE*. Primary teachers were overwhelmingly in favour of the notion of literacy to enhance the learning experiences of pupils in PE, arguing that it could serve to engage more pupils and develop cross-curricular bridges. For the secondary PE teachers, however, literacy was generally viewed with disdain. The notion of literacy for learning in secondary PE was deemed an unnecessary encroachment on PE practice and a needless burden on staff.
5. Based on the experiences of the Literacy Coordinator, PE teachers in the secondary sector are not only resistant to change but also resistant to collaboration, denoting a tight-knit community of *insiders*. For the secondary teachers in this phase, the tight-knit PE community has seemingly been perforated, not with the proliferation of non-specialists in primary PE, but by an increase in non-specialists teaching secondary PE. There is a palpable sense of *resentment* toward non-specialist encroachment on the professional standing of secondary PE teachers.
6. The primary pupils in this study demonstrated an eager willingness to engage in alternative pedagogical approaches in PE. Far from displaying resistance toward homework in PE, pupils in fact demonstrated enormous pride in both their homework products and their intellectual efforts in the PE classroom. It would seem that pupils thrive on *thinking* in PE and will take full advantage of opportunities to communicate *big ideas* associated with interdisciplinary curricula (Beane, 1997) via multimodal forms of expression.
7. The impact of the ethnographic visits was clear by way of pupils' work being published in the school magazine and by the head teacher's public endorsement, using the project in her performance management meeting as well as going public in support of the project in the *Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies* (see Sprake & Palmer, 2019).

In summary, the primary teachers in this study are seemingly open-minded to the notion of literacy for learning in PE and are supportive of the pursuit of authentically holistic PE experience for pupils. The secondary PE teachers, however, appeared firmly resistant. Despite

their clear concerns as to the status of PE in schools, the secondary teachers seem unwilling to address the persistent PE stigma from within. It appears therefore that secondary PE teachers would prefer to remain in the cave.

Publications to date using data accrued during Phases One and Two

	Data Collection Strategies	Date	Published / Disseminated
Phase 1	Preface and ethnodrama - The 'issue' of homework in PE	2014-present	Sprake, A., Keeling, J., Lee, D., Pryle, J. and Palmer, C. (2020) 'Homework, in PE! Are you 'avin' a laugh?' Public Engagement and Performance Conference "Flesh Out – Connections". The Hepworth, Wakefield, Yorkshire. 20th -21st March.
	Pupil-voice research as a teacher of PE - Resistance by close colleagues	2014	Sprake, A. & pupils. (2014). 'I've got my kit for PE Sir, but what else is missing?' Perceptions of Physical Education in a Secondary school. In: C, Palmer. (Ed.) <i>The sports monograph: critical perspectives on socio-cultural sport, coaching and Physical Education</i> , pp. 337-348. SSTO Publications, Preston, UK.
	Postal Surveys for MPhil phase (to staff and pupils who contributed and/or supported the Sports Monograph chapter in 2014).	2017	Sprake, A. & Palmer, C. (2018). Physical Education: the allegory of the classroom. <i>Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies</i> , 12(1), pp. 57-78.
	Interview 1 with a secondary teacher	2017	Sprake, A. & Palmer, C. (2018). Physical Education: the allegory of the classroom. <i>Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies</i> , 12(1), pp. 57-78.

	Interview 2 with a different secondary teacher	2017	Sprake, A. & Palmer, C. (2018). Physical Education: the allegory of the classroom. <i>Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies</i> , 12(1), pp. 57-78.
Phase 2	Focus Group 1 with two primary school teachers	2017	Sprake, A. & Palmer, C. (2018). Physical Education: the allegory of the classroom. <i>Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies</i> , 12(1), pp. 57-78.
	Focus Group 2 with two other primary school teachers	2018	Sprake, A. & Palmer, C. (2018). Physical Education: the allegory of the classroom. <i>Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies</i> , 12(1), pp. 57-78.
	Focus Group 3 with three secondary PE teachers	2018	Sprake, A. & Palmer, C. (2018). Physical Education: the allegory of the classroom. <i>Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies</i> , 12(1), pp. 57-78.
	Narrative Account of a Secondary School Literacy Coordinator	2018	Sprake, A. & Palmer, C. (2018). Physical Education: the allegory of the classroom. <i>Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies</i> , 12(1), pp. 57-78.
	Ethnographic visiting in a Primary School - Researcher as teacher and complete participant - Observational field notes	2019	Sprake, A. & Palmer, C. (2019) PE to Me: a concise message about the potential for learning in Physical Education. <i>Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies</i> , 13(1), pp. 57-60.

	<p>School Magazine (new section entitled Sport and Physical Education News, which was previously just ‘Sport News’)</p> <p>- Pupils interviewed me as a researcher which was unsolicited</p>	2019	<p>Sprake, A., Palmer, C. & Grecic, D. (2020). <i>Physical Education: the allegory of the classroom</i>. Presentation at the 6th International Health & Wellbeing Research with Impact Conference. University of Central Lancashire, Preston, UK. Tuesday 18th February.</p>
	<p>Head Teachers’ comments about Phase One and about the publication in the <i>Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies</i></p>	2019	<p>Sprake, A. & Palmer, C. (2019) PE to Me: a concise message about the potential for learning in Physical Education. <i>Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies</i>, 13(1), pp. 57-60.</p> <p>Sprake, A., Palmer, C. & Grecic, D. (2020). <i>Physical Education: the allegory of the classroom</i>. Presentation at the 6th International Health & Wellbeing Research with Impact Conference. University of Central Lancashire, Preston, UK. Tuesday 18th February.</p>

Chapter Five

Phase Three:

Researcher in Residence (Secondary School)

If someone can prove me wrong and show me my mistake in any thought or action, I shall gladly change. I seek the truth, which never harmed anyone: the harm is to persist in one's own self-deception and ignorance ~ Marcus Aurelius

This chapter presents the experiences, data handling and findings from a nine-week period of data collection using ethnographic tools in a secondary school located in the North West of England. Having observed pupils' enthusiasm for intellectual and literacy-based learning activities in *primary* PE it was decided that further investigation of the learning culture of *secondary* PE would be valuable for the study, particularly in light of the secondary PE teachers' negative attitudes toward literacy thus far.

Two episodes of data collection occurred in the formulation of this chapter. *Episode one* presents the findings from a nine-week period of ethnographic visiting in a secondary school, utilising participant observation as the primary method of data collection. *Episode two* contains an unstructured and conversational focus group with three secondary PE teachers. A brief outline of both episodes of data collection has been provided for the reader's convenience:

Phase Three	Associated Research Activities
Data Collection	
Episode	
Episode One	Nine-week period of ethnographic visiting in a secondary school
Episode Two	Unstructured and conversational focus group with three secondary PE teachers

The fieldwork undertaken in Chapter Four derived from the researcher's comparative involvement – that is, the researcher adopted the participant-as-observer role – whereas the fieldwork undertaken for Chapter Five derives from the researcher's comparative detachment, whereby the researcher occupied the observer-as-participant role (Junker, 1960, cited in

Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Participant observation has long been a popular method in educational research, but the quality of data yielded from this method largely depends on the researcher's ability to capture meaningful moments or incidents (Lightfoot, 1983; Lin, 2016).

Reflexive note: To clarify, much of the data which informed Chapter Four was generated by conducting fieldwork in which I adopted the role of a complete participant (Junker, 1960 cited in Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 104). With the support of the primary school, I facilitated a cultural studies PE curriculum whereby pupils could draw upon multiple faculties to engage in academic and intellectual challenges, inspired by physical culture. Having deliberately and strategically adopted various roles on the social roles continuum, it was inevitable that these roles would impact upon me and that I would impact upon the data, meaning the eventual claims to knowledge will be imbued with the interplay between these two inevitabilities (Palmer & Grecic, 2014). Therefore, in preparing for the final phase of data collection I endeavoured to spread my methodological wings and, by utilising participant observation to inform Chapter Five, I was able to dial down my deliberate and participatory involvement in order to occupy the blurred lines between comparative involvement and detachment.

Episode two comprises a thematic analysis of an unstructured and conversational focus group with three secondary PE teachers. The focus group took place at the end of the *researcher in residence* phase in this secondary school and included teachers with whom the researcher had become well-acquainted during his fieldwork. Fetterman (1989, p. 88) compares the challenges of processing qualitative data to “finding your way through the forest”. With ninety-seven pages of field notes and a supplementary focus group transcription, this analogy is a fitting description of the data processing in Phase Three. The participant observations and focus group yielded large volumes of data, from which numerous insights were gleaned. The *seeing* data was supplemented by the *hearing* data in order to go some way to employing an embodied ethnography (Sparkes, 2009) which incorporates both thick description and a commitment to reflexivity.

Reflexive note: In my initial attempts to analyse, code and generate themes, I did fall into the common trap of rushing into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Willis (2015, p. 56) describes analysis as “the series of steps that occur between data collection and the communication of results”. In my case, there was a series of stumbles before regaining my balance. The desire to construct a thesis – perhaps impatiently – resulted in a rushed process of arriving at themes, prior to careful coding and sweeping through initial codes. Fortunately,

I arrived at this realisation authentically, and somewhat painfully, by feeling a sense of analytical insufficiency; thanks to which the issue was rectified, and the data was revisited afresh. That I experienced this issue toward the latter stages of data analysis only cements the importance of reflexivity in my mind. The positionality of the researcher will continue to be a central thread in this chapter and, congruent with the research thus far, this chapter will interpret, reduce and present the data based on reflexive and interpretive thematic analysis (Biddle *et al.*, 2001; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Saldaña, 2016) in order to present a logical discussion. Both episodes *one* and *two* will now be discussed in turn, including their associated themes and theoretical insights.

Episode One: participant observations in a secondary school

Participant observation is a common feature of qualitative fieldwork. Participant observation enables the researcher to immerse himself or herself within the culture or community being studied, whilst at the same time maintaining optimal professional distance for gathering and recording data (Fetterman, 2020). This section discusses the processes, experiences and findings from a nine-week period of data collection using ethnographic tools in a secondary school. A template for field observations was developed (Appendix 2) in order to ensure purposeful observations (Palmer & Griggs, 2010). This template enabled the researcher to identify opportunities for learning through literacy in PE and served as a reminder to account for the social roles played by the researcher at any given point during the fieldwork (Junker, 1960, cited in Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). The following section will include scanned copies of field notes taken during the participant observations in the school, as well as reflexive notes written-up in the hours following each school visit.

During each visit to the school, field notes were recorded as a means of capturing the essence of the environment and the significant incidents relating to the study. Field notes are a vital aspect of ethnographic visiting. More than simply aide memoires for the researcher to recall what was said, field notes “contain the researcher’s lived experience of a particular moment – such as the atmosphere of a room – which is not easily captured in recordings” (Jarzabkowski, Bednarek & Lê, 2014, p. 276). Furthermore, in ethnographic writing, field notes can serve as more than a memory device for the reporting of data, they themselves can act as a device for the transmission of rich information. That is, field notes can be a visible conduit for the transfer of information in the reporting of data (Jarzabkowski, Bednarek & Lê, 2014) and thus some of the raw field notes will be included as part of the analysis. Writing observational field notes provided an opportunity to soak up the everyday realities of the PE

environment, both in terms of teachers' and pupils' behaviours and perspectives. The researcher observed the everyday realities of PE and observed the behaviours of the community in its natural setting whilst, at the same time, making notes of interactions between teachers, teachers and pupils, and those which included the researcher. This resulted in large volumes of data that needed to be systematically analysed, in this case using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis is a method for analysing qualitative data that entails searching across a data set to identify, analyse, and report repeated patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). On one hand it is a method for "describing data" and, on the other hand, it "involves interpretation" in that the researcher plays an active and interpretive role in selecting and rejecting certain data codes and constructing themes for reporting (Kiger & Varpio, 2020, p. 847). Thematic analysis is not a linear process but rather a cursive approach to interpreting messy and complex data. The themes and patterns of meaning identified in this chapter were constructed through *inductive thematic analysis* (Braun & Clarke, 2013), recently branded as an analytic method (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Identifying themes and patterns of meaning in this way involved an interpretive yet systematic interplay between the researcher and the data generated – that is, the analysis was shaped to some degree by the researcher's own viewpoints, experiences and epistemological position (the *interpretive* aspect) but the patterns of meaning were also contained within the dataset, not created by pre-existing theoretical perspectives. The integrity of this bottom up approach will be managed through an ongoing process of reflexivity. Invariably, this process involves data reduction and omission, but again the reflexive accounts provide transparency and research integrity.

The data were closely examined to identify common themes, topics, ideas and patterns of meaning which occurred organically, inductively and which had clear relevance to the research. Overall, this was a vibrant data collection activity which yielded four key themes and patterns of meaning associated with the PE setting. Themes included (1) the importance of *reflexivity* in ethnographic visiting; (2) the problems associated with a *narrow curriculum offer* in physical education; (3) the *avoidance of literacy* for meaning-making in PE; and (4) that PE teachers can unwittingly act as *architects of their own curricular marginalisation*. The identified themes and associated issues will now be discussed in turn.

Theme 1: Reflexivity as an imperative of ethnographic visiting

The first theme, like each of the themes to follow, was generated through interpretive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initial *codes* were generated through the analytical

interplay between the researcher's interpretive lens and the dataset. That is, researchers invariably play an active, not passive, role in every stage of research and so the codes were a co-creation between the data and the interpretive meaning attributed to them. The codes were then *clustered* into conceptual categories before being defined as *themes*. In the case of Theme 1, the initial codes pertained to the researcher's personal experiences during the participant observations, which included building and maintain rapport, researcher positionality, ethics and social roles. Once the codes had been clustered, the broader conceptual category was generated, which included rapport and relationships, positionality. Reducing this conceptual category into a *theme* required reflexivity because positionality and empathy were each underpinned by the researcher's personal experiences in the field. Consequently, the notion that reflexivity is an imperative of ethnographic visiting became a central theme and has been presented as the first theme in the research 'story' because reflexivity permeates the entire research and analytical process. As Davies (2008) states, reflexivity is of central importance to social science research and even more so to ethnographic studies because of the intimate relationships which can be formed over time.

Thick description: What a warm welcome. The Head Teacher politely requested a meeting with me at 8.15am on my first day in the school and explained that "the Head of PE is more than happy to have you, Andrew, and he even said that he thinks there's real merit in what you're studying". Following the meeting I took myself to the PE staffroom where I was greeted by two female PE teachers. We briefly discussed why I am in the school and built rapport immediately; I knew one of the teachers already as she was completing her NQT year in 2013, the same year that I was doing part of my initial teacher training at the same school. She said: "Andy! I'm sure I saw you on a flight back from Rome last summer, but I didn't wave because you'd think I was a nutcase!" We immediately built a good relationship and I was keen to build rapport with both members of staff.

Reflexive note: In the early stages of my participant observations, I had naively hoped that I might simply blend into the background, somewhat camouflaged, but I soon realised that this would be impossible. For instance, one morning, before a lesson began, I was waiting in the PE department area surrounded by display boards of sporting achievements and curricular mapping when, all of a sudden, I spotted my own reflection in one of the display boards. Suddenly reminded that I am a 6ft 6" male wearing a full black UCLan sports kit, I was taken aback by how easy it can be to forget the obviousness of my presence in the field. I realised that, through no fault of my own, I could never be just a *fly on the wall* who

inconspicuously observes the environment, nor could I be a passive onlooker. Fetterman (2020, p. 38) signals the inevitability that ethnographers will influence the research because they themselves are “human instruments” and, whilst assumptions and pre-conceptions are made explicit through reflexivity, they will always have an impact upon the research. The notion of my positionality and whether I am able to *choose* a social role in the field is an issue that I attempted to understand in greater depth during a Post-Graduate Research Symposium (Sprake, 2021) as identified in figure 24:

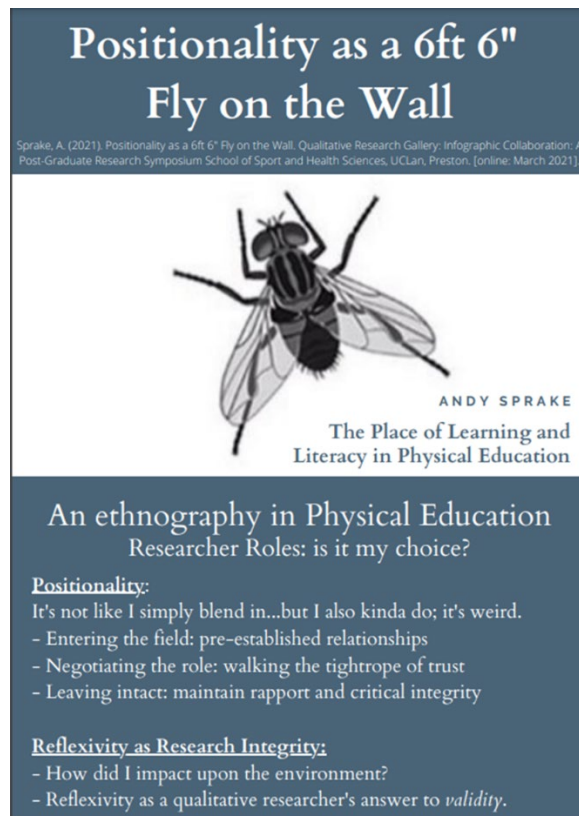


Figure 24: Sprake, A. (2021). *Positionality as a 6ft 6" Fly on the Wall*. Qualitative Research Gallery: Infographic Collaboration: A Post-Graduate Research Symposium. School of Sport and Health Sciences, UCLan, Preston. [online: March 2021].

The continual reflexive accounts revealed that positionality was essential in the formation of rapport and relationships, both with the teachers and the pupils. Ascertaining who decides the researcher’s positionality, or researcher identify, is challenging. For instance, the teachers immediately began to call me “Sir” in front of the pupils and, by the second day, the pupils also began to call me “Sir”. During one lesson, pupils entered the classroom and began to set up the badminton courts themselves, with one pupil approaching me immediately to ask: “could you please look after my watch, Sir?” This suggests that the pupil was comfortable with my presence and unfazed by the fact that I was in the sports hall with

a notepad and pen. In the same lesson, the PE teacher addressed the pupils: “Go and get yourselves a shuttlecock, you’ll find them next to Sir” and, later that morning, while helping to set up some mats for a dance lesson, numerous pupils said: “thank you, Sir!”.

In his book *The Art of Fieldwork*, Walcott (2005, p. 75) argues that: “One important rationale for, and benefit of, conducting extended rather than short-term fieldwork is that those in the study cannot maintain a pretence or pose forever. Sooner or later things get back to normal”. In this case, things certainly appeared to get back to normal sooner than anticipated. However, there were occasional reminders that participant observation requires careful consideration and emotional intelligence. For instance, during the first day of observations, a teacher approached me during his Year 8 fitness lesson for “a nosey” at my field notes (Figure 25). On this particular occasion, I used impression management (Goffman, 1959) to divert the teacher’s attention away from one of the comments I had written, where I asked: “There is plenty that the pupils have done; what have they learned?” I diverted his attention to a comment that I had written about his use of music being a good “motivator” for pupils in the lesson. This signals a deliberate attempt on my part to maintain a good rapport with the teacher, in an effort to develop an *insider* status. Whilst this demonstrates how ethical issues arise in the moment, it also demonstrates my aptitude for considerate and conscientious behaviour in mitigating potentially damaging relationships in the field (Murphy & Dingwall, 2007). Furthermore, by adapting to the ethical and social complexities in that particular moment, it provides an account of how researchers can develop *liquid identities* in the field (Thomson & Gunter, 2010). Throughout my school visits I made concerted efforts both to recognise and reflect on my social role in the field, demonstrated in figures 26, 27 and 28:

PhD Fieldnotes

The Place of Learning and Literacy in Physical Education

Date: LESSON 2 9th Oct 2019 Week 1	Class: Year 10 fitness	Topic: fitness	Location: Main hall
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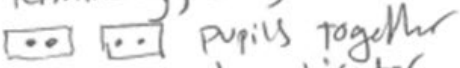
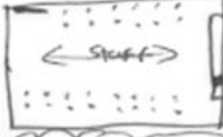
General Observations:	Fitness instead of <u>cross-country</u> 4 staff in total	Researcher Role / Methodology Notes: Hall
<p>Very clear intro & explanations of the plan. Key terminology being used:  Pupils together <u>music</u> was a great motivator & atmos is <u>FUN!</u> Great links to GCSE basics inc. muscle groups & health & safety. Pupils use <u>burpees</u> & <u>sit-ups</u>. Great use of choice. Loads of <u>physical jibes</u>. Teacher reminded pupils that they were doing <u>interval training</u>. Pupils were enjoying themselves & working together. There is plenty that pupils have <u>done</u>; what have they <u>learned</u>? Focused thinking & evidence could be useful as part of the bigger picture. AfL opportunity at the end → <u>peer-assessment</u> used. "sweating" → "heart starts to pound" → "breathing" Everyone on "1s" for lesson 😊</p>	<p>Relative detachment but did encourage pupils  Shared these notes with the teacher mid-<u>lesson</u>. This could feed into this pupils not fazed by me, which is great.</p>	
Opportunities for Learning & Literacy?	How could this be achieved?	
<p>whiteboards for linking exercise) to different sports & when they are used i.e. tennis, football, rugby, netball, athletics.etc.</p>	<p>Groups based on different sports could plan to share how their exercises could be useful for different sports & <u>lifestyles</u>.</p>	

Figure 25: Example field notes from week 1 in the school

PhD Fieldnotes

The Place of Learning and Literacy in Physical Education

Date: Week 2 Lesson 2 16th Oct 2019	Class: Y7 girls	Topic: Gymnastics & Routines	Location: Dance hall
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<p>General Observations:</p> <p>A simple & effective lesson with peer-to-peer working</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pupils setting up the mats, very excited! - Teacher mentions "aesthetic" as this is the focus → think-pair-share. - This is a great term to explore in PE. - Discussion about gymnastics routine → - Pupils exploring movement & balances in pairs, "you stole my balance!" 😊 - "I know PE is different to maths & English, but you are still in a lesson so you need to focus" - Some pupils are keen to explore movement when paused. - Teacher is emphasising key words & phrases to promote <u>vocabulary</u> i.e. aesthetics, balance, routine, stationary, series of movements. - Questioning at the end for AFL & recapping key terms. - Preparation for next lesson at the end. 	<p>Researcher Role / Methodology Notes:</p> <p>Pupils clearly have no issue with me being in the room, behaving as one would expect.</p> <p>→ very interesting</p> <p>→ Fly on the wall feeling</p> <p>→ Researcher as 'partial' participant as I encouraged some pupils.</p>
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Opportunities for Learning & Literacy?	How could this be achieved?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aesthetic terminology is great, is there scope for pupils to explore the term more deeply i.e. "who decides what is beautiful"? - Discussion: what makes a balance look aesthetically pleasing? - could pupils be tested or demonstrate understanding of key terms in a <u>workbook</u>? 	<p>→ Homework?</p> <p>→ class discussion?</p>

Figure 26: Example field notes from week 2 in the school

PhD Fieldnotes

The Place of Learning and Literacy in Physical Education

Date: 30 th Oct. 19 week 3 Lesson 4	Class: Year 10 GCSE	Topic: Types of Movement	Location: Theory room A3
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<p>General Observations: A quiet start with pupils focused. Focus is on operational definitions.</p> <p>"Books out" → sheet coming round with <u>words</u> and <u>definitions</u>, a literacy based starter.</p> <p>Teacher asked pupils to <u>justify</u> their responses by sharing ideas with other pupils. "Flexion", "extension" etc. are the terms discussed.</p> <p><u>Homework check</u> → "sir is going to check your books for homework and will write down those who haven't done it".</p> <p>Method note: male teacher came in and said "sorry miss, are you being observed?" she said "no no, you'd think so though!" → does this imply unease, even though she has told me to come into any of her lessons?</p> <p>The teacher is working very hard to support pupils learning but there is a lot of teacher talk, resulting in a classroom environment where some pupils are "busy doing nothing", just taking notes and sticking in their books when asked.</p>	<p>Researcher Role / Methodology Notes:</p> <p>I adopted the same seating position as I did previously.</p> <p>NB: I had a moment of genuine empathy for (PE) teachers as they are back-to-back from practical to theory with no time between lessons.</p> <p>Pupils paid <u>no attention</u> to me at all. → Detached through <u>negotiation</u>.</p>
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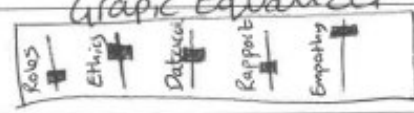

Opportunities for Learning & Literacy?	How could this be achieved?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Again, authentic sporting videos would be great to see this in action. - Tell your own sporting/movement stories along with types of movement. - Is there value in the "narrative" mode for revision, for pupils to plot a route in their heads where they come across different people performing different types of movement? 	<p>→ Youtube etc. (slow motion). & writing what, when & how of movement. e.g a "Football volley" in slow motion, groups could look for specific types of movement.</p>

Figure 27: Example field notes from week 3 in the school

PHD Fieldnotes

The Place of Learning and Literacy in Physical Education

Date: 6/11/19 Week 4 Lesson 4	Class: Y10 GCSE PE	Topic: Joints & Types of Movement	Location: Room A3
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<p>General Observations:</p> <p>Researcher EQ <small>not IQ</small></p> <p>GCSE theory → "Have you all done your homework?" Task set right away Pupils are on task & discussing key points. Pupils who had done well in their homework were genuinely happy, one pupil went bright red in front of his mate who said "go on lad!" (interesting). "Get your purple pens out & use your books to update your answers". Pupils using images to discuss key concepts in the range of movement unit of work. "even if we're boys & we don't do gymnastics, we need to know this" → Gendered language.</p>	<p>Graphic Equalizer</p>  <p>Roles, Ethics, Distance, Rapport, Empathy</p>	<p>Researcher Role / Methodology Notes:</p> <p>At the back, in what now feels like "my" seat. Complete Participant? not yet.</p> <p>Told the teacher about a safeguarding issue - <u>complete participant</u>.</p> <p>Fieldwork (role)</p>  <p>Real ethical issue for me!</p>
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<p>Opportunities for Learning & Literacy?</p> <p>→ <u>Stories</u> / creative writing → <u>Art</u> link → <u>Oracy</u> & presentations → <u>Stories</u> & <u>relatedness</u></p> <p>Key for behaviour management</p>	<p>How could this be achieved?</p> <p>→ Drawing athletes to identify joints & types of movement</p> <p>Safeguarding issue: pupil at the back of the room talking about weed, and the girl in front of him asked "are you having a doobie at D Block?" → Passed on to teacher.</p>
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"I thought you were gonna tell me this is a shit lesson! That would've been worse!"

Figure 28: Example field notes from week 4 in the school

Reflexive note: Acutely aware of the importance of rapport and relationships, I engaged in what could be called reflexivity-*in*-action, depicted in figure 24. I shared my note-taking with the teacher and insisted that I was not looking at his teaching behaviour, rather that I was merely observing the PE environment and perhaps seeking opportunities for learning through literacy; he lost interest quite quickly and carried on with his teaching. Nevertheless, I experienced a sudden rush of adrenaline during this incident. Despite being an overt study, this was a critical incident that made me feel as though I was walking a tightrope between overt and covert observations, and the teacher's curiosity felt like a sudden gust of wind that could have knocked me off balance. One wrong step and I might be branded an *outsider* who is not to be trusted.

Much has been written about the distinction between insider-outsider researcher identities (Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002; Breen, 2007; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Gratton & Jones, 2010). During this fieldwork, however, this so-called binary distinction appeared more like a shifting continuum. Viewing insider-outsider researcher identities as fixed results in what Thomson and Gunter (2010, p. 27) term the "illusion of stability" and, while the authors do not advocate for the abandonment of the insider-outsider distinction altogether, they recognise that such distinctions are "messily blurred in particular places and times" (Thomson & Gunter, 2010, p. 26) resulting in a binary conceptualisation serving little utility for educational researchers due to the complex and dynamic social milieu of schools. Over a period of ethnographic visiting, a researcher may shift along the outsider-insider continuum as they become more (or less) accepted within the community under investigation, but they will rarely be either-or. In the case of this study, the researcher's experiences of fieldwork are closely aligned with what Thomson and Gunter (2010, p. 26) call "liquid researchers". Using Bauman's (2000) notion of *liquid identities*, the authors argue that researcher identities are dialogic, fluid and should be conceptualised as an ongoing self-evaluation process which closely aligns with reflexivity. Furthermore, Sikes (2008, p. 151) posits that it is possible to become an "inside outsider" and an "outside insider". This kind of self-evaluation can be evidenced through three brief examples where the researcher ostensibly occupied the inside-outsider and outside-insider positions:

Thick description: I was in the staff room with the PE teachers whilst they were discussing school politics etc. and the phone rang. No-one answered, so, somewhat instinctively, I answered the phone: "Hello, PE?!", I said, which is how I'd heard all other PE staff answer the phone. The receptionist immediately recognized my voice and said: "Oh

hi Andy! Could you just pass on a message to Mr Dixon?” The relaxed tone of the receptionist’s voice perhaps indicated that I had become an *outside insider*. On a separate morning, Mr Dixon asked me if I wouldn’t mind supervising a Year 8 fitness lesson, remarking: “I could really use another member of staff in there”. A trainee teacher was given responsibility of class on his own, so I understood why I had been asked to observe that lesson. I was immediately supportive, of course, but at the back of my mind was the fact that he had referred to me as “staff”. Again, this perhaps signalled my increasing *outside insider* role at the school. Finally, during the lesson, pupils were organised into groups based on which equipment they could use before rotating round. Within 10-minutes of the lesson, the teacher was clearly and visibly stressed, shouting “this is the worst lesson I’ve had since I’ve been here”. This was a fascinating comment because there were some basic organisational errors which would have avoided if not alleviated his frustration. I felt conflicted because my experience as a teacher could have alleviated the problems for the teacher, and I also felt complicit in a lesson in which the pupils learned very little. However, I reminded myself that I am here to observe, not to interfere. At this juncture, I felt like an *inside outsider* because I was immersed inside the social dynamics of the environment but, at the same time, felt that any intervention was inappropriate and thus I felt external to the community under study. These examples have methodological resonance because they demonstrate how the insider-outsider continuum can manifest in various ways. What these examples have not revealed, however, is the way in which researcher *overtiness* can fluctuate over time, as a result of various factors, and what affect this may have of the research.

Social science researchers are increasingly invited to reflect on the degree to which their research is overt in practice. This invitation is inextricably linked with the *reflexive turn* in social research (McKenzie, 2009) which calls upon researchers to reflect on their research experiences with increased transparency. A key function of the reflexive turn is to address the once-perceived binary distinction between researchers’ *overt* and *covert* roles in participant observation research; in reality, these binary opposites also manifest themselves as a continuum (McKenzie, 2009). Indeed, most educational ethnographies are “about degrees of overtiness rather than about location at either end of an overt-covert continuum” (Pole & Morrison, 2003, p. 149). Drawing on the work of Gold (1958), Brewer (2000) lays out four levels of participation in fieldwork with reference to overtiness and covertiness, including: a complete participant (covert research whilst participating fully as a group member); a participant-as-observer (overt research while participating fully in the field); an observer-as-participant (overt research with limited participation and the role of the researcher is foregrounded); and

a complete observer (overt research with minimum participation in the field). However, the author insists that the distinctions between these levels are an oversimplification because “in practice the overt-covert distinction is a continuum with different degrees of openness, and the roles developed in the field vary with time and location” (Brewer, 2000, p. 84).

The teachers were referring to me as “Sir”, as a “member of staff” whilst simultaneously wanting to have “a nose” at my field notes, it became clear that negotiating access to the field is not a one-off event (Bloor & Wood, 2011) but a continual process throughout the entire research process (Burgess, 1991). Cassell (1988) makes a useful distinction between gaining physical and social access and explains that gaining physical access to the setting – *getting in* – must be supplemented with gaining and maintaining social acceptance among the group – *getting on*. This means that once physical access is granted it is crucial to nurture and maintain rapport and relationships, an issue well captured by Bloor and Wood (2011, p. 2):

Good fieldwork relationships are particularly crucial...as this will improve the trust and consequently the data that the researcher is allowed to observe and record. As well as having personal and professional integrity, researchers often require highly developed social skills which may include social sensitivity and charm. How researchers dress, speak and the social values which they outwardly support will need to mesh with the presentation and values of the research subjects. Indeed, in some research settings continued access depends of performance and conduct from prior sessions of data collection.

I displayed no shortage of social sensitivity where required. Bloor and Woods’ (2011) notion of *presentation* and *performance* are both methodologically and sociologically significant. The idea that presentation and performance is inherent to fieldwork symbolises the proclivity for researchers and research participants to ‘act the part’ during fieldwork episodes. This can be explained by drawing on Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical analysis, in which he uses the metaphor of the theatre as a means of understanding social interaction. For Goffman (1959, p. 26), individuals engage in performances which can be characterised as “all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants”. There were certainly incidents where subtle influencing techniques were used during the fieldwork. Goffman (1959) asserts that everyone has a front- and backstage demeanour. Individuals display the front stage behaviour when they have an audience, and such behaviour is indicative of the internalised norms, values and, to some degree, scripted behaviours expected in each social setting, such as physical education. Backstage behaviour is reserved for authentic displays of the Self; the audience is no longer

present; individuals are liberated from social prescription and can be their true selves. The interplay between the front- and backstage demeanour has epistemological implications in that “reality is not only socially constructed but is constructed *in and through performances*” (Mueller, 2018, p. 27). If PE is socially constructed, and reinforced through dramaturgical performances, then Kirk’s (2010, p. 121) prediction for the future of PE involving “more of the same” resembles teachers’ dogged determination that *the show must go on*.

Offering rich insights into social research, Douglas (1976, p. 55) asserts: “Conflict is the reality of life; suspicion is the guiding principle”. By this, he is referring to the invariable interplay between cooperation and investigation in social research. Young & Atkinson (2012, p. 238) seek to unpack Douglas’ methodological insights further, revealing that getting to the truth through observational fieldwork goes well beyond gazing at the surface:

His research strategy is based upon the assumption that everyday social life has a tendency to be duplicitous: that individuals and groups construct and present images of who they are and what they do that can mask underpinning social realities. The investigative paradigm is based upon the assumption that profound conflicts of interest, values, feelings and actions pervade social life. It is taken for granted that many of the people one deals with, perhaps all people to some extent, have good reason to hide from others what they are doing and even lie to them. Instead of trusting people and expecting trust in return, one suspects others and expects others to suspect him.

Navigating the front stage-backstage performances is what Goffman called impression management, and his use of the theatre as a metaphor offers a useful framework for reflexivity (Hunt & Benford, 2011). For instance, the degree to which both the researcher and the research participants revealed their true, authentic selves is unclear and has implications for both the insider-outsider and the overt-covert continua. The front stage-backstage phenomena can occur simultaneously. That is, the two regions have a “symbiotic relationship in that activities in the backstage allow workers to maintain appropriate behaviours during the front stage, while front stage activities provide fodder for discussions and activities in the back region” (Cain, 2012, p. 669). Put another way, the front stage-backstage divide is not necessarily representative of different physical spaces, rather they can occur simultaneously when actors are playing a role for an audience. One can act, behave or perform in a way that serves a purpose in the moment, whilst at the same time thinking different things backstage. This section has proposed that reflexivity can be conceptualised in parallel with sociological theory, in this case using Goffman’s *dramaturgy*. Applying dramaturgy to the insider-outsider

and overt-covert continua denotes a socio-methodological understanding of reflexivity in research. For the purpose of this study, this will be termed dramaturgical reflexivity and is an example of how theory in this inquiry has been derived inductively.

The dichotomies between insider-outsider and overt-covert researchers is an oversimplification of the researcher's identity and social roles. In reality, the insider-outsider distinction is not comprised of binary opposites but, rather, a *multidirectional* continuum accounting for ethics (overt-covert), positionality (insider-outsider) and presentation of the self (dramaturgy). By drawing on the insights of various scholars – that is, the fluidity of the insider-outsider continuum (Thomson & Gunter, 2010), the pliable nature of overt-covert research practices (Brewer, 2000; McKenzie, 2009) and the malleability of the front- and backstage demeanours in Goffman's dramaturgical analysis (Goffman, 1959) – I intend to further the discussion by applying social theory – dramaturgy – to methodological questions relating to reflexivity. I have developed a *model of reflexive positionality* (Figure 29). This model is based on a Cartesian coordinate system for a three-dimensional space, in which the *x*-axis refers to the insider-outsider continuum, the *y*-axis refers to the front stage-backstage continuum and the *z*-axis refers to the overt-covert continuum. This is by no means an attempt to quantify researcher identities and positionalities. Rather, it serves to illustrate a conceptual awareness of the overlapping features of reflexivity:

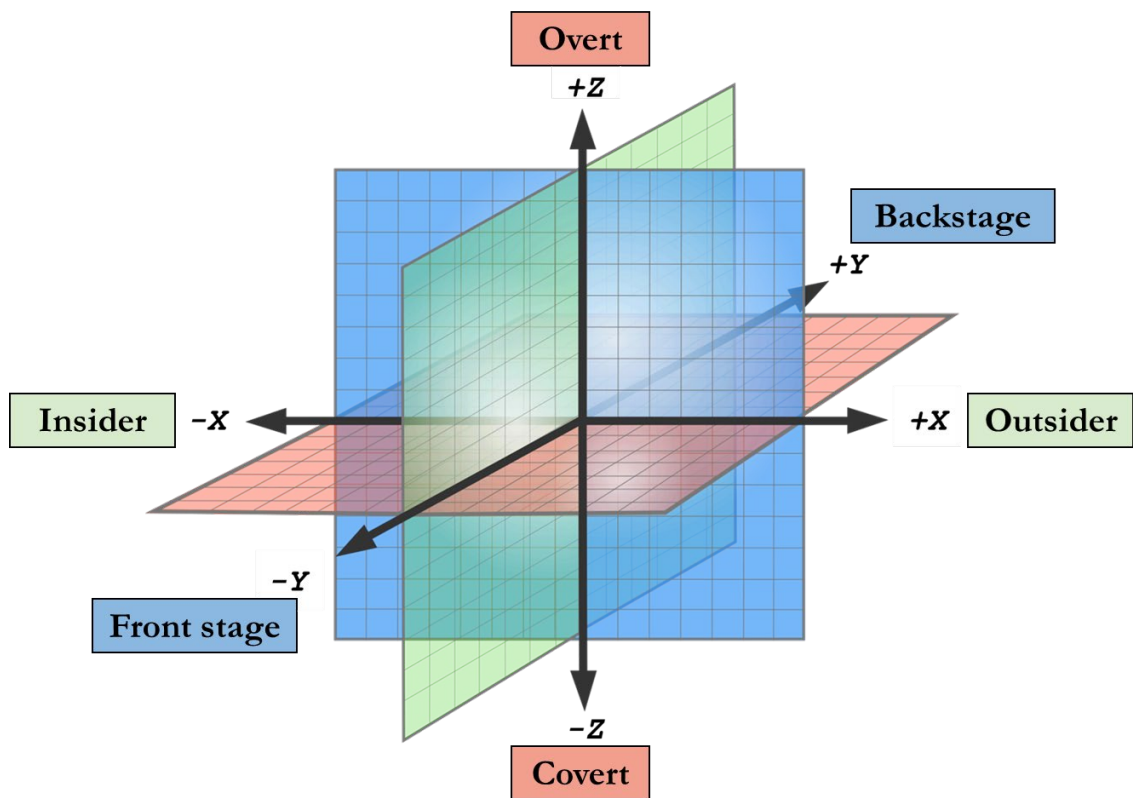


Figure 29: A Model of Reflexive Positionality

Reflexive note: It is clear by this point that any fieldwork operates on a continuum of “concealment and disclosure” (Herrera, 1999, p. 331) and that all overt studies contain some degree of covert practice (McKenzie, 2009). As a researcher keen on developing rapport and relationships, navigating the insider-outsider continuum was challenging. First, I was cognisant of my deliberate attempts to *be accepted* or to become seen more as an insider. This was achieved through using colloquial terminology or sharing experiences as an ex-PE teacher. Second, despite the overt nature of my research – meaning there was no deception about why I was in the school – there were moments in which I strategically concealed my field notes. This left me wondering about the overt-covert tightrope, and how emotional intelligence is required to manage participant observations. Third, in terms of navigating this continuum I was rarely in full control. At times, there were stark reminders that I am not an insider; I was a welcome outsider. In my field notes, I explained: “I am not a native, but I am a neighbour”.

Theme 2: The narrow and restrictive curriculum offer in physical education

The second theme derives from a variety of initial codes, such as the dominance of performance pedagogy, the appearance of industrialised learning and the delusion of learning in physical education. Following the same interpretive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the conceptual category stemming from these initial codes was the notion of narrow pedagogy. However, such a title is too broad, so it became *the narrow and restrictive curriculum offer in physical education*. This section investigates the issues associated with this theme.

Thick description: It was a chilly morning in October. The kind of early-winter morning where the corporeal sense of cold doesn’t bother you, for the sun is gleaming with opportunity and this fact alone keeps at bay any signs of a frosty mood. The tarmac which covers the playing area is slightly wet, creating striking beams of reflected sunlight which cast the entire school grounds. The surrounding townhouses bellowed smoke from their chimneys and steam from their vents, a common depiction of the working-class North West. Upon exiting the building for their first PE lesson the pupils’ breath was visible each time they exhaled, but the cold seemed ineffectual in dampening their excitement; they were about to start their first week of football.

The relationship between PE and sport appears to be a functional dysfunctionality. Across the globe teachers of PE demonstrate similar pedagogical preferences, with sport and fitness taking centre stage (Pühse & Gerber, 2005; Tinning, 2012). However, Kirk (2010, p.

54) argues that “physical education-as-sport-techniques” neither produces skilful participants in the long-run nor alleviates pupils’ disaffection with the subject. Stolz and Kirk (2018, p. 80) conceive a continuation of these approaches as leading to a “dystopian” future of PE. While many of the pupils observed in this study seemed excited to participate in football lessons, their excitement seemingly leaned toward the prospect of *entertainment* rather than *education* (Sprake & Temple, 2016). Problematizing the PE and sport relationship is of considerable importance when investigating the learning culture and educational status of PE. A personal reflection of this observation is captured in a short extract from the researcher’s field notes:

Little can be ascertained from this lesson other than the fact that, for the pupils, it merely involved playing football, having fun and getting muddy. Much of what I witnessed was a sportified, skill-based curriculum underpinned by a performance pedagogy.

The sportified and skill-based curriculum reflects what Kirk (2010; 2018) describes as the lasting and prevailing sport-based rationale for the inclusion of PE in schools. However, the PE-*for* and PE-*as-sport* phenomena has also been increasingly infused with efforts to utilise PE as a form of health promotion (Kirk, 2006). Sport nonetheless remains the centrepiece of PE practice, as one pupil in this study exclaims: “PE is fun, because I like doing sports!”

While pedagogical models in PE have long been in development, such as Sport Education (Siedentop, 1994), Teaching Games for Understanding (Werner, Thorpe & Bunker, 1996) and Cooperative Learning (Dyson & Casey, 2016), so too have pedagogical approaches such as performance pedagogy, health-based pedagogy, critical pedagogy, postmodern pedagogy and so on. However, none of these pedagogical models or approaches go far enough to constitute a justified belief in the holistic educational significance of PE. Sellers makes the case that:

P.E. needs to progress beyond the traditional form of action-based activity. It should...embrace the potential of physical involvement in sports to become a stimulus for the generation of artistic work, not just end with the game or the gym routine. It could develop creatively from that point into the realms of poetry, fine art or music as well as stimulate ethical discussions about rights and wrongs – all significantly, in their language and in their context (Sellers, 2014, p. iii)

The primary school pupils in Chapter Four demonstrated how this can be achieved. Thus far in secondary school, however, PE practice is seemingly dominated by performance

pedagogy, a longstanding issue in PE (Tinning, 1991). The central concerns of most PE teachers are that of technical development, skill acquisition and pupil performance. Even contemporary primary school PE is informed mostly by performance pedagogy (Stirrup, 2018) and so it is not difficult to appreciate why PE is characterised as “an exclusionary and marginalising space for many students” (Fitzpatrick, 2019, p. 1128). The notion of *performance* was omnipresent in the fieldwork for this study. For instance, a female pupil came into the PE foyer and began to cry out of fear of having to perform cross-country and her dread was palpable. Mr Dixon explained that attendance figures “drop to 75% during cross-country week” and that some pupils “have nightmares about doing cross-country”. He then explained a recent initiative which gives pupils the choice about whether to engage in cross-country, with other activity choices being available. With an understanding of colloquial terminology and shifting toward the *insider* end of the continuum (Thomson & Gunter, 2010), the researcher raised the notion of assessment in PE with Mr Dixon. Discussing the necessity for levelling and pupil data, Mr Dixon stated: “I don’t care how you do it, it’s still levelling, and it needs to happen”.

Reflexive note: Upon entering the sports hall on day one, I distinctly remember the feeling that the pupils were ‘on display’. The only recognised educational currency by which the pupils were able to trade was their performance of physical skills – that is, physical skills in return for a progressive level in PE. The notion that physical performance is central to PE was evident throughout my school visits. Ranging from football and badminton to fitness and handball, the performance pedagogy was clear. This approach clearly does not work for everyone. In a girls’ benchball lesson, for instance, many of the girls were screaming and shouting, having fun, whereas others were clearly waiting for the lesson to end. I recorded in my field notes that I met eyes with one pupil, who, having narrowly avoided being struck by a ball, had a face of despair. In the brief encounter, her face told a story. Her eyes said: “when will this torture end?” She *knew* her situation; her desolate and hopeless expression resembled the young lady in Orwell’s *Road to Wigan Pier*. This example highlights a bleak reality of a subject in which the realms of meaning are supposedly manifest *in, through* and *about* movement (Arnold, 1979), yet there is little evidence of these realms being explored in practice. The PE community must contend with such issues if the claimed holistic outcomes are ever achieved in practice.

Thick description: Back in the school, and along the hectic corridors, I had a sudden feeling of empathy for one PE teacher. She had absolutely no time to rest or recover between

lessons. In fact, she was preparing her learning resources on the way to her next class. This could be due to a lack of preparation or it could illustrate the squeeze on time that all teachers face. Upon entering the classroom for a Year 11 GCSE PE theory class, and amid the everyday classroom chaos, I overheard one pupil ask a trainee teacher – who was also in the classroom: “Are we doing football today, Sir?!” Some other boys were hitting each other over the head with their workbooks, some were having private conversations others were preparing to focus on their work. As the room began to settle, one pupil shouted: “Miss, I’ve got to go for the cross-country competition!” I adopted my regular seat, at the back of the room, which made me reflect on ethnographer territory. Once the noise had settled, the pupils were sitting down in rows, resembling the kind of conformity and compliance expected of an education system underpinned by industrial principles (Robinson, 2015). The topic today was “muscles” and the pupils were given a mixture of words (e.g., muscles such as biceps, triceps and quadriceps) and images of sporting actions, to which they were asked to match up. For the most part pupils were simply waiting for the answers to come on the board before matching up their words and images, resulting in a passive learning environment (Sprake, 2014). This passivity was sharply interrupted, however, when an interesting debate took place between two pupils and the teacher. One of the pupils asked: “Miss? Do the deltoid muscles match with the person doing the butterfly stroke?” The teacher checked her resources. “No, it’s not that one”, she said. “Is there another image it could be?”. Fairly convinced that their question was warranted, this caused confusion and frustration for the pupils, who then proceeded to physically explain their justification for the question. The teacher, visibly troubled by their rational and logical conclusions, replied: “Well these are the ones that the exam board have given us, so we need to know them”. This is perhaps indicative of PE teachers’ sequacious proclivity to follow without question the status quo, only now it is impacting upon pupils’ learning.

Whether it was the indifferent year-7 pupils in a badminton lesson or the industrialised year-10 pupils sitting in rows while facing the front in a GCSE theory lesson, the evidence of independent thought and holistic development was minimal. This is not to say that the learning environments were not stimulating or vibrant – they were certainly that – but pupils appeared more like automatons who, whilst enjoying themselves, were seemingly going through the motions in their learning. I have expressed concern about pupils “sleepwalking” through their education previously (Sprake, 2014, p. 338). In her classic study into PE teaching, Placek (1983, p. 49) found that PE teachers commonly explain their planning and facilitation of PE using terms such as “busy, happy, and good”. Essentially, she found that PE

teachers spent much of their time focused on keeping pupils active, busy and entertained. In today's PE settings, this pedagogical mindset seemingly persists. Part of the problem with this mindset, however, is that the lines between education and entertainment continually seem blurred (Sprake & Temple, 2016). The notion of pupils being busy and active in PE was perhaps summed up by a conversation with a pupil which took place during a PE lesson.

It was a typical Year 8 PE lesson, with over thirty pupils in the school hall with eight tables set up for a table tennis lesson. I assumed my regular position – at the side and out of the way – and sat on a bench at one end of the hall. The loud, indistinguishable chatter characteristic of PE lessons was sporadically punctured with a clarity of voice: “That is definitely my point!” one pupil yelled. Various pupils were waiting patiently for a table to become free so that they could swoop in and have a game, and several of these pupils were sitting on the bench next to me. I took the opportunity to speak with one pupil who, having said “Hi Sir!”, sat on the bench next to me:

Researcher:

Good afternoon! So, do you enjoy PE, then?

Pupil:

Yeah, I do! I even know the meaning of PE!

Researcher:

Oh yeah? What's that, then?

Pupil:

Does it mean, Physical Exercise?!

Researcher:

It stands for Physical Education.

Pupil:

Ohhh, right!

Researcher:

So, what is it that you learn in PE?

Pupil:

Well, I'm learning about different sports that I didn't know about before.

Researcher:

Okay, and what's the most important thing that you learn in PE, then?

Pupil:

Erm, probably not to be harsh when the other pupils get something wrong.

Several things can be ascertained from this short interaction. Firstly, the pupil was unsure about what the abbreviation “PE” stands for and thought that the *E* pertained to “exercise”. This is perhaps indicative of the PE-for-health agenda which is commonly used – rightly or wrongly – to justify PE in the curriculum (Fairclough & Stratton, 2005). Secondly, when asked about what he learns in PE, the pupil said that he is “learning about different sports” which, too, might represent the *sportified* PE curriculum so commonly associated with PE (Kirk, 2011). There is, however, an indication at a moral and social focus in that the pupil values the lessons he is learning about “not being harsh” to other pupils. However, with a lack of clarity about the name of the subject, it was perhaps always unlikely that the pupil fully understood the role of PE in learning.

In her pioneering research on epistemological beliefs, Schommer (1990; 1994) developed five dimensions of epistemological belief and drew distinctions between *naïve* and *sophisticated* epistemologies, whilst highlighting their psychological implications for learning and teaching. The five domains are illustrated in figure 30:

Epistemological Dimension	Naïve Epistemology	Sophisticated Epistemology
1. Certainty of knowledge	Absolute	Tentative
2. Structure of knowledge	Organised in isolation	Organised as interwoven concepts
3. Source of knowledge	Knowledge is handed down by authority figures	Knowledge is derived through reason
4. Control of knowledge acquisition	The ability to learn is fixed	The ability to learn can be changed
5. Speed of knowledge construction	Knowledge is constructed quickly	Knowledge is constructed gradually

Figure 30: Schommer’s (1990) epistemological domains

Schommer's framework is a useful starting point for appreciating how epistemological beliefs have significance for learning and teaching. The epistemological implications of the teacher-pupil interaction outlined here are noteworthy. Schommer (1994, p. 309) recognises that classroom-based research demonstrates "evidence of instruction that instils naïve epistemological beliefs". However, what her research does not account for is when pupils are *actively* seeking out the transition from naïve to sophisticated epistemology – in this case by challenging the certainty, source and control of knowledge – but in doing so are pushed back into their *passivity*. Schommer (1994, p. 302) rightly points out that some learners hold the belief that their role in learning is to remain passive and that this involves listening quietly, without asking questions or challenging what is being taught. It is perhaps unsurprising, if such epistemological collisions are commonplace in physical education, that pupils opt for the path of least resistance – a naïve epistemology – even if it hinders critical aspects of their learning (Schommer, 1994). The pupils in this case made it quite clear that they wanted to be *active* learners, and perhaps this interaction signals a starving for intellectual engagement with physical education but are instead socialised into passivity.

An example of this thirst being quenched came in the form of homework in GCSE PE. Pupils had carried out a homework task and were praised by the teacher and visibly happy with the feedback. One male pupil was visibly pleased to receive a personal comment, but when his male peer shouted: "go on lad!" he changed his demeanour and seemingly pretended not to care about his work. This was a powerful reminder of how influential peers become in the socialisation process (Stroot, 2002). Pupils in this study have expressed their enjoyment of working collaboratively, for instance: "Working together and listening to each other helps you learn skills anyway, so my favourite part of PE is when we work together". Nevertheless, the teacher continued to praise the pupils and, for their next homework task, were asked to develop their own set of revision guidance, with complete autonomy about how they go about it, including the opportunity to write a "rap". This was well received. In a separate GCSE PE lesson, however, it was a different story. The teacher in this class said: "There's no homework today" - news to which the pupils joyfully celebrated - and the teacher then insisted: "You're welcome!" Building healthy relationships is a precondition of successful teaching (Vitto, 2003; Marsh, 2012). However, if such relationships are formed in PE over a shared apathy for learning, then this might serve to perpetuate the delusion of learning in physical education. Perhaps some PE teachers are intent on maintaining the delusion, becoming wilful prisoners in the cave.

Deliberations about what pupils learn in PE and how they do it are not uncommon (Quennerstedt *et al.*, 2014). This fieldwork has uncovered that pupils are intellectually underchallenged in physical education. For instance, as part of some naturally occurring corridor conversations, some pupils articulated their initial views when quizzed on their general thoughts about PE: “I love PE, because you don’t have to do any work”, said the first pupil. The second pupil shared this sentiment by saying: “You just don’t have to think in PE, so it’s really easy”. It would seem therefore that the *busy, happy and good* phenomena (Placek, 1983) is alive and well when it comes to current pupils’ perceptions of PE.

Theme 3: Literacy in learning, but not on my watch

The PE profession makes the claim that high-quality provision of PE results in holistic learning outcomes (afPE, 2019). When some of these claimed outcomes are scrutinised, however, such as the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils (afPE, 2020), there appears to be a dearth of evidence substantiating them, or even exploring them. Coming to terms with such scrutiny can be uncomfortable, as Best (1978, p. 21) astutely remarks: “Philosophical examination may reveal that cherished beliefs have to be reconsidered, modified, or even abandoned, and this can be uncomfortable and disconcerting. Yet if such beliefs cannot be substantiated they should be modified or abandoned”. It is here where the iconoclastic and heterodox foundations of this study come to the fore.

Exposing this lack of evidence is not, and should not be conflated with, attempts to deny or refute their existence. Indeed, as the popular phrase commonly attributed to Martin Rees goes; the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. To some degree this is a useful maxim, but it should not be taken as an axiomatic truth in the context of education and learning. In the context of education, the absence of evidence presents a problem, particularly when value judgements are a central feature. Didau (2016) argues that the burden of proof should always belong to those making claims rather than to those who voice appropriate scepticism. Highlighting the importance of the burden of proof, Bertrand Russell (1952, cited in Slater, 1997, p. 547–548) famously stated:

Many orthodox people speak as though it were the business of sceptics to disprove received dogmas rather than of dogmatists to prove them. This is, of course, a mistake. If I were to suggest that between the Earth and Mars there is a china teapot revolving about the sun in an elliptical orbit, nobody would be able to disprove my assertion provided I were careful to add that the teapot is too small to be revealed even by our most powerful telescopes. But if I were to go on to say that, since my

assertion cannot be disproved, it is intolerable presumption on the part of human reason to doubt it, I should rightly be thought to be talking nonsense.

It is not the intention here to refute the claimed learning outcomes of PE, rather, it is to question the dogmatic certainty of which they are boasted. Of course, philosophising about physical education is not a new activity. In his book *Philosophy and Human Movement*, David Best (1978, p. 5) makes a compelling case that philosophy can add significant value to the study of human movement – and implicitly physical education – “by subjecting to logical scrutiny some of the statements made about the activities concerned”. Therefore, it seems proper that the holistic educational claims made in the name of PE are subjected to logical scrutiny. How these holistic educational outcomes are communicated, thus evidenced, in school-based physical education is an epistemological question, but the PE community may benefit from offering pedagogical modalities which enable pupils to communicate their learning in a ubiquitous educational currency – literacy. As Langer (1953, p. 3) states: “If the terms of our discourse are incompatible or confused, the whole intellectual venture to which they belong is invalid; then our alleged beliefs are not false, but spurious”.

Literacy is the lifeblood of learning in schools. Reading and writing are human inventions which have enabled the recording, storing and transmission of information, culture and thus *knowledge* for approximately 4000 years, and in modern society the skills associated with literacy are “the intellectual equivalent of breathing” (Murphy, 2019, p. 9). Literacy has long been a salient feature of education (Ofsted, 2013b). Reading is a crucial life skill and writing is a protracted form of thinking. The importance of literacy is emphatically reiterated by the DfE (2012, np) who state that, amongst a range of other literacy commitments, the school curriculum should offer opportunities for pupils to “use writing as a means of reflecting on and exploring a range of views and perspectives on the world”. Pupils should also be afforded the opportunity to “develop writing skills through work that makes cross-curricular links with other subjects” (DfE, 2012, np). Unfortunately, however, these cross-curricular links were offered to, and rejected by, the secondary PE teachers in Chapter Four and, for the most part, secondary PE teachers seem disinclined to integrate literacy into their practice.

The explicit and implicit content of physical education offers a rich, but often overlooked, tapestry of interlacing and cross-curricular learning opportunities which could be seized upon in schools (Sprake & Palmer, 2018b; Sprake & Palmer, 2019a; 2019b; Grecic, Sprake & Taylor, 2020). Palmer (2014) astutely illustrates the plethora of learning stimuli intrinsic to PE, including but not limited to: *the sciences*; biology, physiology and nutrition;

performance arts; theatre, music and painting; *personal development*; ethics, morals, politics, history and creativity, to name but a few. Logical scrutiny might question why homework is seldom requested in PE (Palmer, 2014) and why pupils are barely asked to write anything in PE, at least from Key Stage 1 to 3. This is particularly pressing when individuals with well-developed literacy skills are more likely to succeed in school, achieve good qualifications, find rewarding and enjoyable careers and are even more likely to achieve and sustain good health (DfE, 2015). If PE is a learner-centred and holistic enterprise, then such outcomes would seem worthy of pursuit. Moreover, evidence suggests that on the whole pupils display positive attitudes to writing (Clark, 2012) and, as Chapter Four demonstrates, their positive attitudes extend to writing in and about PE and sport.

Throughout the fieldwork activities, the research aims were continuously reflected upon to ensure that the observations were deliberate and focused (Wolcott, 2005). This was done to maximise the quality of data and ensure that meaningful moments or incidents were captured (Lightfoot, 1983; Lin, 2016). Investigating the *learning culture* in PE (Aim 1) and the *value of literacy* for learning in the subject (Aim 2) resulted in various and overlapping observations. For instance, during a theory lesson for BTEC Dance – which took place in the school library due to the availability of computers – the PE teacher remarked: “Apologies, but we’re going to have to write this down”. This sentence alone is somewhat revealing about the learning culture in PE. That the PE teacher felt compelled to apologise for asking the pupils to write something perhaps reflects something of an informal norm; that writing and PE should be discrete activities. The teacher’s apology might also have served as a deliberate technique of power in that it seemed to soften the ostensible burden of writing. By announcing that “we” are going to have to write this down, the teacher may have been using what Gore (1998, p. 243) describes as “totalizing” power. Through subtle linguistic and everyday parlance, teachers of PE often use “totalizing” terms such as *we* or *us* in order to govern or regulate their pupils (Gore, 1998, p. 243).

Thick description: While the pupils were quietly working at their computers, I took the opportunity to peruse the school’s library book collection relating to PE and sport. Other than a book titled *Women in Sport*, which I noticed hadn’t been borrowed in over a year, there was little in the way of materials relating to physical culture. Approaching the school librarian, I briefly introduced myself and while explaining why I was in the school I asked whether she believed there is place for literacy in physical education. From her seated position behind the library reception desk, she insisted: “There’s a place for literacy in *all* subjects”. At

this juncture the PE teacher approached us to join in the conversation. I repeated the same question for her, to which she replied: “Yes, so long as it doesn’t impact on lesson time, and if it was planned in advance. For example, you might have a Year 7 project in term 1, a Year 8 project in term 2 and so on”. The tone of her comment indicated a polite sense of resistance to the idea.

It comes as no surprise that a librarian recognises the value of literacy in all subjects, but the PE teacher’s standpoint inserted a strong caveat. She clearly recognises the potential value of literacy in PE but placed a strong emphasis on the separation between *literacy* and *lesson time*. The PE curriculum is a crowded space, so any perceived barriers to the practical implementation of literacy are understandable. However, the teacher’s concern about literacy impacting upon lesson time appears to indicate a belief that the current conditions of lesson time in PE are where the ‘real’ learning value is to be found. Having projects running in parallel with current PE practice seems an interesting possibility, but the conversation ended shortly afterward. In fact, the idea was seemingly closed down quite quickly, which, again, perhaps reveals something about the socialised attitudes toward literacy within the PE community. Interestingly, however, the very same teacher seemed to have an excellent pedagogical relationship with both physicality and literacy when teaching BTEC Dance – though it is worthy of note that this is not classed as *physical education*.

Arguing for the integration of intellectual pursuits in physical education activities, Best (1978, p. 60) insists that it is “not only possible but necessary, for a more comprehensive understanding of them, to consider such activities from the points of view of the disciplines of, for example, physiology, psychology, sociology and philosophy”. Such integrative pedagogy was rarely displayed in PE, but often displayed in BTEC Dance. For instance, in small groups, pupils were given visual stimuli, in this case through photographs, and were tasked with creating a collaborative dance routine which acts as the physical manifestation and representation of their response to the stimulus. The exam board summarises this as learners “respond to a given stimulus as part of a group, using research, discussion and practical exploration to develop performance material” (Pearson, 2016, p. 41). In BTEC Dance, the teacher insisted: “We aren’t just dancing for no reason with no meaning”. First, by engaging in deliberate and purposeful physical action the pupils demonstrated their “kinaesthetic intelligence” which the teacher was able to evaluate (Best, 1978, p. 58). Second, the theoretical aspects of the BTEC course challenged pupils intellectually, by developing a more comprehensive understanding about their physical actions against the backdrop of the

stimulus. Here, pupils were asked to explain and rationalise their movement choices. Consequently, the pupils were able to tell stories through embodied actions, with intellectual explorations of each, in order to consolidate their learning. What's more, the pupils had a portfolio in which they were required to reflect upon not only the physicality in learning, but also the justifications of their actions. Interestingly, a pupil had written "BTEC Dance = My fave lesson" on the whiteboard. An amalgamation of freedom and responsibility in learning would seem crucial for engaging pupils in learning, and much more meaning can be made through exploring physicality in this way. Sellers continues: "under favourable circumstances, participation in P.E. activity can become a gateway to imaginative artistic endeavour every bit as worthy a form of communication as the written essay might be" (Sellers, 2014, p. iii).

Thick description: The most emotive and striking of the dances, for me as an observer, came about when two pupils were given the visual stimulus of the aeroplanes crashing into the World Trade Centre 'Twin Towers' on September 11th, 2001. Their dance was highly emotive and choreographed to include integrated knowledge: such as the different take-off and crash times; the instability of the buildings; the crashing to the ground; followed by the notion of 'rebuilding' and finding strength in despair. A highly energised and emotive story told in the form of dance but with the actions explored through intellectual curiosity. I have to say I was taken aback by the level of intellectual and emotional engagement with this activity. It was a pleasure to observe. In fact, I visited my family that evening for dinner and, as I told them this story, I got emotional myself, as did my family. I learned a lot from observing the pupils and this learning episode could be characterised as *PE with purpose*. Whilst pupils were updating their portfolios and reflecting on their dance performances, I used this as an opportunity to talk to the PE teacher. I asked whether there might be more time allocated to PE in the curriculum if there were more theoretical lessons – such as this one in BTEC – alongside the practical elements. "Not a chance", she insisted. "It would never happen. They would never let it happen. PE teachers wouldn't want to let go of their practical lessons".

Despite recognising the value of literacy in learning, particularly in BTEC, this teacher reaffirms the hegemony associated with this idea. Interestingly, though, in pronouncing the inevitability of resistance she referred to PE teachers as "they", as if to detach herself from the act of resisting. This tactical detachment might be explained by self-presentation or impression management, which is described in the field of social psychology as the deliberate effort by

individuals to project an image they want others to have of them (Bourdage, Wiltshire & Lee, 2015; Ogunfowora, Bourdage & Nguyen, 2013; Schlenker, 2000). Projecting the notion of resistance on to others might have been a tactical decision to remove any discomfort.

Teachers of physical education have a reputation for being somewhat impervious to change (Gerdin & Pringle, 2015; Kirk, 2011). Green (2002) argues that PE teachers' views, or *philosophies*, about the nature and purpose of their subject are not *philosophical* because they do not contain rational, detached, and abstract conceptualisations of PE. Instead, he argues, PE teachers' notions of PE are *ideological* in that they are made up of "mythical ideas regarding the supposed worth of their subject", resulting in confused and contradictory *philosophies* which are value-laden and practical in their manifestations (Green, 2002, p. 65). It could be argued that PE teachers' commitment to their ideological positions is manifested as ideological possession. Carl Jung (1936), the widely influential psychologist and founder of analytical psychology, famously made the case that people do not have ideas, rather, ideas have people. Here, teachers become ideologues, meaning they become the tools of an ideology.

Thus far, teachers in this study seem to recognise and appreciate the value of literacy but keep it at arms-length in their practice. This is likely due to a range of factors, not least the concerns about its practical implementation in an already-crowded curricular space. Examples of implementing literacy seems more prevalent when associated with performance management requirements. For instance, having built up a good rapport with staff during the *researcher in residence* in the secondary school, one PE teacher approached me toward the end of a Year 7 badminton lesson and asked: "Right, so I've got to embed *literacy* this year as part of my appraisal targets, so I was thinking we could chat about it? You scratch my back I'll scratch yours, type of thing." Viewing literacy as a means to an end in this way can be explained by fast-and-frugal heuristics, a short-term and quick-fix approach to decision making within an ecologically rich environment (Gigerenzer, Hertwig & Pachur, 2011). This teacher perhaps also demonstrated what is known as preference falsification, the act of communicating a preference that differs from one's true preference due to the perception that the conveyed preference is more acceptable socially. The teacher asked: "Why don't we use this class? They can be our guinea pigs." So, a meeting was set for the following week, in which we planned to discuss some potential avenues integrative pedagogy.

Reflexive note: Putting aside (or *backstage*) the fact that this teacher's enthusiasm for literacy seemed to be driven by his appraisal targets, I wanted to maintain a good rapport

(remain an *insider*). Therefore, it seemed a reasonable opportunity to explore the relationship between PE and literacy further. Additionally, the teacher knew that my research focus was on literacy in PE which resulted in a transparent fieldwork relationship (remain *overt*) and thus I engaged in impression management to display behaviour congruent with my researcher role (*front stage*).

Using the Model of Reflexive Positionality, a conceptual plot of my researcher positionality during this interaction would be something approximating $(x, y, z) = (-4, -6, 5)$:

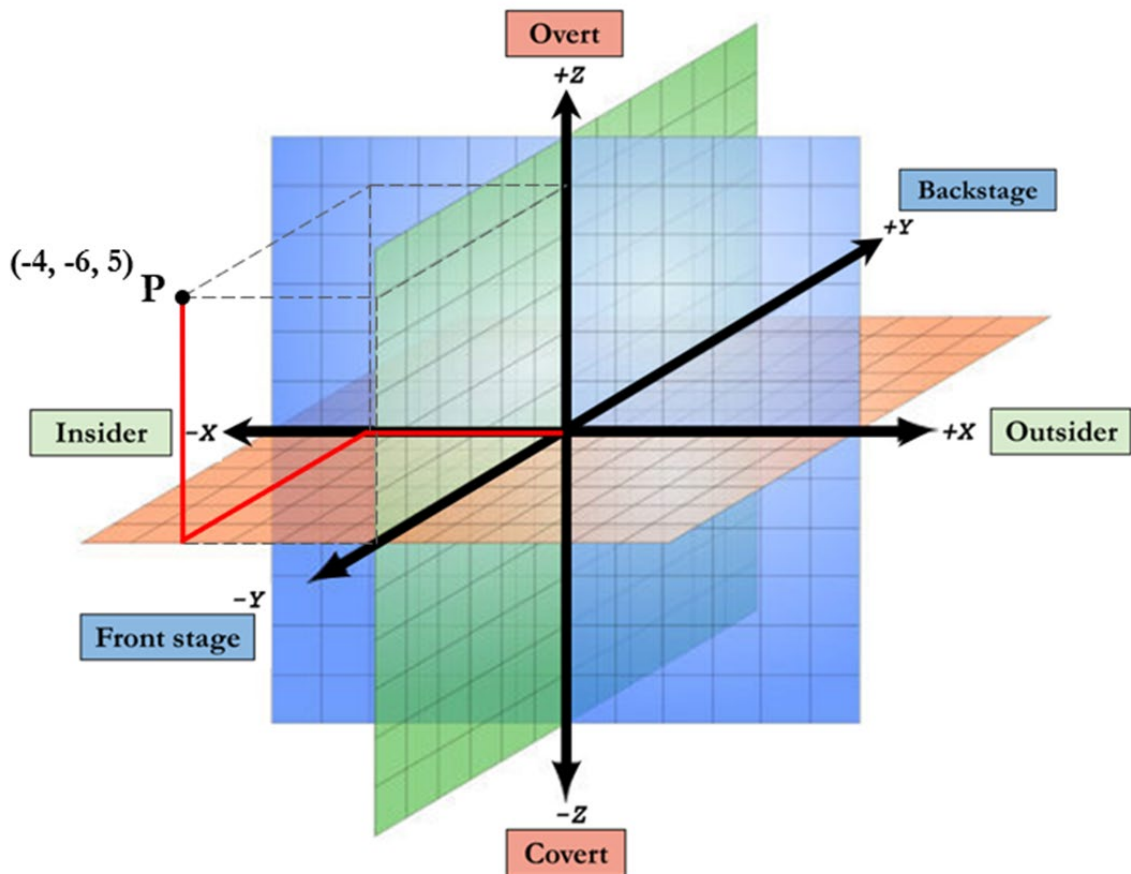


Figure 31: My position within the Model of Reflexive Positionality

Reflexive note: The meeting was not as fruitful as anticipated because, other than a mild suggestion to integrate key words in physical education – such as those associated with badminton – there was no evidence of an ideological commitment to adapting his praxis. Nevertheless, I was asked if I would like to try and incorporate literacy opportunities into his lesson. Finding myself in this unique position, I gladly obliged and, at the start of the lesson, I asked pupils to generate their own success criteria for the lesson, meaning I adopted the role of a complete participant (Junker, 1960 cited in Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). The pupils

enjoyed my intervention and were very keen to share their ideas; the activity took no longer than 2-minutes and certainly did not *impact upon lesson time*.

Having integrated some literacy-based learning activities into this lesson, it was clear that the pupils were highly motivated to develop more meaning from their PE learning experiences, when given the opportunity to do so. Self Determination Theory (SDT) is a widely used theory of motivation which includes autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2017). Research regarding the use of SDT in physical education settings reveals that there is a strong correlation between student motivation and autonomy in learning (Vasconcellos *et al.*, 2020). Giving pupils autonomy over their success criteria proved crucial for a productive, co-developed and positive learning environment. It is somewhat disappointing, in light of what the primary pupils demonstrated in Chapter Four, that the mere presence of co-constructed key words for a badminton lesson seemed a novel idea to these pupils.

Interestingly, at the end of the lesson, another PE teacher entered the sports hall and noticed that the whiteboards had been used: “That’s not your writing, Sir!”, she bellowed to the PE teacher in a jovial manner. Both teachers laughed profusely, suggesting perhaps that this PE teacher infrequently uses the whiteboards in his lessons. Interactions such as this demonstrate the subtle but extremely powerful influence of continual occupational socialisation in PE (Parker, Patton & Tannehill, 2018). Joking about the place of literacy in PE might serve to normalise its omission. This was not the first time that issues pertaining to literacy had been observed during the fieldwork. For instance, during a Year 8 table tennis lesson, one PE teacher wrote on the whiteboard (original spelling included): “How can I use composure to out witt my opponent?”. As outlined in the teachers’ standards (DfE, 2013, p. 11), teachers must “demonstrate an understanding of and take responsibility for promoting high standards of literacy, articulacy and the correct use of standard English, whatever the teacher’s specialist subject”. However, this example demonstrates the importance of literacy skills for teachers themselves. If literacy is “the intellectual equivalent of breathing” (Murphy, 2019, p. 9) then pupils in physical education may be gasping for air.

Theme 4: PE teachers can act unwittingly as architects of their own curricular marginalisation

PE teachers are perhaps the most overt champions of their subject (Kirk, 2011; Whitehead, 2020) and yet they have been described as their own worst enemies (Hawman, 2020). Their oppositional attitude towards change, collaboration and literacy has perhaps “rendered the educational progress of PE trapped in a paradoxical stalemate” (Sprake &

Palmer, 2018a, p. 58) and thus the PE profession is seemingly oblivious to its role as being part of the problem (Sprake, 2017). Whilst pupils were getting changed, an opportunity presented itself to ask Mr Dixon about his views on the sports hall being used for Year 10 mock exams. He replied: “Tell me about it! It happens in all schools!” Whilst his comment was transitory amid the frenzied PE environment, it was nonetheless indicative of the “curricular-hegemony” in schools (Sprake & Walker, 2015, p. 396). In this case, PE being pushed aside for *more important* subjects is viewed as common-sense.

Reflexive note: It became clear in that moment of becoming an active facilitator of data creation as opposed to a passive conduit of information. Although my question about the sports hall being used for exams was not explicitly leading, merely curious, I do recall hoping for some juicy commentary about the state and status of PE. Therefore, being conscious of the ‘mask’ I wore when asking the question, this reflexive incident served as a reminder, firstly, of the fleeting possibilities for opportunistic data collection in the field, and, secondly, the ever-present inevitability of researcher bias. Some researchers, perhaps those of the positivist persuasion, might find this approach methodologically unsound, but I have embraced the inseparability of the researcher from their biases; bringing opinions to the field is inevitable because researchers cannot escape their lived experience. Managing my impressions at this point was not an effort to distort the research findings (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010) but to seize an opportunity to converse about a real-world issue as it occurred in its natural setting. As outlined in the methodology, it is not the presence of bias that is the issue, but the degree to which it is recognised and voiced. Thus, this is a “deliberate effort” to voice my assumptions and prejudices so they can be openly considered and challenged (Norris, 1997, p. 174). I am now comfortable with the inevitability that my data collection – or active facilitation of data – is value laden. That is, I have opinions and emotional reactions to what I observe because I am a thinking, feeling being in a social setting. Naturally occurring opportunities such as this do not present themselves at every turn, so it was my prerogative to grasp it and, with it, generate some data.

In the early stages of the fieldwork, a female PE teacher asked for more information about the nature of the research. Having discussed the research aims – using impression management to do so – she immediately expressed her dissatisfaction that: “PE is not seen as an educational priority”. She went on to discuss an email that was sent by a member of the senior leadership team, in which it was stated that it is: “OK to take pupils out of PE to focus on other revision”. It is not uncommon for pupils to miss physical education in order to catch up in other subject

areas. In fact, research from the Youth Sport Trust (2018) revealed that PE provision is suffering because other subject areas are being given additional curriculum time. To this end, pupils typically experience a 21% decrease in curriculum PE as they transition from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4 (Youth Sport Trust, 2018). However, curriculum time for PE has long been an issue of concern for PE teachers (Fairclough & Stratton, 1997; Hardman, 2009; Dudley & Burden, 2019). For the teachers in this study, such issues seem all too familiar but, as Delamont *et al* (2010, p. 3) remarked: “Good educational ethnography...makes the familiar strange”. PE teachers’ frustration at their curricular status is familiar. Strange is their unwillingness to reflect on their role as part of the problem.

Research on PE teachers’ experiences of marginalisation and their sense of *mattering* reveals that PE is sometimes viewed as a “dispensable commodity” (Richards *et al.*, 2018, p. 451). Interestingly, however, PE teachers seemingly attribute their marginalisation and perceived low status in school to external factors such as policy-makers, senior leadership teams and even other colleagues. Few studies seek to challenge the role that the PE profession plays in its own downfall. Put another way, it is seldom discussed that PE teachers might unwittingly act as the architects of their own curricular marginalisation. It is argued here that the PE community is caught in a collective and self-serving belief system resembling the self-serving attributional bias (Shepperd, Malone & Sweeny, 2008), a phenomenon in which individuals or groups take credit for their successes but blame outside factors for their failures (Barrett, 2017). For instance, one PE teacher proclaimed: “We need to be banging on the door of Ofsted and telling them to come and observe our PE lessons – sometimes, they don’t even bother to come down to PE!”. Perhaps the root of the ‘PE problem’ lies not with external factors, however, but instead with PE teachers’ internal praxis and ideological commitments. For instance, the “hidden skills” identified in Chapter Three would seem more educationally valuable if they were brought into the light, where they can be judged and valued. A reconsideration of what constitutes a *physical education* – and thus what pupils communicate as learning in the name of PE – might gain the attention of the higher-ups whom the PE community feels largely ignored by. Simply put, if the learning was unmissable PE would become more educationally visible.

Unhelpful to the ‘PE problem’ is the dichotomized thinking which PE teachers display regarding PE and non-PE subjects; an *us and them* or an *us versus them* mentality. On the one hand, they seemingly hold the firm insistence that PE is different from other subjects – not only in name but also in nature – whilst, on the other hand, the same teachers appear

frustrated when the subject is perceived and treated differently. For instance, a Year 8 girls' gymnastics lesson was infused with all the social interaction one might expect – with pupils cooperating, laughing and creating meaning through their physical actions – but the PE teacher deemed it necessary to bring the lesson to a standstill, insisting: “I know that PE is different from *maths* and *English*, but you are still in a *lesson* and you need to *focus*”. This teacher reinforced the dichotomy between subjects, firstly, as a way of helping PE teachers stay in their comfort zone, and, secondly, as a way of socialising pupils to perceive PE as distinct from other subjects. If teachers continually reinforce to pupils that PE is *different* to other subjects, then both pupils' and teachers' aspirations for, and expectations of, PE will inevitably differ from other subjects.

Research pertaining to socialisation and socialisation theory in PE has tended to focus on teachers' and teacher educators' thoughts and actions (Curtner-Smith, Hastie, & Kinchin, 2008; Lee & Curtner-Smith, 2011; Vollmer & Curtner-Smith, 2016). Research exploring pupils' experiences of, and socialisation experiences in, PE is still a growing field (Sprake, 2014; George & Curtner-Smith, 2016). Little attention is paid specifically to the impact of teachers on pupils' socialisation experiences, and even less on how teachers' interactions with pupils might shape pupils' perceptions of the educational significance of PE.

Reflexive note: At this juncture, I was cognisant of the dual significance of this moment for my study. First, the teacher's declaration had implications for the *study*. My first research aim is to investigate the state and status of PE within in the educational landscape, and this incident demonstrates how PE teachers can reinforce the perhaps unhelpful dichotomy between school subjects. Having sought to bridge the educational gap between PE and academic learning previously and having been heavily criticised by my ex-colleague who insisted that: “Homework just doesn't belong in PE”, it seems plausible that PE teachers are playing a key role in their own curricular marginalisation. Of course, pupils need to “focus” in PE and should not need reminding that they are in a “lesson”. However, if PE teachers continually insist that PE is habitually different or bites the hand that feeds it a pedagogical opportunity then there seems little point in seeking an equal educational status to other subject areas. The second point is that the teacher's declaration also had *methodological* implications. I had not observed a lesson with this teacher before and it seems she was eager to demonstrate her control of the pupils – perhaps for my benefit – when in actual fact the noise in the room was a healthy, productive noise and not one which indicated a lack of “focus”. Given that PE is a hotbed for social interaction between teachers and pupils alike, it is perhaps

unsurprising that such issues were interpreted as they are directly relevant to the study at hand. That is, as a researcher I am not passively observing the field, rather I am actively reading the environment and engaged in purposeful observations in order to interpret information through a personal lens, using a filter to draw attention to data that is useful in achieving the research aims.

Thick description: One morning, upon their arrival at the changing rooms some Year 7 pupils would ask the teacher: “What we doin’ today, Sir?” The teacher would reply with comments such as “I’ll tell you in a minute, I can’t give away all the suspense just yet”. As it happens, the pupils would soon be outside, doing laps of the AstroTurf in a lesson branded as an *inter-form running competition*. One pupil was unable to participate due to an injury and having confirmed with the pupil that he knew how to do a tally chart, the teacher turned to me and said: “Thank God the primary schools have done something right!” Though it was clearly jovial, the teacher’s comment about primary schools offered a glimpse into his apparent sense of superiority. The irony in his statement, however, is that the lesson he was teaching at that time fell considerably short of something educationally valuable and right into the “busy, happy and good” category (Placek, 1983). A more appropriate phrase to characterise this lesson is that both the teacher and the pupils were “busy doing nothing” (Isaacs & Palmer, 2020, p. 46).

One of the idiosyncratic features of PE is that the delusion of learning is hidden in plain sight whilst at the same time being preserved with a misguided self-assurance. During a typical lesson changeover, various PE teachers would loiter in the foyer to ensure a smooth transition between different classes. Pupils were coming and going as part of their daily routine when a male PE teacher stridently asked one of the female teachers: “How many cones do you need, Miss?” and, with no immediate response and a sense of bemusement on her face, the male teacher probed further: “So you mean to say it’s not in your lesson plan?!” All of a sudden, all the PE teachers burst into laughter – they were *in on the joke*. The ‘joker’ made clear his light-hearted intentions and the ‘butt of the joke’ displayed genuine relief that her planning was not under scrutiny. This incident is dramaturgical loyalty personified, as Goffman (1959, p. 231) stated: “Among members of the team we find that familiarity prevails, solidarity is likely to develop, and that secrets that could give the show away are shared and kept”.

Reflexive note: The *familiarity* and *solidarity* between the PE teachers was clear. Interestingly, the *secret* which could give the show away – that is, the secret that PE teachers

may not plan lessons to the detail expected – was happily shared in front of me. Perhaps my insider status as an ex-PE teacher extended to the sharing of secrets with the assumption of solidarity. As a researcher in residence, I am acutely aware of the importance of social relationships in fieldwork (Mills & Morton, 2013) and, for better or worse, I also laughed along with the teachers. I am constantly striving to become a closer member of their world and their community and so laughing with the staff felt appropriate as a means of establishing rapport and showing empathy to their roles. However, in this moment I am also aware that, through impression management, I am presenting a certain version of selfhood as a means of maintaining my insider status. Revealing my true, authentic Self at this juncture may have created unfavourable tension and, as a result, I made the decision to suppress my *backstage* thoughts in the interest of maintaining my insider position.

This brief encounter has significant implications. First, the teachers' laughter was automatic almost unconscious reaction to the silly idea that planning takes place in PE. This was exemplified when a teacher, having welcomed me into his PE lesson, publicly stated: "I haven't planned like that since I was an NQT!" Second, the impact of collegial socialisation was clear to see. At the very least, it demonstrated a cultural attitude toward planning in physical education. The teachers' collective but unwritten social norm that planning is, quite literally, a laughing matter is perhaps evidence of the low educational aspirations within the PE community. Third, the female teacher's relief that the questions about her planning were a light-hearted joke reveals that even the teachers might not only be sleepwalking through their experience, but that they are somewhat anxious about being observed.

Thick description: During the first week of fieldwork, pupils were engaged in a badminton lesson and the PE teacher took a moment to explain to me that: "The pupils are on courts which reflect their ability, so this [pointing to the court next to where I was sitting] is court 4". The teacher was informing me that where I'd chosen to sit was close to the 'weaker' pupils. He went on to say "so while you're watching *these*, I bet you're thinking..." as his eyes rolled and pulled a face to suggest that they were weak performers.

Interpreting the teacher's comment in this instance was interesting as it seems that he was worried about being judged on the basis of how well the pupils could physically perform. The products of learning are, to some degree, a reflection of the teaching and the teacher's embarrassment was noteworthy. It was not the physical ability of the pupils that was being observed, however, and so this teacher's concern about being observed reflects the spotlight effect (Gilovich *et al.*, 2000; Lawson, 2010), a psychological phenomenon whereby

individuals overestimate the degree to which others notice them. The spotlight effect was also exemplified by another teacher (the ‘joker’), during a different lesson, when he commented: “I don’t like you sitting there with a notepad and pen, it makes me worried!”. Said in a light-hearted manner, he also asked, while rubbing his hands together: “So what are you after? Literacy in PE? I’ll bring out all the key words today then!” Incidentally, the PE teacher completely mistook where the *spotlight* was actually shining – that is, on the opportunities, albeit missed opportunities, for literacy and meaning-making in this class, as opposed to observing him as a teacher.

Reflexive note: My cultural capital as an ex-PE teacher served to enable a sense of collegial connection with this teacher. I did however feel occasional tension with note-taking and will attempt to be subtle whilst balancing the need to capture data. He was overtly happy to make jokes about bringing out “all the key words”, a form of colloquial banter between PE teachers when being observed. Funnily enough, reflecting on this, as I am writing about it has brought back a memory of teaching PE myself. As an NQT, I was shadowing an experienced teacher who was set to be observed by Ofsted later that morning. He explained to the pupils in the changing rooms that: “If you smash this lesson today [meaning try hard, behave well and follow instructions] then I promise you we’ll have a full lesson of football next week”. Maintaining the delusion of learning is a formidable task, but it is nonetheless conceivable that these everyday realities of PE are in part responsible for the low educational status of PE.

Throughout the fieldwork, PE teachers were reticently welcoming of the notion of being observed in their lessons. For example, it was made clear that when lessons were being *crashed* – a colloquial term for merging two or more classes for one PE lesson – the teachers did not want to be observed. On several occasions, such as football assessment lessons or fitness lessons, PE teachers would apologise and say things like: “I’m sorry, Andy, there’s not really anything for you to see in this lesson”. In addition, at the end of a GCSE theory lesson, and having been informed of a minor safeguarding issue, the PE teacher said: “Andy I thought you were going to tell me that it was a shit lesson, which would have been way worse!” There is little doubt that while the teachers in this researcher in residence phase have been incredibly welcoming, there has been evidence of underlying concerns about being watched. Yet in terms of the educational status of PE in schools, PE teachers could be accused of standing in their own way. Pupils are not resistant to intellectual engagement in PE, as is

evidenced by the primary pupils in Chapter Four and the secondary pupils who were asked to engage in deeper meaning-making activities for BTEC Dance.

The questionable status of physical education, and the marginal role that PE teachers play in schools, have both long been recognised. For instance, Hendry (1975, p. 466) remarked: “Non-examinable subjects have a low status within the educational hierarchy”. The secondary school PE environment is loaded with taken-for-granted assumptions about the educational outcomes of the subject and, at present, the rhetoric considerably outweighs the reality. The educational landscape is largely dominated by an *academic* conception about what is most valued in learning. According to Reid (1996, p. 95) and echoed by Green (2003, p. 42), this has left PE teachers with two options: first, they could concede that the non-academic nature of PE renders it non-educational or, at best, marginal in schools; second, they could make the case that the physical activities in PE have academic significance and therefore demonstrating that the subject does have educational merit. Reid (1996a) illustrates the erroneous conception that knowledge is derived from propositional content alone. That is, knowledge is not only expressed in words and symbols, but also in actions, thus knowledge is expressed in terms of knowing *how* and knowing *that* (Reid, 1996a, p. 96). Consequently, Reid determinedly advocates for a more respected status of physical education in schools. Research unpacking the academic significance of PE, however, has tended to justify the place of PE based on its capacity to support learning elsewhere in the curriculum (Green, 2008; Sprake & Walker, 2015). In this regard, PE is seen more as a prop to buttress the academic products in other subjects, whilst at the same time leaving a void of intellectual pursuits from within. That is, physical education should be conceptualised not as the *fuel* keeping other educational *engines* running, but rather an engine in and of itself. The status quo in PE’s quest for legitimacy is like a catch-22. PE is an untapped resource for pupils’ academic outputs in its own right, and given that PE is socially constructed (Kirk, 2011), there is nothing to say the PE cannot offer a platform for propositional knowledge (Reid, 1996b) and kinaesthetic intelligence (Best, 1978) to flourish simultaneously.

Episode Two: unstructured and conversational interview with three PE teachers

Episode two involves a thematic analysis of an unstructured, conversational focus group with three secondary PE teachers; Mr Dixon (the Head of PE), Mr Taylor (a trainee PE teacher) and Miss Green (an experienced PE teacher). Having facilitated a closing interview with the Head Teacher in the primary school phase of research, it was deemed

appropriate for the continuation of this theme at the end of the secondary school phase. The focus group took place at the end of the *researcher in residence part two* phase and included teachers with whom the researcher had become well-acquainted as part of the fieldwork. Following a nine-week period of ethnographic visiting (Sugden & Tomlinson, 2002), relationships were formed, and a sense of collegiality was developed between the researcher and the researched. The idea of an overly structured interview would have potentially undermined the rapport that had built with the PE department; thus an unstructured conversational interview was deemed more appropriate.

Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2019) resulted in the development of four themes: (1) an us and them mentality; (2) the ambiguous value of PE; (3) Literacy in PE, from the horse's mouth; and (4) there's no resistance to literacy here, but we are just so busy.

Theme 1: an us and them mentality

PE teachers in this study have indicated their dissatisfaction and frustration that their subject is not perceived as valuable as other subject areas. These views have seemingly manifested in an *us and them* mentality; *us* being the PE teachers and *them* being anyone outside of the inner PE circle, such as policy makers, school leaders and other subject specialists. An early indication of this came when Mr Dixon attributed the blame for the low status of PE to the government: "It's got to be led from the top in terms of where PE is rated in comparison to other subjects." The implication here is that the state and status of physical education in schools is not the responsibility of the teachers through whom the subject is enacted.

Reflexive note: Having drawn on my own personal experiences as member of the PE community, my questions in the focus group may well have had implications to the respondents' mind-sets. I am mindful, however, that I am the research instrument, bringing with me empirical observations of my own. I explained: "Yeah. Well one of the reasons I wanted to do a study in PE was because, in my spell as a PE teacher, it felt that PE was not at the bottom of the pile but that other subjects were the priority. Do you feel like PE is on a level playing field with other subjects, either at this school or more broadly?" Mr Dixon expanded upon his point:

I think that PE is towards the bottom, not necessarily here in this school but as a subject, generally, you've got some very naïve leaders who see PE as a lesser subject; they think "oh it's just PE", and you hear that quite often which is frustrating

because they don't understand the importance of it and what it can do. *We* all know because we're *PE people*, but for me it's naivety and generally a lack of education. It tends to be those people who have never been involved with sport and hence their negative experiences of PE in school are driving their opinions on it, and these people are influencing the curriculum [italics added].

Protesting the inferior position of PE in the traditional subject hierarchy, Mr Dixon also vented his frustration outward and upward by criticising the “very naïve leaders” and their “lack of education” on the matter. The idea that PE develops pupils in a manner that seems visible only to those within the PE community has been floated in this study previously. In Chapter Three, one PE teacher described this as the “hidden skills” that *outsiders* do not always appreciate. Mr Dixon, however, made an explicit point about the ostensibly shared understanding between “PE people” that PE is a more important and valuable subject than to which it is often credited. Additionally, it is the outsiders' apparently “negative experiences of PE” which are driving both their opinions of the subject and the nature of the curriculum in schools. There is clear evidence that frustration is aimed outward and upward for the state and status of PE in schools, and yet there is little in the way of introspection (Shepperd, Malone & Sweeny, 2008). Before having time to reply as a researcher, Miss Green interjected:

A good example of that is when I was observed by a member of SLT [Senior Leadership Team], who wasn't a PE teacher and had nothing to do with PE. We had these ten things that you had to put into a lesson; differentiation, supporting each pupil, your AfL and that - all the things that make you a good teacher. Before the lesson, speaking about what I was going to do, the SLT member said: “How are you going to fit all those things into a PE lesson?” I was like: “What do you mean? I'm a teacher?! I'm not just going out there playing”. I'm teaching them how to do these things and we're developing their skills, developing all these things that you develop in your pupils in exactly the same way. But the understanding wasn't there, that it happens in PE as well. They think we just go out and play games.

By firmly insisting that the SLT member “wasn't a PE teacher” and “had nothing to do with PE”, this PE teacher seemingly embodies the *us and them* mentality. Her comments are perhaps a polite gesture to the authentic whisperings which takes place in the natural setting of a PE department, without the presence of a researcher. There seem to be unwritten yet clearly demarcated boundaries of understanding – that is, the PE community fully appreciate the role and value of PE, whilst *outsiders* have no conception of what takes place. The teacher continued to list some of the common strategies associated with Learning and Teaching but expressed her concern when an SLT member questioned how this would be

achieved in the PE setting. Her final comment: “They think we just go out and play games”, signals a deep sense of frustration towards the *outsiders*. When asked to elaborate on how they might reach those people in advocating for the importance of PE, Miss Green stated: “Well they’ve got to experience it more and know what’s going on. It’s about selling it yourself isn’t it, to the departments in the school and outside”. This comment was supplemented by Mr Taylor, who expressed contempt for his previous school’s attitude toward PE, arguing that PE was viewed as a box-ticking exercise:

For me, coming here, it’s massive. Compared with the last school that I worked at, PE was literally...they weren’t even interested, it was only in the curriculum because it ticked a box. Whereas, here, everyone does it, everyone wants to take part. You’ve got three classes per year group, GCSE, BTEC. Whereas at my other school you were lucky to even get one class, even in GCSE. Here, they actually want pupils to do PE.

This comment relates to the notion of PE as a “dispensable commodity” (Richards *et al.*, 2018, p. 451) and, resisting such attitudes, Mr Dixon expanded further:

It’s about appointing those people who recognise it. If you don’t understand the value of PE, it shows a lack of intelligence. If you don’t understand the importance that PE and sport can play in relation to pupils’ health and wellbeing, then you shouldn’t be in that [leadership] position in the first place.

Reflexive note: I have increasingly felt that I am carefully navigating the insider–outsider continuum, in that my positionality was being tested. Notwithstanding my confidence in managing fieldwork relations, I am noticing that some of my subjective views about PE – which I shared in the focus group with caution – are not congruent with the PE *insiders*. That is, despite being labelled a “PE person” by Mr Dixon – that is, a person who understands the intrinsic or “hidden” value of PE – I am feeling an increasing sense of ethical guilt. Meanwhile, Mr Dixon continued:

But it does tend to be those people who’ve had a negative experience, who talk about cross-country and running around in your gym knickers and that sort of stuff, which is still...well I think we’re coming towards the end of that cycle of that generation. In the next 5 years I’d like to think that we’re getting towards the end of that, but it still happens.

On the contrary, it appears that PE is continuing with *more of the same* (Kirk, 2011). The notion of “selling yourself” as a subject is particularly interesting. In order to increase the public perception and thus the status of PE, the subject needs a new marketing strategy.

Perhaps literacy born of the physicality of learning could offer a unique selling point; a means by which the *us and them* becomes a collective *us*.

Theme 2: the ambiguous value of PE, even within the PE community

The PE teachers in this study have an unwavering ideological commitment to the apparent value of PE as part of children and young people's education. However, conversations with the PE department revealed a sense of ambiguity about its specific role, purpose and educational worth. The ambiguity around the aims and purpose of PE are not new, but it has resulted in some ideological confusion about what the essence of the subject is and what is hoped to be achieved in its name (Sprake & Walker, 2015). For instance, when the PE department were asked "what PE is *for* in the curriculum", Mr Dixon began:

Erm, for me the first thing is enjoyment. That should be number one. I think we are doing something wrong if kids aren't enjoying sport and PE, cause that's why we all take part in sports. Secondly, I think it's about the development of social skills and life skills that students need; things like leadership, communication, teamwork and things they'll need in daily life. They're the main things from me.

In immediate agreement with Mr Dixon, Mr Taylor remarked: "Yeah, I think mainly enjoyment cause that's when kids will want to do it outside of school." The notion of enjoyment is widely associated with justifications for PE in school settings, which appears to be indicative of the "busy, happy and good" phenomenon (Placek, 1983, p. 49). It is of course self-evident that pupils' enjoyment of learning is a worthy aspiration, but enjoyment does not lead *ipso facto* to meaningful learning experiences. Recent research in the psychological literature reveals the uncertainty about the influence of emotional factors on learning - it is argued that the degree to which positive emotions can help to facilitate learning or negative emotions can impair learning remains unclear (Tyng *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, concerns about the blurred lines between physical *education* and physical *entertainment* have been raised previously (Sprake & Temple, 2016). Therefore, while enjoyment is a reasonable aspiration for any subject, it should not be assumed as a proxy for learning.

The allegory of the cave is a useful metaphor in this case: for example, the *busy, happy and good* environment creates a delusion of learning in PE (the fire); the pupils' *enjoyment* of PE represents an elaborate show of silhouettes which are projected across the sports hall walls (the shadows); the teachers (the prisoners) have only experienced PE in this way and thus it is their reality; pupils' meaningful *education* in PE might be reachable outside the cave, but only once the teachers break free of their ideological commitments (the prisoners' chains).

It seems clear from these teachers' responses that the sport-based foundation upon which PE is justified as a valuable school subject is alive and well (Kirk, 2011; 2018) but there is recognition of the wider role of PE, such as the development of social skills, leadership, communication and teamwork (afPE, 2019). Teachers in this study also often used the term 'enjoyment' to justify the value of PE in school, but it is curious to note that PE teachers make a special case for enjoyment as if to assume that other subjects are not enjoyable. In addition to enjoyment, sports participation and wider development in and through PE, there is a widely held belief that PE is closely tied to physical activity and health promotion. For instance, Trudeau and Shephard (2008) claim that the most commonly anticipated outcome of PE is that, through PE, children and young people are socialised into physical activity, resulting in a subsequent increase in adult physical activity. This belief is reaffirmed by Miss Green, who states:

I think it's about giving them the tools to continue taking part in sport once they leave school, knowing how to do it, where to go and having that commitment to physical activity, cause a lot of people will go on to join a club, carry on until they're 16 and then jack it in when they get a job or whatever. It's about them understanding that they can still go to the gym, take part in physical activity and not necessarily what they were doing before. Like, keeping healthy and fit.

For many PE teachers, this dogmatic belief seems like a Holy Trinity – that is, through *physical education*, children and young people become *socialised into physical activities*, resulting in *lifelong physical activity and healthy behaviours*. However, much of the research making such claims are “couched in a language of contingency” (Green, 2014, p. 360). That is, many of the claims associating PE with lifelong physical activity and healthy behaviours are strategically vague, using terms such as the 'potential' of PE to 'influence' or 'encourage' participation (Green, 2014). However, the rates of obesity and overweight in childhood are anything but vague. The National Child Measurement Programme (2018) reveals that 9.9% of reception age children in England (age 4-5) are obese and a further 13.1% are overweight. These proportions are considerably higher among Year 6 pupils (age 10-11), with 21.0% being obese and 14.1% overweight. Put simply, one in ten children is obese by age 5, which rises to one in five by age 11 (Baker, 2021). In light of the rising prevalence of childhood obesity, such beliefs about the accomplishments of PE offer somewhat of a low-resolution and romantic version of reality and should perhaps be termed *physical education folklore*. The dogmatic beliefs associated with PE might gain more traction in the public eye if they

were supplemented with more robust evidence, and literacy as a mode of communicating learning is a potential track down which PE has rarely travelled.

Theme 3: the truth about literacy in PE, from the horse's mouth

Historically, the PE community has demonstrated little commitment to the integration of literacy into its curriculum offer. Similarly, teachers of PE have shown little enthusiasm to integrate literacy into their everyday praxis. For almost two decades the government has remained largely silent on the matter of literacy in PE; the last significant gesture can be located in the *Literacy in* series, established by the DfES in 2004. The aim of this national strategy was to “develop consistent approaches to teaching and learning in literacy across departments” (DfES, 2004, p. 2). Interestingly, however, the DfES seemingly anticipated some resistance to literacy on the part of the PE profession. In its closing statements, the document reads: “Incorporating writing into physical education is not intended to be writing for its own sake, but a method of extending the ways in which pupils learn and reflect about the subject” (DfES, 2004, p. 23).

The PE teachers in this study were asked a direct question: “Where you do stand on the role of literacy in PE?” Again, Mr Dixon was keen to express his views on this and was given the space to elaborate. Central to his remarks is the notion that teachers need to be more prepared when it comes to the integration of literacy, and more explicit in the process:

I think that naturally, sport and PE develop pupils' communication skills. Since sport began it's been doing this naturally. But perhaps it hasn't been recognized or as explicit, and I know I'm as guilty as anyone else, as in PE teachers in general, I think we need to be more prepared in terms of how prepared we are to incorporate literacy into PE, so what key words we are going to use. Rather than just rocking up to lesson and going right 'this is what we're doing'. Focus on what key words you're using and why, and I've been working on this a little bit trying to build this into our schemes of work and make sure we emphasise the key words for the activities. I think we need to be more explicit though. The communication side of it is naturally there, but there's definitely room for improvement. In terms of evidencing it, which I know this is your job really [referring to my research]. I think it is going to be difficult, if you were to ask: 'How do you know that your pupils are developing literacy in your PE lesson?' in lesson observations and learning walks etc., I think it's very hard to measure.

It is perhaps difficult to measure the products of literacy development in PE because it is not happening in practice. It is not the first time in this study that teachers have used the phrase “key words” to connect literacy with PE. Of course, purposefully integrating key

words is a useful starting point but it does not come close to the PE-based literacy demonstrated by the primary school pupils in Chapter Four. The secondary teachers' conceptions of *literacy for learning* appears to be too narrow, reducing it to a tick-box exercise of standardised and circumscribed techniques. Syverson (2008, p. 109) loathes this vision and argues: "The more apparent it is that this model of literacy learning is entirely inadequate to reality, the more tightly it is embraced". In response to the teacher's question - 'How do you know that your pupils are developing literacy in your PE lesson?' - it would seem prudent to integrate literacy-based activities as part of the everyday practices of physical education. Evidence of learning cannot be found unless learning is in fact taking place. If learning in literacy is to be evidenced in PE, then literacy in learning must form part of the educational experience.

Reflexive note: During the interview I was intrigued when Mr Dixon nodded in my direction to say that evidencing leaning in PE is "your job". Clearly, his comment was meant as a way of recognising that this area is where my research is focused, but I'm not sure it is *my job*. There is, however, some co-created acknowledgement that the PE community might benefit from integrating literacy into the cultural milieu of PE, as Miss Green explains:

Yeah, it's almost like you've got to make it part of the culture of every lesson. So, when you're developing your staff, it's about making sure that they understand what you're aiming to get to. So, it may well be that in Year 7 and 8 could be used to spend time using the GCSE words and definitions, early doors, so that they can be aware of them and develop them before they got to their GCSE. It's giving them a bit more knowledge isn't it. If you're planning to do your really good lessons, like everyone does, then you've got to spend time thinking about it beforehand, to put the literacy in all the time, for it to then become the norm.

As the focus group progressed, knowledge and meaning were being co-created between the participants and the researcher. Miss Green had clearly recognised the potential for integrating literacy into PE practice and focused on preparing pupils for the terminology needed in GCSE PE. As stated previously, all school subjects have their own unique vocabularies and the Education Endowment Foundation (2019) refers to this as subject disciplinary literacy. There is clearly some indication on the part of Miss Green that subject disciplinary literacy would bring about educational benefits for the pupils. Quite rightly, she pointed to the planning and preparation needed in order to integrate literacy successfully, and Mr Dixon expanded:

I think we recognise that this is an area for improvement. Obviously, we've built it into the Year 7 and 8 assessment framework now. So that first layer is all about pupils' knowledge of components of fitness and so if we're using those from Year 7, then by the time they get to Year 9, well, you're just, you're making your life a lot easier.

Literacy in this case seems like a pedagogical means to an examinable end. Mr Dixon's remarks about literacy making the teachers' lives "a lot easier" is perhaps an indication of the cultural pressure that teachers face with regard to pupil progress. The idea that developing literacy early makes teachers' lives easier in the long-run suggests that education is perhaps teacher-focused rather than learner-centred. This is not the fault of teachers *per se*, rather it is perhaps a reflection of the education system at present – that is, the onus for learning is on the teachers. In fact, Mr Dixon went further to highlight that literacy in itself is not "the problem", but that teachers are expected to achieve the impossible:

So, literacy is one of these things which is in every lesson. Yes, we need to be more explicit with it, but we also need to be more explicit with another seven things which are coming at us from senior leaders, and that, for me, is where the problem stems from, it's not literacy. I don't think that literacy is the problem, it's that the list of things to do is becoming ever-increasing.

Theme 4: there's no resistance to literacy here, but we are just so busy

Reflexive note: Using my own empirical experiences as a guide I seized upon Mr Dixon's comment about "the list of things to do" increasing all the time. It struck me as a form of resistance, but a kind of *rational resistance*. I used his comments as a catalyst to explore further one of the central aims of this study:

Absolutely. Well as I mentioned a few weeks ago, I spent some time in a primary school and the pupils were writing all sorts of poetry, artwork, letter-writing and debating, all stemming from their physical experiences of PE. It was great fun and what I noticed is that there was no resistance to it from the pupils. They were more than happy to have a go. But I know from my own experience in a secondary context there has traditionally been a bit of resistance to literacy in PE, I don't know if you've come across this in your experience?

Miss Green was the first to respond:

I haven't, no. I haven't come across resistance to trying new things and developing, so you've just got to try things and if they fail then they fail, but how can you be failing if you're teaching kids about knowledge that's part of your subject? You can't be can you?

Mr Dixon then offered a similar response, but elaborated on the issues associated with the practical implementation of literacy in PE:

I don't think I have, no. No-one is resistant here, and I think everyone is open to trying new things. The problem comes, if we're honest, with the day-to-day implementation of it because everyone is so busy. Every year, you get another 6 things that need to get added to your lessons which weren't there last year, and as a Head of Department you've got to say, for example: "Right let's add three key words into your lesson". It's just another *thing*, and the list is getting bigger and bigger, and this is where the problem stems from.

Mr Dixon rightly acknowledged that schools are extremely complex and dynamic environments with various agendas competing for curricular time. He highlights that the day-to-day implementation is difficult due to being so "busy" and that the "list" of things to do is getting bigger all the time. The issue of teachers' workload is well cited and 90% of secondary school staff report workload to be a serious problem (DfE, 2019b). So much so that the government recently published a *School Workload Reduction Toolkit* for which they collaborated with school leaders, teachers and sector experts to address the issue (DfE, 2019c). In this case, Mr Dixon implied that literacy, as an educational tool, is not "the problem" but there are various barriers and practical limitations affecting its effective implementation, namely workload. Conversations about literacy in PE related firmly to the practical realities of its implementation within an already-crowded teacher workload, but Mr Dixon was still keen to display his appreciation of the importance of literacy:

It's about being explicit and planning it in. When we do the whole-school thing about literacy. I actually met with Ruth [a member of SLT] about this and she asked: "Can this work in PE?" and I was like "100% it can!" It does have a value. I mean, why should we be different to any other subject? But at the same time, like anything, you only get out what you're prepared to put into it.

Having thanked Mr Dixon for his accommodating and welcoming approach to the school visits, he remarked: "Absolutely no problem mate, and if you ever need to come back for anything then the door is always open! Cheers pal!" This signalled a successful end to the fieldwork in which the researcher managed not only to *get in* to the fieldspace but also to *get on* with the participants (Cassell, 1988).

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the experiences, data handling and findings from a nine-week period of ethnographic visiting in a secondary school. Two episodes of data collection led to the formulation of this chapter. *Episode one* comprised a nine-week field observation period in a secondary school and *episode two* comprised a thematic analysis of an unstructured and conversational focus group with three secondary PE teachers, following the fieldwork. As an outcome of this researcher in residence phase, several overarching findings have been discovered:

1. Reflexivity and reflexive positionality are *ethnographic imperatives*. The idiosyncratic complexities associated with ethnographic visiting cannot be revealed in any depth without the self-examination of the researcher's values, attitudes and behaviours in the field. Being reflexive about researcher positionality is also of paramount importance. The researcher's social roles in the field become incredibly complex as a result of various social forces. On the one hand, researcher's roles can be pre-planned in advance whilst, on the other hand, they can be swiftly changed and moulded in response to the social complexities of the research setting. This impacts upon research identity, which is an ever-evolving phenomenon.
2. Secondary school PE seemingly offers a *narrow and restrictive curricular offer*. Against the backdrop of Chapter Four, in which primary school pupils confidently shared their meaning-making via multimodal forms of expression, the secondary PE landscape resembles the *arid, endless desert* of sport and health promotion.
3. Secondary PE teachers appear to display a fervent *resistance to literacy for learning in PE*. They expressed concerns that literacy is not their role, that they are too busy to incorporate literacy in an already-crowded curriculum and reduce literacy to the notion of key words.
4. PE teachers might unwittingly act as the *architects of their own downfall*. Whilst PE is continually perceived as a marginally important subject, is faced with increased reductions of allocated curriculum time, and while PE teachers are evidently frustrated at this hierarchical relationship, the PE community seems neither willing to change its pedagogical approach nor adopt reflexive methods. This oppositional demeanour towards change, collaboration and literacy, has seemingly "rendered the educational progress of PE trapped in a paradoxical stalemate" (Sprake & Palmer, 2018a, p. 58).

5. The PE community displays an *us and them* mentality. Anyone outside the inner PE circle, such as policy makers, school leaders and other subject specialists are seemingly viewed as *outsiders* who do not appreciate the educational vitality of PE.
6. There is a concerning *ambiguity about the value of PE*, which extends to the PE community itself. Far from the holistic PE outcomes claimed by the profession (Bailey, 2006; Bailey *et al.*, 2009; afPE, 2019; Gray *et al.*, 2021), teachers in this study cite enjoyment, sports participation and physical activity as the most valuable contribution that PE makes in pupils' learning.

In summary, therefore, the secondary PE teachers in this study appear somewhat closed-off to the notion of literacy for learning in PE. The narrow and restrictive PE offer continues to resemble the *busy, happy and good* ethos of the past and there remains serious confusion about the role and value of PE in schools. This is compounded by the *insider* community of PE, whereby those external to PE are painted as *outsiders* who fail to appreciate the value of PE. Ironically, however, it is perhaps through dialogue with these *outsiders* that the educational potential of PE might be harnessed and operationalised. Yet the PE community is seemingly reluctant to adopt reflexive approaches and recognise its own contribution to the 'PE problem'.

Publications to date using data accrued during Phases One, Two and Three

	Data Collection Strategies	Date	Published / Disseminated
Phase 1	Preface and ethnodrama - The 'issue' of homework in PE	2014-present	Sprake, A., Keeling, J., Lee, D., Pryle, J. & Palmer, C. (2020). 'Homework, in PE! Are you 'avin' a laugh?' Public Engagement and Performance Conference "Flesh Out – Connections". The Hepworth, Wakefield, Yorkshire. 20th -21st March.
	Pupil-voice tesearch as a teacher of PE - Resistance by close colleagues	2014	Sprake, A. & pupils. (2014). 'I've got my kit for PE Sir, but what else is missing?' Perceptions of Physical Education in a Secondary school. In: C, Palmer. (Ed.) <i>The sports monograph: critical perspectives on socio-cultural sport, coaching and Physical Education</i> , pp. 337-348. SSTO Publications, Preston, UK.
	Postal Surveys for MPhil phase (to staff and pupils who contributed and/or supported the Sports Monograph chapter in 2014).	2017	Sprake, A. & Palmer, C. (2018). Physical Education: the allegory of the classroom. <i>Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies</i> , 12(1), pp. 57-78.
	Interview 1 with a secondary teacher	2017	Sprake, A. & Palmer, C. (2018). Physical Education: the allegory of the classroom. <i>Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies</i> , 12(1), pp. 57-78.
	Interview 2 with a different secondary teacher	2017	Sprake, A. & Palmer, C. (2018). Physical Education: the allegory of the classroom. <i>Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies</i> , 12(1), pp. 57-78.
Phase 2	Focus Group 1 with two primary school teachers	2017	Sprake, A. & Palmer, C. (2018). Physical Education: the allegory of the classroom. <i>Journal of</i>

			<i>Qualitative Research in Sports Studies</i> , 12(1), pp. 57-78.
Focus Group 2 with two other primary school teachers	2018		Sprake, A. & Palmer, C. (2018). Physical Education: the allegory of the classroom. <i>Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies</i> , 12(1), pp. 57-78.
Focus Group 3 with three secondary PE teachers	2018		Sprake, A. & Palmer, C. (2018). Physical Education: the allegory of the classroom. <i>Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies</i> , 12(1), pp. 57-78.
Narrative Account of a Secondary School Literacy Coordinator	2018		Sprake, A. & Palmer, C. (2018). Physical Education: the allegory of the classroom. <i>Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies</i> , 12(1), pp. 57-78.
Ethnographic visiting in a Primary School - Researcher as teacher and complete participant - Observational Field notes	2019		Sprake, A. & Palmer, C. (2019). PE to Me: a concise message about the potential for learning in Physical Education. <i>Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies</i> , 13(1), pp. 57-60.
Trinity Times School Magazine (new section entitled Sport and Physical Education News, which was previously just 'sport news') - Pupils interviewed me as a researcher which was unsolicited	2019		Sprake, A., Palmer, C. & Grecic, D. (2020). <i>Physical Education: the allegory of the classroom</i> . Presentation at the 6th International Health and Wellbeing Research with Impact Conference. University of Central Lancashire, Preston, UK. Tuesday 18th February.

	Unstructured interview with a Primary School Head Teacher	2019	
	Celebration Assembly - presenting back the pupils' work to the whole school community	2019	
	Head Teachers' comments about Phase One and about the publication in the <i>Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies</i>	2019	<p>Sprake, A. & Palmer, C. (2019) PE to Me: a concise message about the potential for learning in Physical Education. <i>Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies</i>, 13(1), pp. 57-60.</p> <p>Sprake, A., Palmer, C. & Grecic, D. (2020). <i>Physical Education: the allegory of the classroom</i>. Presentation at the 6th International Health and Wellbeing Research with Impact Conference. University of Central Lancashire, Preston, UK. Tuesday 18th February.</p>
Phase 3	Ethnographic Visiting in a Secondary School	2019	Post PhD / Pending
	Focus Group 4 with three Secondary PE Teachers (unstructured and conversational due to ethnographic rapport)	2019	Post PhD / Pending

Chapter Six

Conclusions, Implications and Future Opportunities

Literacy is the primary mode of human communication, through which information, culture and knowledge are explicitly shared and preserved. Accordingly, literacy is the fundamental pillar upon which educational claims are made. Literacy is an essential component of the pedagogical mechanism of education, in which PE plays a part. However, the status of PE in school has been hindered by the PE community's reluctance to accept literacy as a vital conduit for meaning-making in the subject. Currently there is little information, culture or knowledge to speak of regarding pupils' learning in PE which is in part due to the lack of literacy in the subject. As a result, the heritage of learning in PE is somewhat underwhelming. The educational importance of literacy for learning in PE cannot be understated; just as literacy is synonymous with learning, learning and literacy should be synonymous with physical education.

Nevertheless, the PE community has become proficient at defending the place and value of the subject in schools, based on the faith that PE contributes to the holistic development of children and young people. The rise in examinable PE, for instance, gave rise to a new orthodoxy in PE which recognised the subject as both practical and academic. On the one hand, these defensive manoeuvres have been successful, as evidenced by the ongoing global commitment to PE in schools. However, due in part to the persistent scrutiny about the educative value of PE, the allocated time for the subject in the curriculum is becoming increasingly squeezed and its curriculum foothold is becoming less stable. It would appear that the current theoretical aspects of PE have not gone far enough to demonstrate the holistic educational value of PE. Moreover, the PE profession seems oblivious to its own contribution to the 'PE problem' and is thus failing to adopt reflexive approaches, both conceptually and practically. If the goal is to enhance the educational status of PE, and, by the same token, the status of *learning* in PE, then the time and energy spent justifying PE for 'what it currently is' might be better spent reflecting on 'what it could be'.

The iconoclastic and heterodox nature of this inquiry has exposed both a conceptual and practical gap between rhetoric and reality. That is, by scrutinising the cherished beliefs and practices relating to the claimed educational contribution of PE, and simultaneously offering an unorthodox pedagogical alternative underpinned by literacy, this inquiry revealed

that the holistic educational claims made in the name of PE are, at best, overstated and, at worst, non-existent. The heresy of being uncommitted to the collective ideological dogma of PE will likely go against the grain. Nevertheless, the initial research idea was formulated with the assertion that PE is, in fact, a goldmine of untapped learning potential and educational expression, and this inquiry has taken steps to capitalize on the subject's holistic educational potential. Drawing upon a range of qualitative data collection strategies, this study has investigated the educational rhetoric of physical education and, in three successive phases, explored the underutilised value of literacy for learning in PE.

Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to investigate the potential for physical education to integrate literacy for learning, and to amalgamate the subject's physical and intellectual opportunities, so as to fulfil its holistic educational promise. To achieve this, three research aims were designed, each with a corresponding question to guide the researcher through each phase of the study. This section weaves together the findings and threads from Phases One, Two and Three in this study, to demonstrate how the research aims and their corresponding questions have been achieved and addressed. The conclusions have implications for both for the theoretical and practical domains of PE and, as a result, recommendations are also provided. The conclusions, implications and recommendations for each research aim and corresponding question will now be discussed and, although they are presented as distinct areas, they do of course have overlapping and interdependent dimensions.

Aim 1: To investigate the learning culture and educational status of Physical Education, against the backdrop of other curriculum areas. **Research Question 1:** What is the state and status of PE within in the educational landscape?

The state and status of physical education is in turmoil. The findings in this study corroborate existing literature which characterises PE as having a low status in schools (Armour & Jones, 1998; Hardman & Green, 2011; Ozolinš & Stolz, 2013), particularly in relation to other subjects (Hendry, 1975; Bleazby, 2015). This can be evidenced across all three phases of this study. In Phase One, for instance, the reflexive ethnodrama illustrates the frustration of one PE teacher about always being 'bottom of the pile', a sentiment echoed by both Miss Hayes and Mr Phillips – PE teachers in this study – who both described the general perception that PE is not as valuable as other subjects and bemoaned the lack of curriculum

time given to the subject. The low status of PE was also revealed in Phase Two of this study. For instance, in a focus group with three PE teachers, Mr Shore described the invisibility of PE in some schools and how the subject has “taken a bit of a dive” in recent years. Similarly, during a focus group with two primary school teachers, Mrs Slater explained that physical education “can get a rough deal as a result of other subjects”, which suggests that the ‘PE problem’ exists in both primary and secondary education.

In Phase Three, during the observational research, one teacher complained that “PE is not seen as an educational priority”. A subsequent focus group with three teachers of secondary PE revealed the same sentiment. For instance, Mr Dixon criticised the “very naïve leaders who see PE as a lesser subject” and how they are ignorant of the value of PE due to not being “PE people”.

As for the learning culture of PE, however, there are signs that the PE community do not take seriously their educative role. For instance, one teacher surveyed in Phase One remarked: “it comes down to a lack of creativity and laziness and most PE teachers take the easy option”. In addition, during the observational fieldwork in Phase Three, several PE teachers joked about the notion of planning lessons in the subject, with one teacher stating: “I haven’t planned like that since I was an NQT!” This demonstrates that PE teachers can in some cases be the architects of their own downfall. Furthermore, in Phase Two, Miss Leach – the literacy coordinator – criticised the PE department for their indifference shown toward whole-school literacy initiatives. The secondary PE teachers in this study also displayed strong resistance to the notion of literacy for learning in PE. They viewed literacy as either a burden on their workload – feeling too busy to integrate literacy with PE – or as the responsibility of other colleagues in the school. In stark contrast, the primary teachers in this study were fully supportive of literacy for learning in PE.

Consequently, this study has exposed a chasm between primary and secondary teachers’ attitudes toward literacy for learning in PE. In fact, an additional episode of data collection was proposed for this study, which would involve the researcher reconnecting with the Year 6 pupils who produced the work in Chapter 4. Having transitioned to Year 7, to the high school where Miss Hayes – the secondary teacher interviewed in Chapter 3 – teaches, those pupils could have made yet another valuable contribution to the study by reflecting on the process a year later and also discussing how it compares with their ‘current’ PE experiences

in high school. However, this request was flatly rejected by a school representative, stating: “this would be an unnecessary task to ask the children to do on top of schoolwork”.

The implications of these findings are that current pedagogical practices in PE offer more of the same (Kirk, 2011), precisely at a time when a conceptual shift in PE is needed most. The secondary PE teachers’ resistance to change indicates an ignorance of the pedagogical possibilities in PE which serves to suppress the holistic educational potential of the subject. Literacy for learning offers a powerful pedagogical opportunity for PE, through which a pedagogy of integration might be achieved, but this has been grossly overlooked by the PE community thus far. Therefore, PE is not the holistic subject it purports to be. As part of a comprehensive learning experience in PE, literacy – as a shared currency for communication and understanding – is a vital and underutilised pedagogical tool.

It is recommended therefore that the PE profession adopts literacy as a conduit for meaning-making in physical education. Doing so would simultaneously enhance the educational status of PE, provide PE teachers with a stronger and more legitimised professional identity in schools, and enable the subject to fulfil its holistic educational promises, the latter of which will now be discussed in relation to Research Aim 2.

Aim 2: To investigate ways in which the claimed holistic educational outcomes made in the name of Physical Education might be facilitated, experienced, and evidenced in schools.

Research Question 2: How might the claimed holistic outcomes of PE be facilitated, experienced and evidenced in schools?

The notion that physical education contributes to the holistic development of children and young people is frequently proclaimed in existing PE literature (Bailey, 2006; Bailey *et al*, 2009; afPE, 2019; Gray *et al*, 2021). The teachers in this study also reflect this belief. For instance, in Phase One, Miss Hayes stated: “I think some schools underestimate the importance of PE in developing the whole student” and, in Phase Two, Mrs Carter insisted that PE is “great for the development of the whole child.” However, based on the findings of this inquiry, these stated outcomes are more like a set of rhetorical claims as opposed to holistic pedagogical realities. Put another way, the holistic educational promise of PE is not facilitated in practice.

Evidence of this can be found across all three phases of this study. For instance, the reflexive ethnodrama in Phase One illustrates how an attempt by the researcher – then a PE teacher – to integrate literacy and homework with physical education was attacked and ridiculed by a member of his own PE department. This is indicative of the narrow and restrictive practices common in physical education. In Phase Two, Emily – a Year 6 pupil – reflected on her experience of amalgamating the physical with the intellectual in PE: “I’ve never done PE like this before. It’s always been active, active, active, where here we actually *think* about why we are active and things like that.” Another Year 6 pupil, Lucy, explained how much she enjoyed making the connection: “It’s fun! It’s different because we usually just do running, like running laps and stuff like that, but actually *thinking* more about PE and sport, it’s much bigger than it seems.” In Phase Three, the narrow and restrictive curriculum offer in PE was uncovered during the observational fieldwork, in particular the dominance of performance pedagogy, associated with skill development for a narrow selection of specific sports.

Nevertheless, in Phase Two, the primary school was highly receptive to exploring alternative pedagogical approaches to evidence holistic learning in PE. As a result, the pupils in this study demonstrated their learning in PE through a wide variety of communicative modes, such as literacy tasks using poetry and letter-writing, composing music using lyrics, melody and rhythm, courtroom roleplay using groupwork and individual roles, and creating artwork in the form of painting, all while using the physicality of learning in PE and sport as the stimulus for learning. This demonstrates how the claimed holistic outcomes of PE be facilitated, experienced and evidenced in schools. However, this ‘success story’ does not reflect PE practice generally and, when it comes to holistic development in PE, there is still much to be desired.

Learning is fundamental to a subject’s position in school. The status of learning and literacy in PE is highly questionable, but the disconnect between the holistic educational claims and the everyday reality of PE is undeniable. The implications of this is that the status quo in PE acts as a major contributor to the ‘PE problem’ – that is, if the status of learning and literacy is low in PE, then it seems uncontroversial that the subject occupies a low curricular position in terms of educational priorities. PE could continue to offer more of the same (Kirk, 2011) but doing so would only prolong and exacerbate the scrutiny of the subject in terms of learning (Sprake & Walker, 2015).

A recommendation therefore is that, in order to redress the incongruence between rhetoric and reality, PE must seek to facilitate an *integrative pedagogy of plurality*, denoting a genuine commitment to the stated holistic educational claims in practice. PE teachers should seek to collaborate with other subject teachers to integrate their learning stimuli and produce tangible evidence of learning. One way in which teachers can achieve this, as evidenced in this study, is by integrating literacy with PE. The next section will discuss this in relation to Aim 3.

Aim 3: To investigate the potential value of literacy for learning in Physical Education.

Research Question 3: What is the value of literacy for learning in PE, for pupils to make meaning from their experiences?

Literacy is without question the cornerstone upon which modern society depends. It is the foundational conduit for meaning-making and for the communication of learning. The acquisition and usage of symbolic competence – or *literacy* – is a fundamental aim of education because the purposeful communication of meaning can only be achieved through a symbolic mode (Gross, 1974). Thus, literacy is the fundamental currency by which all subjects, aside from PE, trade and exchange their knowledge. Until now, PE has only been window-shopping (Palmer, 2014) but, as this study has demonstrated, literacy can act as the bridge between the *processes* and *products* of learning – that is, literacy is the mode through which pupils can articulate their learning in PE.

The value of literacy for learning in PE can be evidenced across all three phases of this study. For instance, while responding to the survey in Phase One, one pupil reflected on the value of connecting PE with literacy, stating: “I was pleased because I enjoy PE and wanted a way to connect it to different topics of learning.” Teachers also responded in favour of literacy in PE. For instance, one teacher remarked: “it would only add to the value of PE as it provides a stimulus and the opportunity to add some theoretical content where possible – sometimes this is lost in a practical setting”. Another teacher insisted: “There are no strong arguments to suggest that literacy cannot be integrated into PE.”

In Phase Two, literacy was shown to add significant value to PE by positively impacting upon the subject in three fundamental ways. Firstly, in the case of the primary

school, literacy has enhanced the status of PE, both within and beyond the school community. This is evidenced by the development of a newly-established Sport and PE News section in the school magazine. This magazine showcases the school's achievements and the pupils' work across the curriculum and is provided to parents and caregivers. Prior to this research, there was no mention of physical education in the magazine as there were no tangible learning products to speak of. Furthermore, following the study, the Head Teacher requested that the PE-based literacy outcomes be included in the School Governor's Reports. Again, this demonstrates an increasing appreciation for PE as an important contributor to a child's education. Moreover, the entire school, comprising all staff and pupils, attended a celebration assembly to recognise the innovations in, and broadening of, PE outcomes in the school. As a consequence, it is clear that literacy can raise the profile and enhance the status of physical education in school.

Secondly, literacy has enhanced the learning experiences of pupils in PE, as evidenced by the volume of tangible learning products developed by the pupils. The pupils in this study were enthused by – not resistant to – the widening of pedagogical practice in the subject. In fact, they seized upon the opportunity to engage in PE-based literacy, producing various poems, stories, artworks, music and roleplays. What's more, the pupils were highly receptive to literacy-based homework tasks in PE, as evidenced by one pupil in class: "Mr Sprake, I wrote *three sides* of paper for my 'PE and Me' story!" For many pupils, these fresh learning opportunities came as a welcome change from traditional PE. For instance, Adam – a Year 6 pupil – remarked: "I like it, because instead of wasting our time running up and down a field for no reason, and with no apparent goal...instead we are thinking about things." Whether discussing perseverance in sport, performance enhancing drugs or matters of social justice, the pupils capitalised on the opportunities to communicate through literacy, and by doing so they developed a deeper, more holistic connection with the subject. For instance, Theo – a Year 5 pupil – commented: "I like the Art, because you can show what you're thinking about PE and sport."

Thirdly, for the PE subject specialists in the primary school, literacy has invigorated their sense of professional identity. By contributing to a curriculum innovation and by sharing the pupils' classwork and homework across the school, the PE teachers have developed a noticeable sense of pride in their subject. For instance, reflecting on the alternative approaches to learning in PE, Mrs Carter remarked: "The kids have been loving these homework tasks

and it just shows by the amount of pupils who are actually doing the work!” Those teachers who embrace literacy as a feature of PE can no doubt use it to their advantage, as both the staff and pupils who have experienced literacy in PE can now attest to its educative value. Moreover, after one of the poems written by the pupils – entitled *PE to Me* – was published in the *Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies* (see Sprake & Palmer, 2019) the Head Teacher remarked: “It has been enlightening to see the quality of the children’s learning with PE as the driver”. She went further to state:

The PE context is a platform where children are accustomed to active learning with greater opportunity to directly feel and physically experience – a context which seemed to encourage the children to feel less inhibited in their responses. This was exemplified by the children when they were exploring the theme of Justice where their ability to philosophise and respond through a variety of media demonstrated a significant depth of understanding.

The use of literacy for learning in physical education has demonstrated how the subject’s holistic, but hitherto invisible learning claims can be facilitated and evidenced by producing tangible learning products born of the physicality of experience. In Phase Three, however, data was accrued entirely in the secondary school setting and, incidentally, there was little in the way of literacy for learning in PE, aside from in GCSE theory lessons. One example, however, was in the BTEC Dance class – though it is worthy of note that this is not classed as *physical education*. Pupils were given visual stimuli and were tasked with creating a collaborative dance routine that reflected a physical manifestation of their response to the stimulus. The pupils were encouraged to tell stories through their embodied actions, with intellectual explorations of each, in order to consolidate their learning. Pertinently, the pupils were required to use a portfolio in which they could reflect – using literacy – upon the physicality of learning and explain the decision-making process behind their embodied actions. However, this level of intellectual reasoning was not afforded to pupils in *physical education*.

These findings have significant implications for the PE profession. The learning evidence produced by the pupils in this study, particularly those in Phase Two, are testament to the learning power of the amalgamation of PE and literacy. In fact, many of the practices instilled during Phase Two have been sustained by the primary school. As a result, literacy could be the lifeboat on which PE is rescued, but PE teachers first need to embrace literacy as a valuable pedagogical medium. Addressing the ‘PE problem’ from within will require teachers to embrace literacy for learning and, in doing so, recognise that this would not denote

a conceptual abandonment of their cherished beliefs. On the contrary, it would serve to bring about evidence of the holistic development claimed in the name of PE and enhance the educational state and status of the subject.

Given that literacy can enhance the profile and status of physical education in school, it is now vital that the PE profession considers adopting these fresh pedagogical insights as a means of broadening the educational outcomes of PE. Failure to do so will likely result in physical education continuing its current holding pattern – that is, the subject will continue to go round in circles without landing on solid educational ground. To enhance the status of physical education in schools, it is recommended here that the PE profession should utilise literacy as a conduit for pupils’ meaning-making and learning expression. As an integrated part of the subject, literacy would significantly bolster the state and status of PE in schools and, far from encroaching on the physicality of learning, literacy would serve to illuminate the holistic learning claims made by and for PE in schools.

Furthermore, it is recommended that pupils should be offered broad and holistic experiences in PE, similar those facilitated in this study. Evidence from the pupil focus groups, their artwork and literacy-based learning products demonstrates their willingness and excitement for alternative learning opportunities in PE. That the pupils welcomed literacy in PE demonstrates their openness to the plethora of requests that PE could make in pursuit of holistic educational outcomes. As shown in the pupils’ poetry, for instance, learners are highly receptive to a broad range of educational experiences in the name of physical education. By implication, it is not the pupils who are resistant to change. Rather, it is the PE teachers – specifically at the secondary school level – that obstruct the holistic education that PE can facilitate. The secondary PE teachers in this study seemed unwilling or unable to facilitate learning beyond traditional notions of PE, namely the development of sports skills. This narrow and restrictive approach not only stifles the claimed holistic outcomes of PE, but it denies pupils the experiential opportunities promised of a balanced physical education, leading to some pupils feeling unsuccessful and alienated.

In stark contrast to this, however, the primary teachers in this study demonstrated a child-centred, not subject-centric approach and, by broadening the outcomes of PE in their school, the primary teachers experienced an increased professional standing within the school community. It is therefore the educational duty of PE teachers at all levels to facilitate

meaning-making through an integrative pedagogy of plurality, and teachers of secondary PE should take a leaf out of the primary teachers' book. This broadening of educational outcomes also produces a more inclusive learning experience for the pupils, as it enables all pupils to explore and utilise their talents in meaningful ways.

Moreover, it is recommended that literacy for learning be integrated into Initial Teacher Training programmes, to encourage trainee teachers to reflect on and refine their evolving practice and ideologies so as to facilitate these holistic learning experiences when they enter the profession. Current teachers would also benefit from self-examination, reflecting on the goals of education and thus the educational purpose of physical education. Utilising literacy for learning in PE would serve to increase the status of reasoning in the subject, enhance the status of PE in the school community, and strengthen PE teachers' professional identities at all levels. The opportunities have been laid out in this research, and only time will tell if PE teachers take notice.

This study makes a valuable and unique contribution to the body of knowledge in PE and, it is hoped, to the philosophies and practices of PE teachers. Calling for a conceptual recalibration of physical education, it is recommended that:

1. The PE community should utilise literacy to empower and broaden student learning in the subject, whereby pupils could demonstrate their holistic development in PE.
2. PE teachers and school departments should alter their expectations, both of themselves and of their subject, to fully realise the academic potential of physical education.
3. The Department for Education, Ofsted and School Leadership Teams should make a genuine commitment to promoting literacy for learning in physical education.
4. Initial Teacher Training should integrate literacy for learning as part of a trainee PE teacher's professional development.
5. PE teachers should create opportunities for literacy as part of their professional duties.
6. PE teachers should contend with the 'PE problem' from within and adopt reflexive approaches to the subject's future development.
7. PE teachers should appreciate literacy as a pedagogical asset to their subject, not an inconvenient obligation.

Research Limitations

All research methodologies and associated methods have strengths and limitations. Qualitative research in educational settings is always challenging due to the complex and dynamic nature of the school environment. The researcher, by definition, is on the periphery of the school culture, so it is important to establish professional rapport in order to undertake ethnographic visiting. The researcher recognises the limitations of this study, some of which could be addressed in future research opportunities presented below.

- a) Researcher interpretations: Due to the interpretive nature of this study, the researcher's personal circumstances could be perceived as a limitation. As a research instrument, that is, the researcher was close to, and had prior experience with, the PE world which will have impacted upon the research experiences, interpretations and derived theory. It is acknowledged therefore that this study provides only a partial glimpse of what 'data' the PE world has to offer. Nevertheless, through a commitment to reflexivity the researcher has sought to provide transparency throughout the project in order to provide as close to a transparent window as possible into his interpretations.
- b) Geographical location and generalisability: The data collection activities for this inquiry took place in the North West of England, meaning that the findings are limited to some degree by geographical location. Consequently, the findings of this inquiry cannot, nor did it intend to, make generalisable claims to knowledge. Researchers can never see everything but, through a combination of reflective accounts and systematic inquiry, this study has offered a transparent portrayal of the learning culture of PE.
- c) The researcher's role: The researcher was fortuitous in that he developed ethnographic rapport with both the primary and secondary school staff, as much of the data was collected in these settings. It is recognised however that during the fieldwork the researcher's role meandered in response to the circumstantial changes in the school settings. This may have led to missed observations and uncaptured data. Nevertheless, successful ethnography relies on the researcher's capacity for getting inside the fabric of the phenomenon under investigation and, as a result, such methodological flexibility is an essential feature of ethnographic visiting.
- d) Volume of data: Like many qualitative inquiries, this study yielded large volumes of qualitative data which proved challenging, both in terms of data management and analysis. However, the interpretive framework for thematic analysis provided a

systematic mode of analysis which enabled the researcher to follow a logical and analytical sequence in order to generate the research findings.

Future Research Opportunities

Future research investigating literacy for learning in PE is needed to enhance the holistic educational potential of PE in school. Literacy for learning in PE offers new and fresh research opportunities in PE, with a transnational focus – that is, literacy for learning in PE offers the international PE community a new branch of research exploring how literacy can enhance, not hinder, the educational value of PE. There are various opportunities for future research exploring the place of learning and literacy in PE. For instance, research could:

- a) Investigate the role and value of literacy for learning in PE, with an explicit focus on either the primary or secondary sector.
- b) Investigate literacy for learning in PE from a sociological perspective (e.g., socioeconomic factors, cultural differences, race and ethnicity, disability, sex and gender and so on)
- c) Examine the use of PE-specific disciplinary literacy in physical education contexts.
- d) Use pupil voice to investigate the transition period between primary school – in which literacy is used in PE – and secondary school, where literacy seems like an afterthought in PE.
- e) Adopt various methodological approaches in exploring the place of learning and literacy in physical education.

A Final Comment

Literacy is a vital conduit for learning and an invaluable vehicle for producing evidence of meaning-making in PE. Pedagogical approaches underpinned by literacy can help to solve the ‘PE problem’ from within. The question of whether the PE community is ready and willing to contend with this notion remains to be seen.

PE is an academic enterprise as it occupies a status of being a ‘core subject’ in the current National Curriculum and has been a cornerstone of school-based learning experiences for well over 100 years. It is generally accepted that PE teachers undergo an academic degree in order to teach the subject, yet once they become qualified and employed to fulfil this duty, they rarely facilitate any academic learning for their pupils (and certainly little evidence of

such learning). Therefore, PE is currently not the academic subject it could be. It is perhaps time for the PE profession to stop with the self-justificatory proclamations and to start questioning the first principles of education and thus the *educational* purpose of physical education. If literacy is important in education – which it is – and if PE is an important part of education – which it claims to be – then literacy is invaluable for physical education. Some logical arguments appear to bring the ‘PE problem’ into sharp focus:

Premise 1: If a subject is educationally valuable, it must provide evidence of learning.

Premise 2: PE does not currently provide evidence of learning.

Deduction from 1 and 2: PE is not currently educationally valuable.

Premise 1: If learning is communicated through literacy, then literacy is paramount in learning.

Premise 2: PE does not use literacy.

Deduction from 1 and 2: Therefore, PE is not paramount in learning.

Premise 1: If PE is holistically educative, it must use literacy.

Premise 2: PE does not use literacy.

Deduction from 1 and 2: PE is not holistically educative.

Literacy, as a mode of communicating learning in PE, is a pedagogical blind-spot in the PE profession. The writing is on the wall, so to speak, but it is up to the PE community whether it wants to read it and venture out of the cave.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Extract from an interview with Mr Phillips (pseudonym)

Mr Phillips: an interview with a Teacher of Secondary PE.

Interviewer: Andy Sprake: University of Central Lancashire asprake@uclan.ac.uk

Interviewee: Mr Phillips

Date: Tuesday 11th April 2017 (8am – duration 43 minutes 04 seconds)

Location: Starbucks Coffee Shop (Upstairs)

Enquiry: The Place of Learning in Physical Education

Schedule: 6 questions with prompts. Also supplied: information sheet and consent forms

Time within audio file	Full Transcript of interview presented as verbatim: utterances, questions and responses.	Actions, reactions, disturbances and/or researcher notes that have Methodology Implications	Initial coding of responses: themes emerging, trends and inferences that have Study Implications
10s	<p>Important Note: SP had already begun talking about PE before the interview had ‘officially’ started. I asked him if he would be happy for me to “hit record” and he said...</p> <p>SP: Of course. I’ve always thought that once you’ve got a job, you’re sort of into teaching and you can work your way up but now I don’t know.</p> <p>I’ve got a second in department position this year and I’m loving it but the <i>pressure</i>, it’s an outstanding school, but the pressure of it is ridiculous. I’ve never felt anything like it. I’m not saying I don’t like it and I’m not saying it’s not good for me, but the <i>difference</i> between this and the last two schools that I’ve worked at.</p>	<p>SP shook his head to emphasise the pressure within his job role</p>	<p>Enjoying the responsibility – struggling with the pressure</p>
48s	<p>SP: My first school, where I did my NQT year, I worked there for two years and I loved it. The PE department got 100% A*-C and the head teacher was like ‘I can’t really ask for more than that’ and they did it for four or five years.</p> <p>So the PE department was sort of untouched and you just kind of taught your lessons, you enjoyed it, you did the extra-curricular, put in all the hours but in terms of pressure, there wasn’t really much there because we were doing well and we had good kids.</p>		<p>SP seemingly enjoyed the sense of ‘trust’ at his previous school. The notion that the department was ‘untouched’ just because it was doing well statistically is perhaps concerning.</p>
	<p>SP: I then went to [redacted] which was my second school and my third year, and I wasn’t on the GCSE I was just teaching BTEC which <i>irritated</i> me. They were a really weird and unique department and the school is now getting</p>	<p>SP and I worked in a similar area several years ago. This small knit suggestion has methodological implication.</p>	<p>SP irritated about not teaching GCSE PE, perhaps feeling undervalued or un-trusted.</p>

This interview was concerned with exploring SP's views on the role of PE, how learning is evidenced in PE and the perception of status. This was another very interesting interview in which the interviewee, SP, seemingly had little reservations about elaborating on his responses without the need for prompting. The notion of PE-for-sport was a similarity from my previous interview with KH a little over a week ago. A significant learning curve for me in this interview was to explore the issue of 'missed data' or 'post-interview data' as the discussion naturally continued once the official interview had ended. Interestingly, SP's language did change somewhat after the record button had stopped. For example, when discussing the importance of building relationships with pupils, he described some, perhaps more difficult pupils, as "little shits" which certainly did not come through on the recorded interview. This suggested a loosening of social etiquette once the interview had finished.

Summary of themes:

- Interestingly, SP hinted towards a sense of 'resistance' faced when trying to bring about change within a PE department.
- SP signals similar beliefs about PE in that the role of KS3 and KS4 PE are different, that PE is a site for sport-introduction
- Sense of reluctance to make changes in PE
- The issue of PE being about sport and as a sports introduction tool
- Frustration at exam season costing PE it's facilities
- Hierarchy of staff whereby the staff in senior positions do not pull their weight, setting a poor example
- The notion of a bad culture in PE
- Curricular-Hegemony in that PE isn't view as important

Setting - Starbucks Coffee Shop was agreed as the location for the interview, this was suggested by SP and agreed by AS in advance of the interview. Whilst a public place has numerous benefits (natural setting / comfort for the interviewee) it also has potential downsides, which I discovered in this interview (music being played was fairly loud and potentially distracting / members of the public were not far away which could have impacted upon the interview, i.e. the public space is unpredictable and uncontrolled).

I enjoyed the interview and consciously tried to limit my suggestive responses in an effort to talk less and listen more, based on my previous interview with KH. I manipulated the setting prior to SP's arrival so that he would have the sofa in the café and I would have the standard chair. This was in an effort to maximise SP's comfort and create a relaxed environment in which he would hopefully not feel the pressure of *being interviewed*. What I learned through this interview process is the importance of prepping 'linking' questions to previous interviews. When I related back to my previous interview, my questioning wasn't as clear as I'd hoped and I think it threw SP off track a little. SP seemed very relaxed, legs crossed, coffee in hand and speaking what seemed to be freely and openly about his experiences teaching PE. In fact, upon his arrival, he began speaking so I just hit the record button with his permission. Hence why the opening minutes of the interview is purely SP with no questioning/guidance on my part.

Appendix 2: A template for field observations

PhD Fieldnotes

The Place of Learning and Literacy in Physical Education

Date:	Class:	Topic:	Location:
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General Observations:	Researcher Role / Methodology Notes:

Opportunities for Learning & Literacy?	How could this be achieved?