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WELCOME FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the fourth volume of the Birmingham City University (BCU) Education Journal Magazine (EJM) and the third and final edition of this academic year. This edition contains 14 articles from a variety of sources, ranging from students, ex-students, academics and teaching professionals.

In our first chapter, enquiry and support within the partnership, Gabriel Barnwell-Edinboro explores how sleep quality and sleep duration impacts trainee PE teachers ability to teach. Following this article is an interesting article from Lucy Wheeler, who analyses methods of adaption that are used in a secondary PE specialist Education school setting. Isobel Wardle follows up with an exploration of the relationship of PE for 2015-2020 school leavers, looking into their physical activity decisions now. Finishing this chapter is Elodie Timms, who uses autoethnography to reflect upon a critical incident and its influence on Elodie's teacher identity.

In our second chapter, current enquiry and practice, Francesca Clark starts us off with a reflective analysis of modern day teaching practice in a SEND setting using aspects of Mezirow's transformation theory. Staying within the SEND theme, Tarandeep Malhi writes around SEND in PE, looking into Ofsted inspector guidance. Our third article in this chapter comes from a member of our peer review team, Chris Bolton, who writes of creating schools of recovery, a two-year collaborative Theatre-in-Education project. Next up, Stacy Johnson examines the influence of storytelling, particularly those stories that manifest within the unconscious minds of educators and become internal frames of reference. Finishing the chapter, we have Safa Riaz and Dr Zoe Lewis, who write of encouraging children's personal, social and emotional development through outdoor play.

In our third and final chapter, we have a very exciting first, an educational comic, produced by Kevin Hoffin. Following this article, is Aida Thompson, giving us a qualitative narrative study on commuter students. Jessica Wythe follows, writing of balancing motherhood, academia and teaching. We are then blessed to have an article from an international author, Ishita Bhattacharjee, who offers an article around the use of questioning in mathematics. We return to Tarandeep Malhi, who looks into inclusive pathways in PE, and remaining in PE, Reece Cropley gives us a somewhat biographical journey on becoming a qualified PE teacher with a club foot. To close the edition, Imran Mogra gives us a critique of the 2024 RE Ofsted Subject Report.

I hope you enjoy this edition.

Grant Huddleston

Our Aim

Our aim is to help support practice across our partnership schools and promote enquiry and research. We welcome contributions from students, teachers and academics who wish to make a positive difference to teaching and learning and believe they could help develop and support other's practice. We aim to support new and experienced writers to submit their work so that we share a variety of perspectives.

Our Goals

- Showcase the excellent work our BCU Students produce
- Allow an opportunity for those interested to publish their work to promote positive development and reflection across our partnership schools
- Promote confidence and competence to write for an education publication
- Promote interest towards research and enquiry

CONTENTS

Enquiry and Support within the Partnership

- 4 Does sleep quality and sleep duration have a perceived impact on trainee PE teacher's ability to teach whilst on school placement?
Gabriel Barnwell-Edinboro
- 11 An analysis of the methods of adaptation used in Secondary Physical Education
Lucy Wheeler
- 19 Exploring the relationship of the Physical Education curriculum of 2015–2020 school leavers, and the physical activities that they complete now
Isobel Wardle
- 27 The use of autoethnography in the reflection of a critical incident and its influence on my teacher identity during the completion of a PGCE in Secondary Education with QTS
Elodie Timms

Current Enquiry and Practice

- 32 A reflective analysis of modern-day teaching practice in a SEND setting using aspects of Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory
Francesca Clark
- 35 SEND Physical Education: The Ofsted Inspector Guidance for Secondary PE verses the SEND Code of Practice
Tarandeep Malhi
- 39 Creating Schools of Recovery
Chris Bolton
- 45 "The stories we tell"
Stacey Johnson
- 48 Encouraging Children's Personal, Social and Emotional Development through Outdoor Play
Safa Riaz and Dr Zoe Lewis

Individual Enquiry and Scholarship

- 52 Educomix: towards a critical, HE-ready comics-based pedagogy
Kevin Hoffin
- 54 A qualitative narrative study of commuter students – a pilot study
Aida Thompson
- 57 Balancing Motherhood, Academia, and Teaching: A Doctoral Student's Journey
Jessica Wythe
- 62 Igniting Inquiry: A Journey from Basic Questions to Deeper Understanding. A Case Study in a Seventh-Grade Classroom in Mathematics
Ishita Bhattacharjee
- 64 Inclusive Pathways: Perspectives of Students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities in Physical Education
Tarandeep Malhi
- 69 The Journey towards becoming a Physical Education Teacher with a Club Foot
Reece Cropley
- 72 The Ofsted RE Subject Report 2024: Who is ready to take the deep dive?
Imran Mogra

How to contribute

Anybody wishing to contribute an article for consideration should email their draft to BCUEJM@bcu.ac.uk

You do not need to decide which chapter you wish your article to appear, but you can indicate this if you wish. Please ensure you follow the house style. Final decisions on publication are made by the editorial board. You can submit as many articles as you wish. If the editorial team have received a large number of contributions, your article may be held for later editions.

House style

When submitting an article for consideration, please aim to follow the subsequent house style:

- Documents must be submitted in Word in font Calibri, size 11, with 1.5 line spacing.
- Include your full name and role/school – this will appear under the title.
- Any web links given should be accessible by the reader and not sit behind passwords or paywalls.
- Word count is expected to be 500 to 3000 words "all in" (including references lists).
- Acronyms and abbreviations must be written in full the first time they are used in each article; thereafter the abbreviation may be used, e.g. "The special educational needs and disability co-ordinator (SENDCO) is ..."
- UK English should be used, e.g. "...ise" endings instead of "...ize"
- Numbers one to ten written in full; thereafter numerical (e.g. 28 pupils aged nine completed... etc.)
- Double speech marks for direct speech or quotes; otherwise single speech marks
- Please use the Harvard referencing system (where applicable – we can support with this if necessary).

Please note that the editorial team will amend the final copy to suit our house style. You will receive a copy back if any major changes have been made for you to proofread.

RESEARCH PAPERS

ENQUIRY AND SUPPORT WITHIN THE PARTNERSHIP

Does sleep quality and sleep duration have a perceived impact on trainee PE teacher's ability to teach whilst on school placement?

Gabriel Barnwell-Edinboro – Yr3 BA/BSc Secondary Physical Education with QTS, Birmingham City University

Introduction

This study looks at out how sleep affects the human body and mind, specifically through the eyes of undergraduate trainee physical education (PE) teachers. With sleep being viewed as an essential component of health (Colten & Altevogt, 2006), this study explores whether sleep quality and duration could have an impact on teaching performance for current trainees on teaching placement. To determine this, I gathered evidence looking at sleep duration before and after placement, positive and negative factors before sleeping and direct questioning related to my enquiry title. I intended to carry out this research as I felt there was a lack of similar literature out there already. Many articles are available discussing sleep and the importance of it, but little is available highlighting the significance for teachers, more specifically trainees. Through my study I intend to answer the following three questions, which can be seen below:

Research Questions

- 1 Does sleep duration differ before and after placement days in school for trainee PE teachers
- 2 What factors impact the quality of their sleep?
- 3 Do trainee PE teachers believe that sleep impacts their ability to teach?

Literature Review

The importance of sleep

Sleep is one of the basic physiological processes for human survival. Both sleep quantity and sleep quality are fundamental components of sleep (Kohyama, 2021). Bin, (2016) states that for adults, 7-8 hours of sleep is considered "normal" and is important in promoting optimal health (Watson et al., 2015). Sleeping less than 7 hours per night on a regular basis can result in weight gain and obesity, diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, stroke, and impaired immune function (Watson et al., 2015). On the other hand, Watson et al., (2015) states that sleeping more than 9 hours regularly for young adults, individuals recovering from sleep debt or illness maybe appropriate but for others it is uncertain whether sleeping more than 9 hours per night is associated with health risks. Along with diet and exercise, sleep is considered one of the three basic pillars of health and plays a huge role in facilitating mental wellbeing (Clement-Carbonell, 2021). Poor sleep quality is related to negative psychological consequences such as anxiety, depression, aggression and altered cognitive functioning (Alvaro et al., 2013). Team, (2023) carried out a survey in 2023, involving 8,000 UK adults that questioned their sleep quality and quantity.

The intention of a survey is to get a representative image

about a number of variables or statements within a certain target group or population (Dobronte, 2020). In this case, 8000 people is a good sample size and this is evident in quantitative data displayed. It is important to use a correct sample size. When a sample is too big, this will lead to unnecessary waste of money and time. On the other hand, when it's too small, results will not be statistically significant, and will not come to a reliable conclusion (Dobronte, 2020). Results shown that Brits are only getting 5.91 hours of sleep a night, this is down from 6.11 in 2022 and 6.19 in 2021. Further data revealed that 36% of those who participated feel that their sleep is good with the remaining 64% stating that their sleep is not of a good quality. What's relevant amongst this data is that Education is included within the industries where mental health is most affected by poor sleep (55%). To understand the significance of this, I will be looking at why this maybe the case in sub heading three "Teachers and sleep". From the literature above, it is evident that poor sleep can result in a decline in health both physically and mentally with the impacts of this affecting important factors of life such as occupation.

Factors that impact sleep

• Mobile phones: Negative factor

As humans we spend one third of our lives asleep (Webb & Friel, 1970). Stated previously, we know that sleep plays an important role in cognitive and physical functions (Curcio et al., 2006). As you get older, sleep timing can change and going to bed earlier can become a part of the daily routine (Evans et al., 2021). Dinic, (2022) carried out research in 2022 analysing the practices and patterns of Britons when it comes to sleep. Data revealed that 44% of Brits say that they consider themselves as night owls, compared to 33% who say they are early risers. Other data revealed that Britons aged 16-24 (39%) are more likely than those aged 25-59 (28%) and those aged 60 and over (20%) to report going to bed at different times. A Significant part of this data shown that those aged 60 and older (51%) are more likely than everyone else (35-38%) to be satisfied with the amount of sleep they get. Although there is clear quantitative data in this research, it must be said that it does not state a sample size meaning the statistics may not carry much significance. With looking at the data the question that needs answering is why sleeping times differ between generations and ages. Many factors can affect sleep hygiene (Dimitriou et al., 2015) but the role of mobile use in causing sleep problems in adolescence has gained huge attention in the past few years (Rafique et al., 2020). Almost all (98%) UK adults aged 16-24 now have a smartphone (Baker, 2024) and these numbers have near enough stayed the same for several years, with an 80% increase from 2022 to 2023 for the 65+.

Mobile use at bedtime, can cause poor sleep quality by various mechanisms (Mireku et al., 2019). Mobile phone users now have smartphones which enable them to access internet and social networks, watch videos, online chat and play games (Haug et al., 2015) resulting in exposure to stimulating content, mobile phone overuse and phone addiction (Sahin et al., 2013).

• Physical activity: Positive factor

If we look at positive factors, physical activity is considered an effective, non-pharmacological approach to improve sleep and is recommended as an alternative or complementary approach to existing therapies for sleep problems (Yang et al., 2012). Exercise intensity, type of exercise and the timing in relation to sleep are important contributing factors to the sleep response (Rinder et al., 1988). Afterall, the primary purpose of sleep is to recover from “wear and tear” caused by daytime activity (Hauri, 1968). As humans, it’s important that we fall into a slow wave sleep (deep sleep) to allow the brain and body to rejuvenate (Gemello, 2021). When exercise happens the bodies temperature rises, sending signals to the brain letting it know it’s time to be awake. After about 30 to 90 minutes, the core body temperature starts to fall. This decline helps to facilitate sleepiness (Gemello, 2021). However, everybody is different and exercise plans/routines vary in style, time, and intensity. Gemello, (2021) states that moderate aerobic exercise increases the amount of slow wave sleep you get but not everybody may endure this type of exercise and still experience a slow wave sleep. Therefore, it is important not to put one form of exercise at the forefront of effectiveness. Overall, the literature reveals adolescents and young adults are far more distracted by mobile devices compared to adults 30+ and therefore more likely to stay up later and experience tiredness and the effects of insufficient sleep. Exercise is an effective tool when preparing the body for a state of sleepiness but the timing of this can be a contributing factor and different with every individual.

Teachers and sleep

When looking at the significance of sleep within the education sector, what must be considered is insufficient sleep is common among teachers and is associated with diverse health risks (Schmidt et al., 2022) and impaired professional and non-professional activities (Burton et al., 2017). With teaching be considered as a highly stressful occupation (Johnson et al., 2005) it is no surprise that when compared to the general population, teachers with a high job strain have been found to report poorer sleep (Cropley et al., 1999). A teacher is the basic instigator of interaction with his/her pupils (Xhemajli, 2016) therefore, stress resulting from too little sleep can be transferred over to the students; after all, “A well slept teacher is a better teacher” (Poon et al., 2019). However, it must be said that in the education profession, getting enough sleep is a challenge with the regular early morning wake ups (de Souza et al., 2012). Add this factor to the overall stress of the job, sleep deprivation is highly likely to occur during weekdays (de Souza et al., 2012). Many teachers have been shown to find it difficult to recuperate after work (Aronsson et al., 2003) due to distractions that follow from the workplace (Cardenas et al., 2004). If teachers are stressed and not able to switch off, this is likely to have an impact on both the quality and quantity of sleep. Afterall, sleepy teachers are at higher risk of providing insufficient supervision and inferior instruction (Amschler & McKenzie, 2010).

Methodology

This study employs a mixed method approach to investigate whether sleep quality and duration have a perceived impact on trainee PE teacher’s ability to teach whilst on school placement. To gather this data, an online questionnaire (Microsoft forms) was sent to third year teacher trainees currently studying secondary physical education. With ethics being an important figure within research, I made sure to design and email out a participant information sheet and consent form to ensure participants knew what it was they were taking part in. Once ethics has been cleared, I began sending out my questionnaire to the selected group. Through my questionnaire I wanted to find out whether sleep duration differed before and after placement days, what factors impacted this and whether any of these resulted in a change in teaching performance. The questionnaire consisted of 7 multiple-choice questions, with an option to add a written response for questions 5 & 7. This written response enabled me to collect qualitative data and gather more evidence for my research. Doing an online questionnaire can save time and effort (compared to interviews) and data can be extracted easily (McKinley & Rose, 2020). However, writing items, pre-piloting and piloting the questionnaire can be very time consuming (McKinley & Rose, 2020).

The data analysis process for this study involves both qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of sleep quality and duration amongst trainee PE teachers. Quantitative research is regarded as a deductive approach towards research (Rovai et al., 2014) whereas Qualitative research places emphasis upon exploring and understanding, drawing meaning from the experiences and opinions of participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). With including both sets of data within my study a greater degree of understanding could be formulated than if a single approach were adopted (Creswell & Clark, 2017). One factor that must be considered is the balance of both sets of data and whether there is an equal status to both quantitative and qualitative information (Johnson et al., 2007).

With my questionnaire consisting mainly of closed question, which generate quantitative data (Kircher & Zipp, 2022) I was able to score data with ease and efficiency (Krug & Sell, 2013). Moreover, the use of closed questions, with their limited number of response options ensures that respondents focus on the issue I am interested in, rather than addressing something else, which may happen with open ended questions (Kircher & Zipp, 2022). One factor that must be considered when designing a questionnaire is the wording. If questions are too simple, respondents may become bored; whereas if questions are too complex, respondents may find them onerous, therefore potentially leading to boredom and non-compliance (Meyerhoff et al., 2015).

I approached the qualitative data through thematic analysis, which is an accessible, flexible, and increasingly popular method of qualitative data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The flexibility of thematic analysis means it is suitable to analyse a wide range of data types (Terry et al., 2017). Through a thematic approach I was able to identify and analyse patterns within my responses, creating themes within my data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, one of the challenges to qualitative research is the open-ended nature of data as opposed to numbers only (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

A limiting factor amongst my research is the sample size.

Samples should not be either too big or too small since both have limitations that can compromise the conclusions drawn from the study (Faber & Fonseca, 2014). In my instance, the sample size would be considered small with only 7 respondents. Too small a sample may prevent the findings from being extrapolated (Faber & Fonseca, 2014). Although responses may be detailed and credible a sample that is smaller than necessary would have insufficient statistical power to answer the primary research question (Andrade, 2020). One other limiting factor within my research is convenience sampling, which means I identified individuals who fitted the criteria (Emerson, 2015). I specifically focused my research on trainees within my cohort, knowing I would get responses that worked effectively around my proposal. This method may have helped my research obtain the number of participants I desired, but the way the participants are gathered can easily influence the results by introducing un-expected or uncontrolled factors (Emerson, 2015).

Findings

Findings from this study are presented through seven participants currently in their third year of teacher training in physical education.

Research question 1:

Research question 1 (does sleep duration differ before and after placement days in school for trainee PE teachers?) was broken down into two further questions which looked at sleep quantity of participants before placement (e.g. Sunday evening) and after placement (e.g. Friday evening). These results can be seen below:

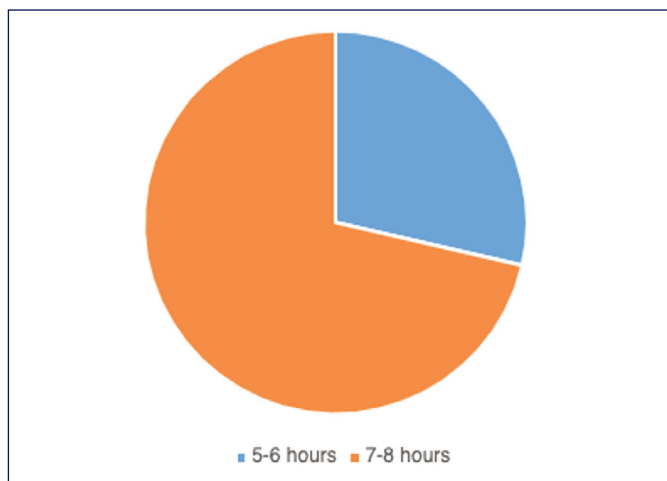


Figure 1: The number of hours sleep participants typically have before school placement commences

Figure 1 shows:

- 29% of participants typically get around 5–6 hours of sleep on Sunday evenings.
- 71% of participants typically get around 7–8 hours of sleep on Sunday evenings.

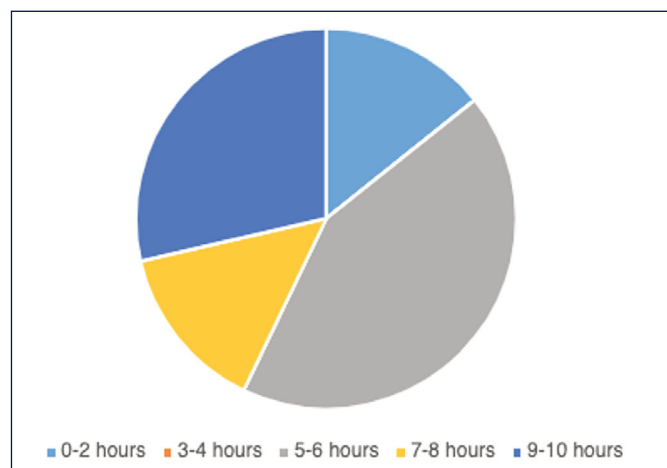


Figure 2: The number of hours sleep participants typically have after school placement has finished for the week

Figure 2 shows:

- 14% of participants typically get around 0–2 hours of sleep on Friday evenings.
- 0% of participants typically get around 3–4 hours of sleep on Friday evenings.
- 43% of participants typically get around 5–6 hours of sleep on Friday evenings.
- 14% of participants typically get around 7–8 hours of sleep on Friday evenings.
- 29% of participants typically get around 9–10 hours of sleep on Friday evenings.

Research question 2:

Research question two (what factors impact the quality of their sleep?) was broken down into two further questions that got participants to consider what positive and negative factors impacted their sleep. Negative factors included eating or drinking too late, screen time and mental wellbeing (stress, anxiety, or depression). Positive factors included reading, exercise (gym or personal sports), curfew (settling at a certain time), no screen time after a certain time and meditation. These results can be seen below:

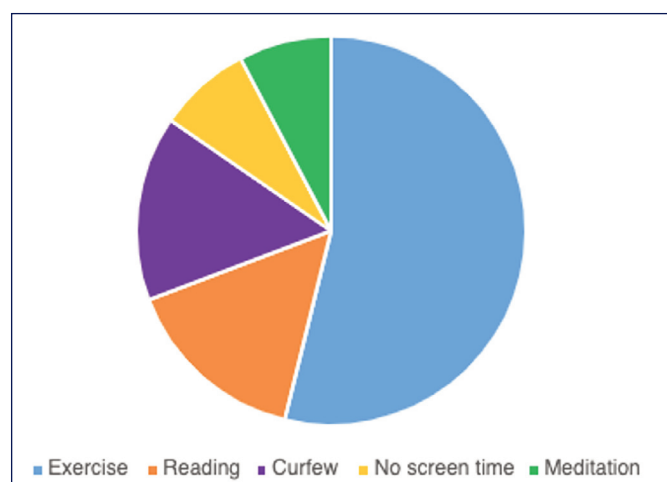


Figure 3: Factors that have a positive impact on the quality of sleep for participants

Figure 3 shows:

- 100% of participants found that exercise contributed positively to their quality of sleep.

- 29% of participants found that reading contributed positively to their quality of sleep.
- 29% of participants found that having a curfew contributed positively to their quality of sleep.
- 14% of participants found that no screen time contributed positively to their quality of sleep.
- 14% of participants found that meditation contributed positively to their quality of sleep.

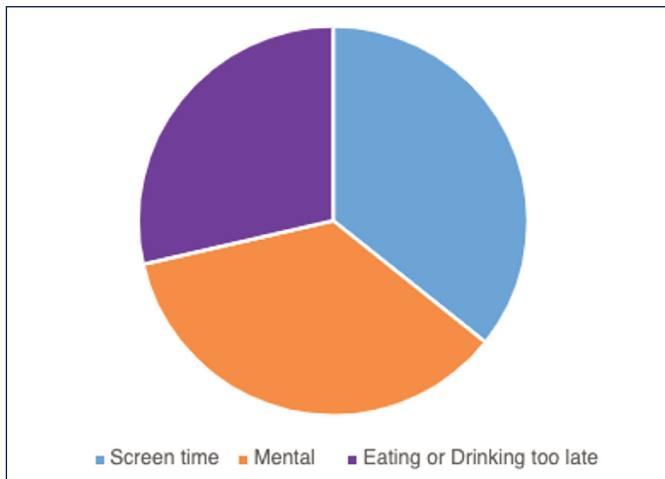


Figure 4: Factors that have a negative impact on the quality of sleep for participants

Figure 4 shows:

- 71% of participants found that screen time contributed negatively to their quality of sleep.
- 71% of participants found that mental wellbeing contributed negatively to their quality of sleep.
- 57% of participants found that eating or drinking too late contributed negatively to their quality of sleep.

Research question three (do trainee pe teachers believe that sleep impacts their ability to teach?) was broken down into three further questions that looked at whether participants felt their sleep impacted their ability to teach effectively, if they believe they get enough sleep to teach effectively and whether their effectiveness would improve with more sleep. Two of these questions required a written response to enable me to produce qualitative data along with more evidence. These written responses were then thematically analysed and put into themes.

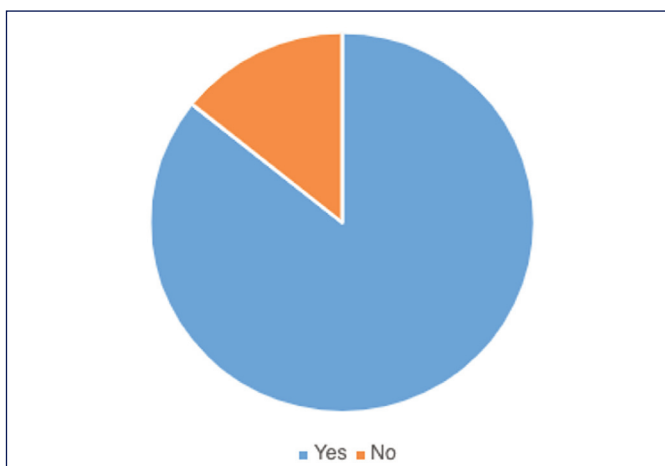


Figure 5: Do participants believe that sleep has an impact on their ability to teach

Figure 5 shows:

- 14% of participants believe that sleep doesn't impact their ability to teach.
- 86% of participants believe that sleep does impact their ability to teach.



Figure 6: Do participants believe they get enough sleep to enable them to teach effectively

Figure 6 shows:

- 14% of participants believe that they do not get enough sleep to teach effectively.
- 86% of participants believe that they do get enough sleep to teach effectively.



Figure 7: Do participants believe that if they had more sleep, would they be a better teacher

Figure 7 shows:

- 29% of participants believe that more sleep would not make them a better teacher.
- 71% of participants believe that more sleep would make them a better teacher.

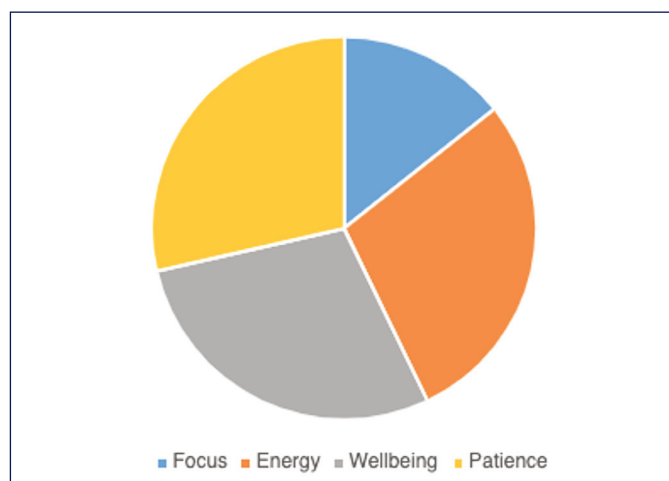


Figure 8: How do participants believe sleep has an impact on their ability to teach

Figure 8 shows:

- 14% of the participants suffer from a sleeping disorder, which has a big impact on teaching performance and overall health. Participant 3 confirms that "Having insomnia has had a detrimental impact holistically on overall wellbeing". From a result of this, teaching has become challenging with regular "brain fog" leading to "poor time management" and "a lack of motivation".
- 29% of the participants feel that sleep impacts their patience, which then results in poor behaviour management. Participant 5 states that without sufficient sleep they are "harsher with behaviour management" but in relation to participant 6 finds that sufficient sleep improves "patience" and the ability to positively respond to "behaviour management and interventions".

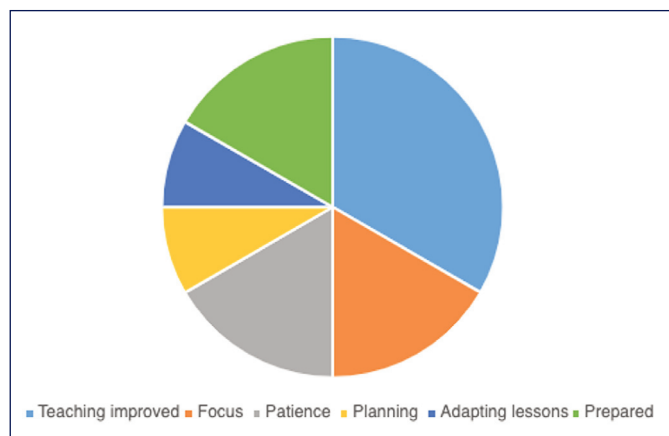


Figure 9: Do participants believe that if they had more sleep, what would improve in their teaching

Figure 9 shows:

- 57% of the participants feel with more sleep their general teaching would improve. Participant 2 highlights that sufficient sleep would enable them to be more "focused during lessons" meaning they could "respond to low level disruption" in a better manner. Participant 5 believes that sufficient sleep enables them to be "more alert" meaning they can be more present within the classroom to ensure students get "the very best of myself".
- 29% of the participants feel with more sleep their preparation for teaching would improve. Participant 5

acknowledges that if they had "8 hours of sleep every night" they would be "more ready to teach". Participant 7 also highlights the significance of getting 8 hours sleep and feels it produces a "better mood" and "motivation for preparation".

- 14% of the participants feel their teaching is improved in the "lighter days" of the year compared to the darker days as "it's much easier to wake up and find motivation".

Discussion

Research Question 1

This study explores sleep quantity during professional practice of trainee teachers. By reviewing sleep duration prior to placement commenced (Sunday evening) and when placement had finished for the week (Friday evening), the key findings of this study showed that 71% of participants received 7–8 hours of sleep on a Sunday evening, prior to placement. This aligns to 'normal' sleep (Bin, 2016) for an adult, and should support the promotion of optimal health (Watson et al., 2015). Other findings revealed that 29% of participants get 5–6 hours of sleep on a Sunday evening. As stated by Watson et al., (2015) these participants are in danger of multiple health risks such as weight gain, obesity and an impaired immune function if repeated regularly. Referring to Schmidt et al., (2022) insufficient sleep is common among teachers and is associated with diverse health risks. A contributing factor for this was highlighted by Johnson et al., (2005) who referred to teaching as a "highly stressful occupation". Looking more specifically at trainee teachers, in England, about 40% of those who undertake a training course (on all routes) never become teachers, and of those who do become teachers, about 40% are not teaching 5 years later (Kyriacou & Kunc, 2007). However, as Murray-Harvey et al., (2000) suggests trainee teachers are not yet sympathised with, as it is viewed as a normal part of teacher development and therefore accepted as a natural element of the transition from novice to qualified teacher.

On Friday evenings, 43% of participants received 5–6 hours of sleep, whereas 29% experienced 7–8 hours. Over half of the participants (57%) experienced less than 7 hours of sleep on a Friday evening; supporting (Team, 2023) survey that stated that Brits only get 5.91 hours of sleep per night. As highlighted by (Alvaro et al., 2013) poor sleep quality is related to negative psychological consequences. This was reinforced by participant 3 who regularly has trouble "articulating the correct words" and experiences "brain fog" as well as "a lack of motivation" due to suffering from insomnia. Findings also reveal that 29% of participants experience 9–10 hours of sleep on a Friday evening. This quantity of sleep may be beneficial for young adults and individuals recovering from sleep debt/illness but for others, uncertain as to whether it is associated with health risks (Watson et al., 2015). From my personal experience, a night out on a Friday for a student is more desirable compared to a Sunday. With Sunday coming a day before the start of the week (Monday) many people consider it "the day of rest" especially within the education sector where a low percentage of work is carried out. Fridays, on the other hand, are considered "a part of the weekend" (Bryson & Forth, 2007) and therefore seen as an opportunity to head out with fellow students and friends. For this reason, quantity of sleep may differ with late arrivals home and results may not correlate with others throughout the week. What must also be considered is whether sleep is being impacted due to the stress and demands of teaching or other

factors such as, personal circumstances. This information, however, is not accessible through a questionnaire. These are the limitations, yes they can save time and effort and data can be extracted easily (McKinley & Rose, 2020) but compared to an interview, follow-up questions cannot be asked (Kuter & Yilmaz 2001).

Research Question 2

This part of the discussion will be looking at what positive and negative factors impacted the quality of sleep. To gather this data, participants were given multiple options for both positive and negative influences. Positive factors included exercise, reading, a curfew, no screen time and meditation. Negative factors included screen time, mental wellbeing, and eating/drinking late. From the findings, 100% of participants found that exercise helped them sleep. This data is no surprise as exercise provides the body with an opportunity to increase its core temperature; with the decrease that occurs 30–90 minutes after, sleepiness is an effect of this (Gemeldo, 2021). Given that teachers are more than twice as likely as other working adults to experience stress and severe levels of burnout, it is critical that getting enough sleep be experienced and supported by an established component like exercise. After all, physical activity is considered an effective, non-pharmacological approach to improve sleep (Yang et al., 2012) and one of the three basic pillars of health (Clement-Carbonell, 2021). Further findings revealed that 29% of participants found reading positively impacted their sleep. Grønli et al., (2016) supports this data and states that reading around 30 minutes a night “attenuates sleepiness”. When comparing both, exercise may cost money through a gym membership or club but reading in bed before sleeping is a low-cost, accessible intervention that might improve sleep quality (Finucane et al., 2021). A study carried out by (Finucane et al., 2021) included 991 participants that read a book for 15–30 minutes, every night, for 7 days. Overall, results show that reading before going to sleep improves sleep quality.

When looking at the negative factors that impacted sleep quality. 71% of participants found that screen time negatively contributed to their sleep. These results align with (Mireku et al., 2019) who confirmed that mobile use at bedtime, can cause poor sleep quality by various mechanisms. With almost 98% of the U.K having access to a mobile device (Baker, 2024), internet, social networks, videos, online chats, and games (Haug et al., 2015) it is clear to see why there is an overuse and addiction to phones (Sahin et al., 2013). Electronic back-lit devices like mobile phones, tablets, readers, and computers emit short-wavelength enriched light, also known as blue light; shown to reduce or delay the natural production of melatonin in the evening and decrease feelings of sleepiness (Pacheco & Truong, 2023). Other findings from (Pacheco & Truong, 2023) revealed that blue light can also reduce the amount of time spent in slow-wave and rapid-eye movement (REM) sleep, which is important to allow the body and brain to rejuvenate (Gemeldo, 2021). Other findings revealed that 71% of participants struggled to sleep due to their mental wellbeing (stress, anxiety, or depression). The high levels of stress that teachers experience and the consequences they face such as burnout, sleep deprivation, and decreased motivation to teach have been made clear by this study. Once more, the inability to ask follow-up questions makes it challenging to ascertain the cause of this data. Are the outcomes a function of placement or university requirements, or a combination of both?

Research Question 3

The final part of this discussion will reveal whether the participants believed that sleep had an impact on their ability to teach, whether enough sleep was had to enable effective teaching and if more sleep would improve their overall performance. 86% of participants believed that sleep had an impact on their ability to teach and this result was mirrored (86%) when asked if enough sleep was being had to teach effectively. The results from the final question revealed that 71% of participants felt that more sleep would improve their teaching performance. For students to fulfil their potential and develop, their teacher needs to be present and able to be the basic instigator of interaction (Xhemajli, 2016). Based on their responses to poor behaviour, participants admitted that they are “harsher” when they were fatigued as opposed to being more “patient” when they were well-rested. Therefore, participants should attempt to switch off in the evenings to allow for their body and mind to relax, incorporating the positive factors that help them sleep and avoiding the negative. As explained during the introduction, there is limited research on how sleep impacts trainee teachers. For this reason, there is less to comment on in comparison to the other discussions within the study.

Conclusion

This study aimed to answer whether sleep quality and duration have a perceived impact on trainee PE teacher's ability to teach whilst on school placement. This study has shed light on the significant correlation between sleep quality, duration, and the efficacy of trainee P.E teachers during their school placement. Through analysis and verifiable evidence, it has become evident quality and duration of sleep indeed play a crucial role in influencing the teaching capabilities of the participants in this study. For this reason, additional studies should be carried out across a larger participant profile to understand the quality and amount of sleep school teachers get. Furthermore, to highlight the impact sleep can have on wellbeing. I have mentioned within the study the benefits questionnaires provide as well as the drawbacks. For future research such as this, I would consider primary research through an interview format. This should help delve deeper into understanding sleep patterns and factors impacting sleep, and how this can impact a trainee teacher. Although the data within this study provides interesting data around sleep, the sample size is small and therefore open to questions on statistical power.

What's worrying within the findings, is the percentage of participants who are getting less than 7 hours of sleep. Data revealed a link between insufficient rest and mental wellbeing. However, exercise is proven to encourage sleep and can bring about many physiological changes, which result in an improvement in mood state, self-esteem and lower stress and anxiety levels (Mikkelsen et al., 2017). Therefore, exercise should be seen as an effective strategy for those not only in need of improving sleep hygiene but mental wellbeing. To add to this, further research could be carried out to establish potential strategies that would help alleviate poor sleep-in trainee teachers. An interesting focus would be on how teachers are supported in relation to their wellbeing and whether there are opportunities through meetings/workshops to discuss their thoughts and feelings with other colleagues and trainees.

Another key finding within the study is the negative impact of screen time. Data revealed the impacts that blue light can

proceed to have on deep sleep cycles and the rejuvenation of the body and mind. An alternative for this can be found through reading 15-30 minutes before sleep, which was proven to “attenuate sleepiness” (Grønli et al., 2016). Another recommendation which can be drawn from the study is the importance of getting a minimum of 7 hours sleep per night. As a trainee teacher myself, I am pleased I was able to call attention to the importance of sleep for people in a similar place to mine. As said at the beginning of this study, I have been interested in the significance of sufficient sleep for a while and with this study now conducted, I intend to look deeper into how this pillar of life impacts the lives of those involved within the education sector.

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An analysis of the methods of adaptation used in Secondary Physical Education

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Introduction

The UN conventions of rights for people with disabilities, hold a central objective of encouraging an inclusive education system at all stages on a global scale (UN, 2006). An inclusive education system is where learning is adapted through different methods which are best suited to the strengths and needs of a classroom, enabling all students an equitable access to learn and achieve (UNICEF, 2017). To be inclusive, activities can be adapted to meet the needs of learners to ensure that teaching and learning taking place (Eaton, 2022).

Adaptive teaching actively adjusts the lesson in a variety of ways to meet the students' needs (Parsons, Dodman, Burrowbridge, 2013). The definition of adaptive teaching is indefinite and is about building a shared understanding of what this means in every moment in different contexts (Eaton, 2022). Adaptive teaching aims to ensure a lesson is fully inclusive for all learners while ensuring there is reasonable challenge to enable all to progress (DfE, 2019). The only way to cater for diversity and facilitate a fully inclusive learning environment is to adapt when necessary, promoting equity (Westwood, 2018).

Specifically, within physical education (PE), the inclusion spectrum demonstrates the variety of ways activities can be accessed through varying degrees of inclusion and accommodation (Misener, Darcy, 2013). Activities can be modified more specifically using the 'STTEP' model, which provides guidance on modifications using space, task, time, equipment, and people (Downs, 2017).

This study seeks to answer the following:

Research Questions

- 1 What are the most common forms of adaptation used in secondary physical education lessons?
- 2 What are the teacher justifications for the use of the chosen methods of adaptation?

Literature Review

The importance of adaptive teaching

PE guidelines have been developed in partnership with various organisations including European Commission, International Olympic Committee, The International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education, UNICEF, World Health Organisation, and others, to support policy makers (head-teachers and subject leaders) to implement a high-quality PE provision to students of all ages (UNESCO, 2015). Ofsted echo the idea of high-quality PE, providing statements of which all PE curriculums and lessons should follow, clearly stating, alongside other comments, that the PE curriculum should meet the needs of all students including those with SEND (special educational needs and disabilities), and that all students should be supported to be able to succeed (Ofsted, 2022[a]).

A study by Dixon, Braye and Gibbons (2021) determined that students categorised as SEND face significant exclusion from timetabled PE lessons and are more likely to experience being put into officiating roles such as holding the stopwatch or setting up cones. As a result, these students not only feel rejected but are dismissed of the right to learn and participate in sport and physical activity (Ofsted, 2022 [b]), meaning they are not able to access areas of the PE national curriculum- 'to get involved in a range of activities' and develop 'personal fitness to promote an active, healthy lifestyle' (DfE, 2013). In order for all students to achieve, it must be recognised that they are 'diverse in their needs, development, attitudes, values, and beliefs' (O'Brien, Guiney, 2001). It is highlighted that teachers should plan for inclusion and recognise that adaptations are required for all, if not some, rather than starting from a place of fully adapted practice, which might mean that students with SEND are subject to lower aspirations (Ofsted, 2022[b]).

Adaptive teaching, an integral part of the teachers' standards, is a passive response to the needs and strengths of the students to promote progression and is often done without preparation (Mulholland, 2022). Adaptive teaching encourages a fully inclusive learning environment, where all students feel safe, that their diverse contributions and needs are valued, creating a sense of belonging for all (Becker, 2019). The varying demands of a classroom, requires teacher preparation throughout the whole learning process, including planning, teaching and assessment, to ensure learning is effective (Konstantinou-Katzi, et al., 2001). However, before any adaptations can be put in place, teachers must be mindful of the unique needs and strengths of their learners, and how to best support those individuals to ensure there is clear

equitable access to learn, while significant stretch and challenge is being achieved to ensure maximum attainment (EEF, 2023).

Studies suggest that students with SEND see varying levels on inclusion in their PE lessons, as these students described 'good days' being when they engaged in the learning context and modifications were made to cater for their needs, and 'bad days' being when they experienced restricted participation, social isolation from peers and their competence questioned (Goodwin, Watkinson, 2000). For this reason, any adaptations made to a lesson or activity, needs to ensure that it maintains educational integrity and gives students the equal opportunities to achieve the same learning objectives, while ensuring they are meeting the aims of the national curriculum and preventing isolation from peers (Ofsted, 2022[b]).

The Inclusion Spectrum

The inclusion spectrum (Black and Williamson, 2011) shows the several types of activities in which sport can be delivered to all students including those with severe disabilities. This provides teachers with an organisational structure with a variety of task options which allows for teachers to tailor their activities to suit the needs of individuals, allowing all accomplish the learning aim (Hartmann, 2015; Lieberman, Houston-Wilson, 2018). When implementing the inclusion spectrum, it is important to consider the individual's learning goals and aligning these with the goals of the whole class to identify the correct type of activity to use (Grenier, Miller, Black, 2017). The spectrum strategises instruction and organisational setup, arranging students into ability, interests, or accomplishment specific groups, facilitating the opportunity for students to work with their peers, henceforth directly promoting inclusion (Klavina, 2008).

At the centre of the spectrum, added to the developed model in 2007, is disability sport, expressing reverse integration, which can be used as a basis for the surrounding structures (Kiuppis, 2018 and Black, Williamson, 2011). This is used to integrate the needs of people with disabilities into mainstream society (Ogden, 2016). The four organisational structures include: open, parallel, separate/alternative and modified. Open activities are activities where all participants are completing the same activity with no modifications present (Grenier, Miller, Black, 2017). This could be used because there are no requirements for adaptation, that the activity is inclusive by nature, or that there has been no attempt to ensure all can access the activity (Kiuppis, 2018). Parallel activities include activities where students are completing the same activity in ability groupings, where students can work with others that are able to work at the same pace as they are (Grenier, Miller, Black, 2017). This gives opportunities for students to experience challenge within their own group, while also having the opportunity to succeed and be able to access the learning. Alternative or separate activities are when students are working in separate groups doing completely different activities in order to get to the same outcome or achieve the same learning intention (Black, Williamson, 2011). Research shows that this is used when there are significant barriers that will stop a certain group from accessing it in that way and also can be used when an alternative path can be used to get to the same outcome allowing for further skill building (Lieberman, Houston-Wilson, 2018). The final type of activity is a modified activity, where elements of the activity are adapted to help individuals

to access the activity. There are a variety of ways that an activity can be modified and in physical education is usually modified using the 'STTEP' model (Kiuppis, 2018).

The STTEP Model

The STTEP model allows educators to modify their activities through the manipulation of space, task, time, equipment, and people allowing them to flexibly adapt an activity or programme to the needs of the students (Grenier, Miller, Black, 2017). Space can be managed by increasing or decreasing the size of the playing area (Kiuppis, 2018). Teachers and leaders of PE should recognise that learning takes time and should consider the time spent for students to consolidate their knowledge in a given context before moving on to new activities, sports, or topics (Ofsted, 2022 [b]). It is also important to consider that enough time is allocated for students to revisit learning, ensuring knowledge development can be built and retained (Ofsted, 2022 [b]). The task can be changed through the manipulation of rules, ways or methods of scoring and roles of students within a game such as creating leaders or team coaches (Kiuppis, 2018). Adaptations to rules may need to be made, where students with movement or mobility restrictions are given a timeframe to receive and play the ball in a team game scenario (Chow, et al., 2007). Equipment can be altered to be bigger, lighter, or brighter coloured to help students to complete successful skills or more accurate movements (Ofsted, 2022[b]). People could mean the number of participants for example how many students are working together, numbers on a team, or could mean the people who are helping or working with the groups (Kiuppis, 2018). This could mean the use of TA's or other additional teaching staff which can provide support to groups or individuals (Farr, 2010).

Methodology

Judgemental sampling was used to recruit participants from a SEND school in Staffordshire, England. Teachers were recruited as participants, who met the criteria of having attained qualified teacher status (QTS), and to teach PE in the chosen school, which ensured the research questions were answered contextually (Etikan, Bala, 2017). Four recruited participants ensured that a broad range of teachers were observed and questioned to answer the research questions, and only a manageable amount of data was collected (Rea, Parker, Wallace, 2014). The sampling group holds high information power regarding their use of adaptive tools and their justifications for the use of these due to working with students with SEND daily, meaning the research questions will be best answered by the participants in the case study environment (Malterud, Siersma, Guassora, 2016).

Research question one was answered via an observation by the researcher of a single PE lesson taught by four volunteer participants, where the methods of adaptation were recorded over different points in the lesson, using a tally chart and brief description. The tally was then used to show the number of times a different form of adaptation was used, measured against the organisational structures of the inclusion spectrum and the STTEP model. The models and continuums were used as they are the most widely used adaptation tools developed by PE specialists within education and directly link to the inclusion of SEND in school sporting activities (Woods, 2017). Due to the lack of detail in the use of tally charts to collect data a brief description was included alongside the tally, which provided the volunteer with the activity observed, so reference to the correct moments within the lesson could

be made during the observation (Wealleans, 2001).

Research question two was investigated in the form of electronic questionnaire completed independently by the volunteer participants, using a copy of the data collected during their observation for reference. The qualitative data produced from the questionnaire gave justification for the use of the adaptive strategies used in the observation. The responses required thematic analysis (shown in figures 3–8), where common themes amongst question answers were identified and responses were grouped accordingly, allowing for analysis (Munn, Drever, 1995).

Data was then taken from the tally charts and transformed into graphs such as the pie chart (shown in figure 1 and 2), to provide visual quantitative data of the most common forms of adaptation in the case study school.

Observations are a valid method of collecting data as when the purpose of other observation is well established and there is suitable means of recording data such as a tally chart, it provides the researcher with direct data (Cartwright, Ward, 1982). The questionnaire form must have been completed within two days of the observation date, so teachers were able to remember their justifications for the use of each adaptive measure. Volunteers were also provided with a copy of the observation tally data, so they were aware of which questions were relevant to their observation and the activities relating to each adaptive tool, to provide qualitative justifications for the quantitative data collected (Leonard, Glenwick, 2015). Timings for the observation ensured that teachers were able to understand and relate to when they used each method, to be able to remember their reasoning in as much detail as possible. This also ensured that from a researcher's perspective, that teachers had equal opportunities to use different methods of adaptation within the given timeframe (Everett, 2019).

This study was granted ethical approval in accordance with Birmingham City University's research guidelines. The study was conducted in a secondary SEND school, due to the differentiating student needs meaning that adaptive teaching would be expected to be frequently used in all PE lessons.

Limitations

A common criticism of case studies is the low validity and reliability factor, as the results from the study only apply to the case study school as the values and beliefs, level and type of CPD training, the varying needs of students and their abilities may affect results and are likely to be specific to the case study school (Quintão, et al., 2020). Cohen et al. (2017) also states that in order for research to be valid the sample group must represent the whole population, which is achieved within the case study setting as the observed teachers were varying experience levels, although this does represent the whole population of PE teachers across the UK or teachers within special schools as the participant sample is too small. As only one lesson was observed by the individual researcher there may have been observer bias, where the researcher's expectations, prejudices, opinions, and knowledge influence what they perceive or record in a study (Bhandari, 2023). However, the multi-method approach where the use of observations and questionnaires are used to gather qualitative and quantitative are combined, the researcher gains a broader perspective of the research topic and can answer the research questions in greater detail (Mik-Meyer, 2020). Ofsted (2019) reported that one lesson observation does not ensure

reliability as lesson observations are overt, so teachers can change their behaviour and one observation may not give a full picture to answer the research questions well enough. Therefore, more observations need to be done over a period of time to increase reliability.

Discussion and findings

RQ1: What are the most common forms of adaptation used in secondary physical education lessons?

In this study, modified activities were the most frequent form of activity delivery, where 54% of activities were instructed in this way (see figure 1). Modified activities form one element of the inclusion spectrum, an adaptive teaching tool, which promotes inclusion within an educational context (Kiuppis, 2018). Modified activities are carried out through the manipulation of space, task, time, equipment, and people, to ensure that all needs are met (Goodwin, Watkinson, 2000). Johnson, Carrol, and Bradley, (2017) conducted a report into the most common support SEND students receive, which was specialist equipment for fine motor control, and trusted 1:1 support, which forms part of the modified delivery, maybe suggesting why modified delivery is used significantly more than other forms. Alternative delivery, where students perform different tasks to reach the same outcome (Black, Williamson, 2011), was used during the observed lessons 30% of the time (see figure 1). However, Woods (2017) suggests that this should not be done most of the time as teachers should aim for students to rejoin the main activity and questions the level of inclusivity that this adaptive delivery imposes. Parallel activity delivery, where students are working in ability groupings at their own pace (Grenier, Miller, Black, 2017) was used 16% of the time (see figure 1), however, Merrick (2015) suggests that this is as equally weighted as the importance of modified delivery and advises that teachers should ‘chop and change’ between the two delivery methods for maximum effectiveness. Within the findings of this study the use of open activities is not discussed due to the fluidity of the activity, which means the activity requires little adaptation as the attributes of the activity lend themselves to inclusion regardless (Grenier, 2018).

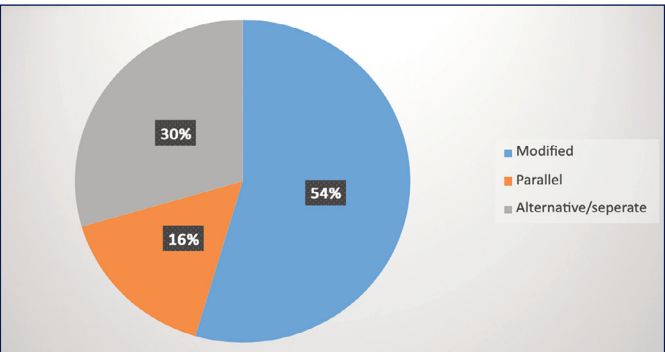


Figure 1: The most common forms of adaptation measured against the inclusion spectrum

Regardless of teacher preference, within any class structure, teacher’s may use more than one category of the inclusion spectrum, depending on the context, students, the class, and their needs (Grenier, 2018). When deciding on which method of activity delivery teachers are using, many considerations need to be accounted for as it is not only important for creation of an environment where all students feel safe and valued (Becker, 2019), but also the perceived perception of peers within the class. Peers who observe others receiving

the help they need and achieving to create meaningful contributions to activities and performance outcomes, are more likely to be accepted and favourably perceived by other students, regardless of their ability to perform (Kasser Lieberman, 2003). Therefore, it is important for teachers to consider their methods of delivery to ensure that they are not favouring one group within the class and that they are giving all students equitable opportunities to learn (EEF, 2023).

In the context of lessons observed, 38% of the skills in modified activities were changed through equipment (see figure 2), allowing students with autism spectrum disorder to display their skills through equipment modification (Grenier, 2018). Kasser and Lieberman (2003) discuss how changing the equipment used in activities is one of the most common strategies used to adapt lessons, to ensure student success. However, Esmilla (2023) and Myers (2023) indicates one of the biggest challenges that PE teachers face is the availability, readiness and safety of equipment and facilities to meet the needs of their students and it is noted that this directly affects the behaviour and learning of students.

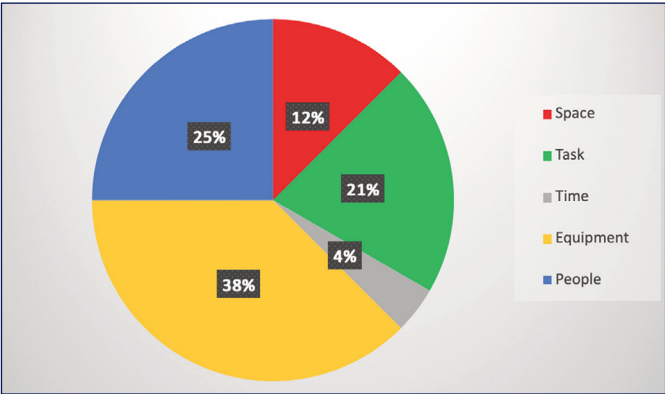


Figure 2: The most common forms of adaptation within modified activities, using the STTEP model

In the observed lessons, teachers used people as a method of adapting their lessons 25% of the time (see figure 2). People were used in the lesson observations by means of teaching assistants (TAs) working with small groups of students or with students on a 1:1 basis. The EEF (2018) reports how the driving force for the inclusion of SEND pupils is the increased number of TAs in schools and when they consistently work 1:1 with students or small groups in a structured setting with right support and training, this can impact students’ attainment, showing an additional three to four months progress. However, Ofsted are aware that schools setting TAs with the responsibility for appropriately supporting and progressing the most vulnerable students and they themselves are often the least educational skilled and lowest paid members of staff (Skipp, Hopwood, 2017).

Figure 2 shows 21% of the observed time, modified activities were adapted through task. Myers (2023) suggests that tasks can be manipulated to facilitate success, through placing task constraints on some, adapting rules to support learners with physical skills, or changing how a question is asked to support learners cognitively; further explaining how progressive this method is as it initiated the development of differentiation into adaptive teaching as it promotes the scaffolding of learning, over creating boundaries and division between abilities (Parsons, Dodman, Burrowbridge, 2013). On the other hand, Klavina (2008) explains how when students are grouped by ability it facilitates opportunities for students

to work with their peers without the boundaries of task constraints or modification of aspects of the game and believes that this creates better developmental opportunities for students of all abilities.

Teachers should be consistently asking themselves, how appropriate the method of adaptation they are using is in relation to the class they are teaching and not resort to their personal habitual preference, which requires a complex response, however the alternative is a class in which only the highly-skilled students feel positive and achieve the desired outcome, while the less-skilled and some highly-skilled students experience no challenge, leading to boredom and are at risk of ceasing physical education all together (Kasser, Lieberman, 2003).

RQ2: What are the teacher justifications for the use of the chosen methods of adaptation?

Space

In figure 3, 4, 5 and 7, increasing the 'opportunity of success' was the largest theme behind justifications teachers gave for many different adaptive methods. Figure 3 shows the teacher justifications for the use of space in modified activities, where the largest response was the theme of the 'opportunity to succeed', making up 50% of responses. Examples which are similar to the activities observed for the ways in which space can be used to increase success are given by Pritchard and Dockerty (2024), who suggest making the space larger when playing possession games to make it easier for students to move and pass, allowing for less pressure, equating to more success, however studies into the opportunity for success to be achieved through the manipulation of space have only been carried out in the context of teaching and learning in football, therefore for this to be valid, studies must be carried out across multiple sports in different settings.

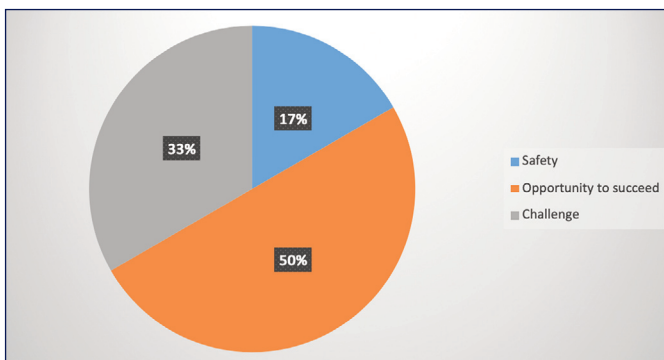


Figure 3: Thematically organised responses to teacher justifications for the adaptive modification of space to improve teaching and learning

A study into the use of space and size of playing area for lessons in football found that when the space is larger students are more likely to improve their synchronisation and performance of skills at speed, compared to when the playing area is a smaller space, subsequently enhancing students' long-term physical development (Gonçalves, et al., 2017). However, the social and tactical development of performers is said to be most improved when students play invasion games in a small area, where the use of strategy and teamwork is most valued, therefore success is achieved in both increasing and decreasing the size of playing areas, but it in turn depends on how the PE teacher decides the manipulate the space, so teachers must know and understand their students

abilities first and align students goals, their manipulation of space and the learning objective in order to increase opportunities for success in context (Gonçalves, et al., 2018).

Task and Time

In figure 4 the theme of increasing 'opportunity for success' was the most frequent response at 50% by teachers for the justification of manipulating the time spent on activities and the task itself, while 'challenge' was 20% and catering for sensory needs was 40%.

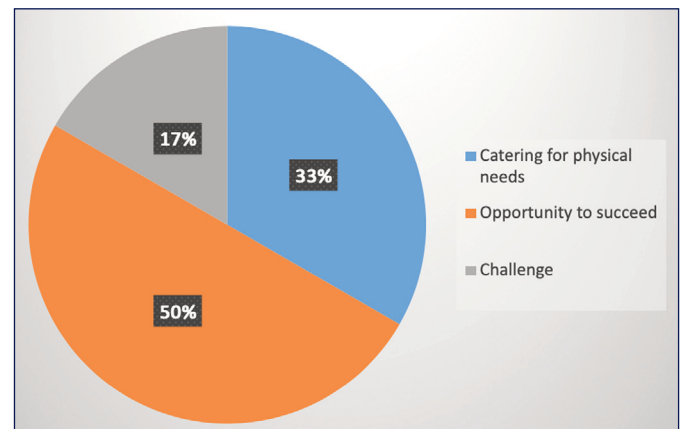


Figure 4: Thematically organised responses to teacher justifications for the adaptive modification of task and time to improve teaching and learning

Schmidt, Sagester, Simon and Tanner (ND) suggest that reducing sensory aspects of an environment or task such as touch in physical contact games like can accommodate for sensory needs due to autism spectrum disorder (ASD), this prevents overload, subsequently increasing working memory and improving 'opportunities for success'. In observed lessons the rules in tag rugby were altered from the original rules, so players could not make contact to tackle with player in possession with sensory needs, instead they were offered a time limit to hold the ball and move before they must pass, reducing physical touch for an individual player, accommodating for their sensory needs, while enabling them to be successful in the game, preventing exclusion or the attempt to (Ofsted, 2022 [b]).

Equipment

Themed justifications in figure 5 for the use of equipment in modified activities shows an equal split of 'catering for physical needs' and 'increasing opportunity for success' at 40%, and to increase 'challenge' at 20%. Grenier and Lieberman (2018) suggest that in order for a piece of adaptive equipment to support learners needs and increase their 'opportunity for success' it must make 'sense' - a framework which they use to discuss the effectiveness of the implementation of adaptive equipment, where the equipment can be assessed on its safety, educational integrity, number of practice opportunities, success, and enjoyment.

Courchesne (2024) states that adapting equipment for students with physical limitations allows learners to access parts of the curriculum they may otherwise have been able to do, helps students to maintain physical health – a key aim the PE national curriculum guidance (DfE, 2013), and ensure they a part of the group, fostering a sense of community and belonging (Becker, 2019).

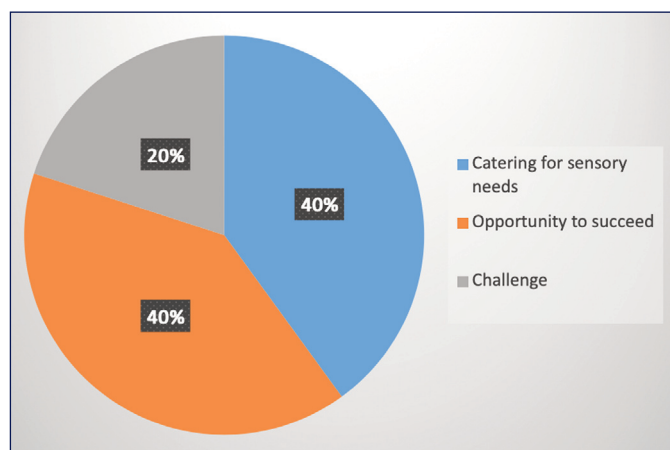


Figure 5: Thematically organised responses to teacher justifications for the adaptive modification of equipment to improve teaching and learning

People

The themes of 'Modelling the correct skill', 'providing feedback' and 'developing life skills' attained 10% each for teacher justifications of for the adaptive modification of people in modified activities, however 'support for physical needs' attained 40% and 'encouraging participation' attained 30%. The modification of people is predominantly made using TAs to work 1:1 with students low-attaining groups, which the EEF (2021) suggest is a mistake made with good intention that many schools make, as they suggest TAs working in structured setting in 1:1 arrangements can have a positive impact on pupil attainment and success, however it does not promote inclusion, as students are being identified as low-attainers and are being segregated from the class.

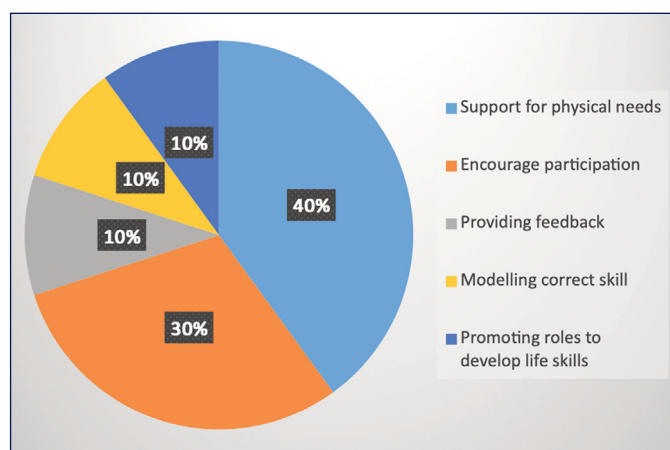


Figure 6: Thematically organised responses to teacher justifications for the adaptive modification of people to improve teaching and learning.

In a study by Namli and Suveren (2018) conducted about the expectations of SEND students in physical education, students with SEND had common expectations, such as receiving extra help and teachers sparing more time for them during lessons. A study suggests that TAs spend more time with SEND students and low-attainers, than the class teacher and it is important to express that their typical instructional approach differs from teachers, often telling a pupil how to perform the skill in specific context or telling them the correct answer (Vogt, Koechlin, Truniger, Zumwald, 2022). This questions whether TAs are fulfilling the justifications of 'supporting

individuals with physical needs' and 'encouraging participation' through the promotion of student independence or are simply completing the task on their behalf. This also questions whether Teachers are instructing TAs appropriately to guide them to correctly support students, as Winnick and Porretta (2016) suggest that teachers do not receive enough training on how to most effectively do this. More research should be conducted into the type and amount of support given by TA's and its effectiveness for learning.

Parallel activities

Figure 7 shows how teachers equally justified, at 43%, their reasoning for using parallel activities to 'increase success' and to 'accommodate for needs and ability', while only 14% of the justifications were to promote 'challenge'. Parallel activities were used to group students of similar 'ability and needs' to 'increase success' within their working group, and balance challenge (Merrick, 2015). This allows individuals to not only achieve the outcomes of the lesson, but also achieve their personalised aims, meaning success is not only achieved within the learnt context but also individual long-term goals are most achieved this way (Grenier, Miller, Black, 2017).

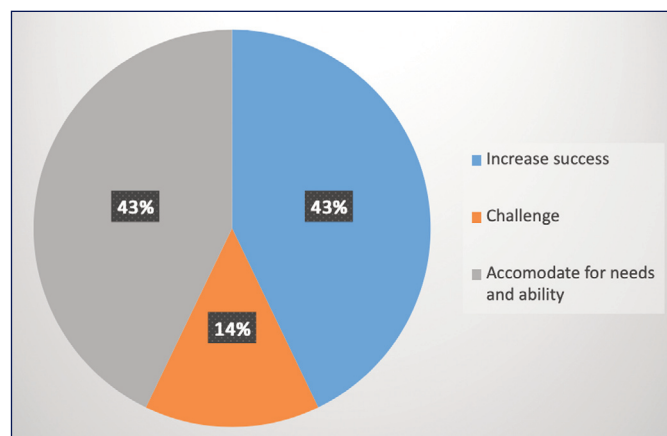


Figure 7: Thematically organised responses to teacher justifications for the use of parallel activities to improve teaching and learning.

Downing (2007) explains how accommodating for students needs using developmentally appropriate activities directly increases success as the students working with peers with similar individual aims, will have equal participation within their working group (Grenier, Miller, Black, 2017).

Separate/alternative activities

Figure 8 shows how 75% of the justifications for the use of alternative activities was to 'include non-active participants (NAP)', while 25% were to provide 'support for physical needs'. Alternative activities such as officiating or coaching roles were given to some students who could not participate in whole class activities due to health conditions. However, Dixon, Braye and Gibbons (2021) state that SEND students are increasingly more likely to be put into these roles, meaning inclusion is not being achieved. Although children are still learning the content and gaining theoretical knowledge of performance and skill completion, students are being denied of the opportunity to participate in physical activity, so are not achieving national curriculum aims of developing personal fitness (DfE, 2013), and as a result, feel rejected and devalued (Ofsted, 2022 [b]).

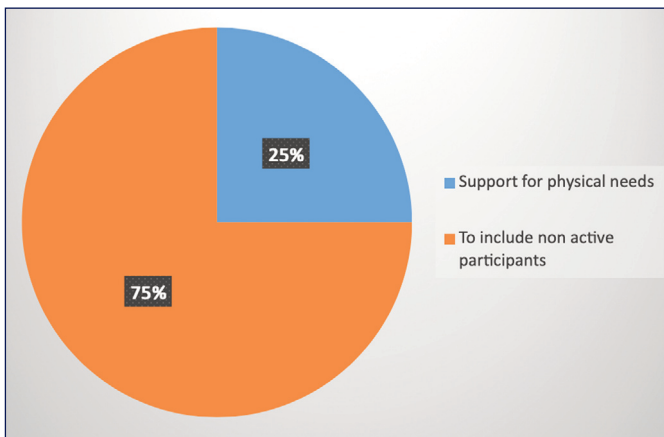


Figure 8: Thematically organised responses to teacher justifications for the use of separate/alternative activities to improve teaching and learning

Liberman and Houston-Wilson (2018) identify that this type of activity delivery is part-time segregated and part-time integrated, questioning its level of inclusivity, however they state this delivery method allows for individual education goals to be developed without impacting the whole class and it can also allow students to be integrated into activities where participation as a performer may not be possible (Grenier, Miller, Black, 2017).

Conclusion

Teachers used modified delivery most of the time and most often adapted the activities delivered in this way, by changing the equipment students were using. Teachers justified that they predominantly adapted their lessons and changed their adaptive delivery method to increase student success. It can be assumed that the findings can be transferable, however in a case study like this they cannot be generalised to the entire population as a small group in a single setting/ environment cannot represent the whole community of teachers nationally or globally (Lauer, Asher, 1988; Barnes, et al., 2024). Therefore, research should be conducted on a larger scale in order for this data to be generalised and to provide national feedback on how teachers are adapting their lessons, so funding can be used to facilitate the methods used most and to orientate CPD sessions to have the most relevance and benefit.

Findings from various other studies suggest that some students with SEND describe times when they have not been able to join in with certain activities due to not having equipment to participate fully or instead attending scheduled therapies during this time, completely missing PE lessons (AA, 2020). However, the data collected in this study suggests that teachers use different equipment most often, highlighting how findings nationally may vary from those suggested in this study. This suggests that further studies into how schools are spending their financial funds/budgets is required to measure the accessibility and inclusivity of PE, to highlight areas where further measures can be put in place to bridge this gap.

Winnick and Porretta (2016) suggest that during teacher training programmes there is not enough focus on the assistance of those with SEND, as trainee teachers do not have training on task- analysis, writing and managing aims on individualised education plans, working with allied professionals and managing extreme behaviour. This may suggest that teachers are not using all the resources and

tools available to them when choosing how to best support their students through adaptive teaching and therefore the methods put in place may not be most effective for the students. Further research is required to establish the effectiveness of the adaptive teaching methods used and whether the teacher justifications for the methods used is shown in the student outcome.

It is suggested that in future practice, trainee teachers are informed of ways to support SEND students using the multi-disciplinary team, individual education plans and task-analysis (EEF, 2021), so teachers can feel confident about their choice of adaptation and ensure that is supporting the learning of individuals most.

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Exploring the relationship of the Physical Education curriculum of 2015–2020 school leavers, and the physical activities that they complete now

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Introduction

Banville, et al (2021) believes the integral role of physical education (PE) within the secondary curriculum is to help students progress throughout school, developing the dependence needed to be physically active when departing mandatory education. To maintain physical activity (PA) at a suitable standard during adulthood, students need the motivation, physical competence and knowledge, these features align with the concept of physical literacy (PL) (Whitehead, 1993), to promote this, meaningfulness needs to be prioritized. Teachers identify features that are meaningful to students, implementing challenging and fun lessons into their school PE curriculum and providing opportunities for development across several learning domains (Fletcher, 2021). PL and meaningful PE (Beni et al, 2021) share the same goal of lifelong participation in PA, throughout fostering

the holistic development in students. However, in 2024, 11.9 million adults failed to reach the minimum of 30 minutes of PA a day (SE, 2024A). Therefore, drawing my attention to understand if the curriculum has impacted participation post mandatory education.

The focus of my enquiry is to understand if the school PE curriculum has impacted PA levels of current 2015–2020 school leavers. I aim to understand if the rationale behind motivation to be active attained within my enquiry corresponds to the school PE curriculum aims, as it is imperative that the interests, preferences and needs in PE are a continuous process (Strand, et al. 1994). Students establish the foundations of adopting a healthy active lifestyle in school, however it has become prevalent that schools are unable to establish goals understood or consistent with the

desired goals of students (Jones, et al. 2001). Through a self-administrated questionnaire, I intend to interpret data and statistics, with the aim of analysing the impact the schools PE curriculum has had on school leavers. I intend with the findings of the enquiry to subsequently implement changes in the near future, adopting the approach within Key stage 4 (KS4) that is most desired. My enquiry is centred around the three questions below.

Research Questions

- 1 What were the PE related physical activities school leavers of 2015-2020 complete at Key Stage 4 PE?
- 2 What physical activities do school leavers of 2015-2020 now complete on a typically weekly basis in 2024?
- 3 What are the factors that motivate participation for these physical activities?

Review of Literature

Physical activity

PA is a fundamental theme throughout my enquiry. It paramount to define as the content of my first and second research questions are underpinned by what participants understand by the terminology. Within my enquiry, PA is defined as "any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that results in energy expenditure" (Caspersen, et al. 1985) a universally recognised definition of PA (Piggin, 2020). To sustain life all individuals partake in PA; however, the amount varies and is dependent on personal choice (Caspersen, 1985). Vigorous PA (VPA) when regularly undertaken is the burning of calories, beneficial for children and adults' health (Teixeira, et al. 2012), as it makes 'our lives go better, not just longer' (Kretchmar, 2006). Despite the definition of PA being clearly outlined, the variation of what PA entails within national documents differs. Sport England (SE) established by the Royal Charter in (1996) define PA as completing moderate intensity activities, with a raised heart rate in bouts of 10 minutes (SE, 2023A). SE define VPA as being out of breath or producing sweat, resulting in a loss of breath (SE, 2022). Their aim is to allow people to enjoy sport and be physically active whilst investing in five health, social and economic outcomes (Appendix 1) (SE, ND). It is encouraged that adults 19 and over should complete 150 minutes of moderate PA per week, or a minimum of 75 minutes of VPA per week (DoHaSC, 2019A).

The National Curriculum

The national curriculum (NC) is a document produced by the Department for Education (DfE) (2014) which sets the foundation for school subject curriculums ensuring all students are taught to the same standard. It is acknowledged that the primary function of the curriculum is to act as a systemic framework (Kirk, 1988), serving as a foundation for teachers to shape decisions as helping with the implementation of PA for students is fundamental (Herold, 2020). Maintained schools must follow the NC (Roberts, 2021), under section 80 of the Education act (2002). However, academics, free, faith, private and state boarding schools do not (DfE, 2024A).

Frequent PE lessons are a requirement within education, students should partake in a minimum of two hours per week (DfE, 2024B), however the volume fluctuates contingent on the type of school. It is aimed that students should partake in an average of 60 minutes of PA per day across the week (DoHaSC, 2019B). The KS4 PE NC intention is for students to be partaking in complex and demanding PA with the aim of

developing fitness, contributing to an active healthy lifestyle (DfE, 2013B). The UK Chief Medical Officers state PA for students age five to eighteen as "making you breathe faster and feel warmer" (DoHaSC, 2019B).

Physical Activity Transitions

Both definitions of PA bear similarities, mentioning changes in breathing rate and elevated body temperature. However, activities defined as being PA significantly vary from the schools' activities influenced by the NC, as adults are not bound by a mandatory framework. SE (2023A) state walking for leisure, active travel and fitness activities accumulate the highest number of participants aged 16 plus. Walking for leisure gained popularity over the span of 6 years, growing from 18.3 to 24.0 million participants (SE, 2023A). Participation in cycling for leisure and swimming has decreased, failing to match or surpass pre-pandemic figures (SE, 2023A). Activities completed at home can also accumulate to PA; housework, gardening and building work can be classed as moderate activity for adults (Scholes, 2012). Data attained over six years presents minimal change to how active adults are, in November 2015-16 figures of physically active adults fell at 62.1%, in November 2021-22 figures rose to 63.1% (SE, 2023A). The demographic breakdown of age also impacts the amount, intensity and type of exercise adults complete, gradually subsiding from 70% to 41% when adults are 75+ (SE, 2023A). The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2011) found health and fitness activities are popular among adults aged 16-44, whilst snooker for adults 75+ has an increased interest.

As a result of PA within maintained schools being a government requirement, 47% of students suppress the average of 60 minutes or more a day, 22.8% complete a minimum of 30 to 59 minutes per day weekly (SE, 2023B). During and after school, sporting activities offer additional opportunities for students to partake in organized PA under supervision (Cheung, 2019). PA and PE is exemplified well by Shephard and Trudeau (2000), who view that the exposure of a varied range of PA should be met to achieve the long-term goal of health (Fairclough, et al. 2002). Examples of sports are provided by the DfE (2013B) for schools to use as an influence to formulate their independent curriculum. The NC for KS4 believes students should, overcome opponents in team and individual sports and give examples of basketball and football (DfE, 2013B). Additionally stating students should be involved in competitive sports such as athletics, gymnastics and other activities, providing the example of dance (DfE, 2013B). Students should be taught to take part in outdoor, adventurous activities (OAA), such as orienteering (DfE, 2013B). The DfE (2013B) also advise that students should partake in competitive sports regularly. Despite children beginning to partake competitively in sport between the ages of eleven and thirteen, the effort should be focused on encouraging participation compared to the competitive nature of winning (Maffulli, 2000). Despite their age, physical maturity and psychological attitude (Maffulli, 2000), students may not understand how physically demanding competitive sport is whilst in education.

Curriculum design

The growth of a school curriculum comprises a set of goals and beliefs, developing from a value orientation or a theoretical framework (Darst, et al. 2013). When departing education, students should have the comprehension and perceived competence to contribute solely or with adults in PA (Houston,

et al. 2014). However, the content within is reliant on the value orientation of the curriculum which is dependent on the PE practitioner's involvement in the planning (Darst, et al. 2013). Subject matter mastery as a curriculum design approach, involves sports and activities similar to what is devised by the DfE (2013B). However, practitioners that formulate the curriculum design around a student-centred approach foster the holistic development of individual students (Darst, et al. 2013). The pedagogical approach of student-centred learning is an alternative design to engage students, discovering suitable methods of collaboration which students and teachers co-create the class environment (Nuñez Enriquez, et al. 2022). PA within this setting is non-traditional, including co-operative games and group activities which enhance students' interpersonal skills (Darst, et al. 2013). Ofsted (2023) stated many schools have been unable to define and embed a broad PE curriculum, therefore not meeting the ambition outlined in the NC.

Meaningful PE is a pedagogical approach to teaching and learning, intending to aid teachers to prioritise meaningful experiences for students (Beni, et al. 2021). A theme when implementing meaningful PE is to "support students in coming to value PE through experiencing meaningfulness, recognising ways participation enhances the quality of their lives" (Fletcher, 2021). The six features of meaningful experiences are, social interaction, challenge, fun, motor competence, personally relevant learning and delight (Fletcher, 2021). In accordance with Kretchmar, (2006), students are more inclined to associate meaningfulness to PE encounters when a combination of the features are present.

Factors impacting Physical activity

The PA completed during school differs in time, type and intensity when leaving education. During the first-year young people frequently move to pursue further education or job prospects, resulting in a decline or change in PA (Simons, 2015). Socioeconomic status assessed through household income, educational achievement or occupation, (Cerin, et al. 2008) can impact the availability of time to complete PA. Responsibilities such as devoted childcare, physical labour, transportation and inflexible work schedules (Seefeldt, et al. 2002) impact the significance of fulfilling PA commitments. Adults lack motivation, due to not appreciating PA (Cerin, et al. 2010), as within school PE was compulsory, minimizing the significance of self-selection (Black, et al. 2019). Additionally, students have access to facilities within the educational day, however in adulthood they may have reduced accessibility or funds to access comparable facilities (Cerin, et al. 2010). The majority of household incomes have decreased (SE, 2024B), as a result reducing numbers of PA as costs have increased. There are three simultaneous factors that have increased the cost of living; interest rates, inflation and energy prices (SE, 2024B). The rise in gas and electric has increased gym membership fees (SE, 2024B), consequently impacting lower income families.

Methodology

This study was granted ethical approval in line with HELS BCU abiding by the British educational research association (BERA, 2024). The participants were sent the information sheet and consent form prior to their involvement.

This enquiry, through primary research, employed the methodology of a questionnaire, participants answered

questions without the aid of an interviewer (De Leeuw, et al. 2008). Questionnaires can be used sensibly to attain data about subjective features in a standardised format (Rugg, et al. 2007), highlighting my rationale. I collected data from ten participants, setting a deadline for the collection of responses, to keep strict guidelines on accurate data. My structured questionnaire enabled me to attain accurate data (Taherdoost, 2016), through anonymising data I was then able to attain valid and reliable responses. To ensure participants remained anonymous their names were coded, E.g. P1. To strengthen my enquiry, I systemically reviewed studies and documents already produced that comment upon reflections, data and primary resources (Wisker, 2018). By exploring existing data, it added to my study by providing additional information on relevant evidence already researched. All data obtained and used within my enquiry was peer reviewed, government sourced and provided theoretical context to inform my research.

The data collected was obtained from ten university students who left secondary education between 2015-2020 and are completing university subject degrees in secondary PE. The participant strategy including other degree subjects, however, once the data collection window was finished, only PE students had completed the questionnaire (see limitations). The decision behind choosing a variation of subject specific backgrounds was to ensure a variation of interests and experiences were reached, so no specific subject biased the results. The participants chosen were obtained through judgemental sampling, used to ensure the participants had the required information and subject knowledge to enable the objectives of the enquiry to succeed (Etikan, et al. 2017).

Quantitative questions were used in different variations, to attain answers to aid my first and second research questions. Multiple choice and likert scale questions were used to gain answers; a common tool used in various fields of education (Vyas, et al. 2008). The quantitative data gained involved numbers and statistical methods (Thomas, et al. 2003), it was produced in a numerical format which was analysed (Wisker, 2018), through manipulation I was able to extract the central tendency to which I could form a meaning (Mertens, 2017).

A single qualitative question informed my final research question. The data collected encompassed participants perspectives (Graue, 2015), which I extracted a meaning by categorizing through thematic analysis, a form of identifying, analysing and interpreting themes (Clarke, et al. 2017). I axially coded information, ensuring to draw connections to their categories and inter connecting them (Kendall, 1999).

Data attained was presented in the same format throughout, the graphical representation of a pie chart; the optimal format for representing data attained into a limited number of categories (In, et al. 2017).

Limitations

A disadvantage when attaining data through a questionnaire was the common low response rate (Atkinson, 2012). Despite the questionnaire being sent to 37 applicable students, only 10 students submitted responses. Within the responses attained not all subject backgrounds were reached as only secondary PE students completed the questionnaire. When looking at what I intended to measure and the closeness of what I have believed to measure varied (Roberts and Priest, 2006), due to the marginal subject background reached the validity of my enquiry could be questioned when presenting my findings.

Additionally due to the format of my questionnaire there was limited flexibility for students to present their own data on issues (Marshall, 2005), as limited qualitative questions were asked. Qualitative data produces rich and complex detail (Baralt, 2011); however, the time take to thematically and axially code data is time consuming resulting in minimal questions. Upon reflection, due to the minimal response rate an increase in qualitative questions within my questionnaire should be used to gain responses with greater depth.

Findings and Discussion

During KS4, 70% of students completed 2 hours of PE per week, leaving 30% of students completing 1 hour (Figure 1). No participants completed more than two hours of PE.

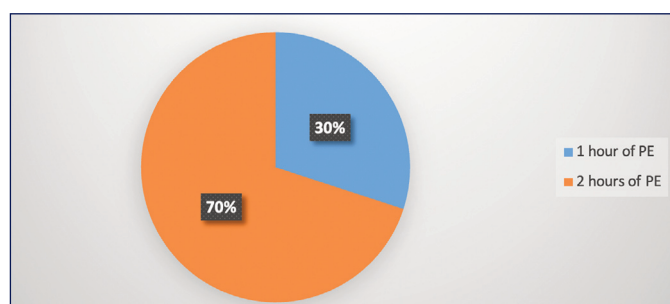


Figure 1: How many hours of core PE participants completed at KS4

For an increasing number of students, school is the main provider for offering regular and structured PE (Bailey, 2006). However, dependent on what school the participants within my enquiry attended would influence how many hours their PE curriculum devoted to PA. The DfE (2024B), stated 2 hours of PE should be a minimum alongside additional PE. In 2002, prior to the participants entering KS4, the government stated that by 2006 75% of students should complete 2 hours of PE per week, by 2008 this should have amplified to 85% (AfPE, 2015). In 2010, a continuing goal of 2 hours of PE was devised and magnified by PE curriculums offering an additional 2 plus hours beyond the curriculum (AfPE, 2015). However, data attained showed that 30% of students (Figure 1) hadn't met the requirement of 2 hours of PE per week, even though their attendance in KS4 was up to 11 years past the initial implantation of the government's targets. Furthermore, participants did not suppress the governments targets of PE, even though the importance of PA was increasing in society.

Further research has stated since 2011 schools have reduced PE from 326,000 hours to 284,00 hours in 2021 within English state schools (Youth Sport Trust, 2022). Despite hours within the week devoted to PE declining, the DfE (2013A) have shown that around 6% of schools have stated to suppress the government requirement and complete three hours of PE within educational hours. None of my participants stated to suppress this target therefore, the likelihood of students being able to complete the 60 minutes of PA during the day over the span of a week devised by the DoHaSC (2019B) is minimal.

Even though the 2 hours of PE should be a minimum, 54% of students would enjoy more PE and opportunities to exercise than what is currently offered (Youth Sport Trust, 2022). PE provides students with the necessary knowledge to complete PA, therefore should be used to increase habitual PA levels in adulthood (TRUDEAU, et al. 2005). Minimal exposure within education may encourage students to see it as less important, minimizing the significance attached to maintaining it in

adulthood therefore negatively influencing PA levels.

RQ1

The majority of students completed games activities at 47% (Figure 2). Participants were given examples of PA involved within each theme. Games examples included badminton and football. Second in popularity at 24% were fitness-based activities (Figure 2), examples given to the participants were circuit and weight training. Gymnastics, dance, swimming and OAA were all completed marginally, figures fell below 10% (Figure 2).

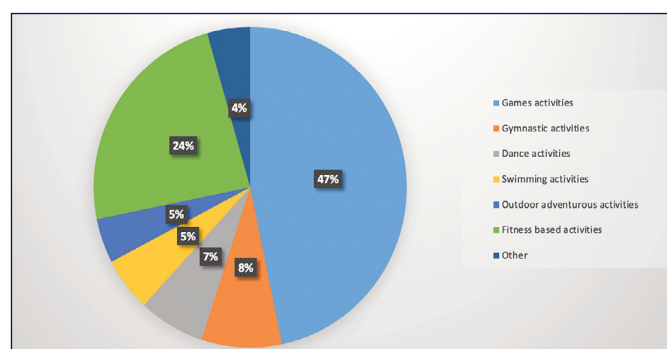


Figure 2: The percentage of PE activities that students predominantly completed at KS4

Despite all sport-based themes being reached, the proportion of activities completed are insufficiently balanced, a similar conclusion was reached by Ofsted (2023) who agreed numerous schools have been incapable of embedding an expansive PE curriculum, despite the DfE (2013B) stating this was imperative. The prominence of a diverse curriculum is agreed upon by Shepard and Trudeau (2000) who state the implementation should be met, to fulfil the long-term ambition of health in adults (Fairclough, et al. 2002). Participants spent under 10% of their time during KS4 completing gymnastics, swimming, dance and OAA (Figure 2). As a result, failing to match the DfE (2013B) aim of students being able to "excel in a broad range of physical activities". Due to the limited time participants spent completing gymnastics, swimming, dance and OAA during education further links to the decline of no gymnastics or OAA in adulthood and similarly minimal dance and swimming, both under 10% (Figure 3). Due to the limited exposure within education, results show that students are incapable of having the comprehension and perceived competence to partake in adulthood (Houston, et al. 2014). This corresponds to the relationship of the PE curriculum having an impact on the PA participants within my enquiry currently complete.

The tradition of what is taught in PE throughout the years has transformed noticeably, the introduction of games like basketball presently employed on the PE curriculum as an alternative to 'boring calisthenics' was invented by a PE teacher in 1981 due to inspiration from a traditional game (Martínez-Santos, et al. 2020). However, the high proportion of games on the curriculum was realised by Thorpe, et al. (1986), who stated pupils should be aware of moving "away from a skills-based lesson and towards a more cognitively based approach". The high proportion of games activities is historically developed on what activities physical educators want to teach (Ennis, 2016A) or the pedagogical approach chosen by the school. This may be down to the approach in curriculum design as a result of each participants schools' beliefs. Looking at the results produced (Figure 2), students

attended schools that focused on teaching PA through games like badminton and are yet to adopt a cognitively based approach.

Involvement in adulthood is down to what students have access to in education. The idea of prioritising meaningful experiences for students (Beni, et al. 2021), helps for them to make sense of past, present and future studies (Beni, et al. 2017). Studies have found that non- games-based activities, like dance create a more meaningful experience (Beni, et al. 2017). Therefore, if implemented more within school, participation in adulthood may increase. Fun is a feature associated with creating meaningful experiences (Fletcher, 2021). Dismore and Bailey (2011) found that secondary students like the challenge associated with games-based activities and a minimal focus on fun. This corresponds to why KS4 lessons consisted of mainly games-based activities due to the challenge student's desire. This additionally relates to associating sport in a competitive manor, as this happens around the age of eleven to thirteen with additional parental encouragement within sports being played (Maffulli, 2000).

RQ2

During adulthood 45% completed fitness-based activities and games activities at 43% (Figure 3). Minimal dance 7% and swimming 5% were completed.

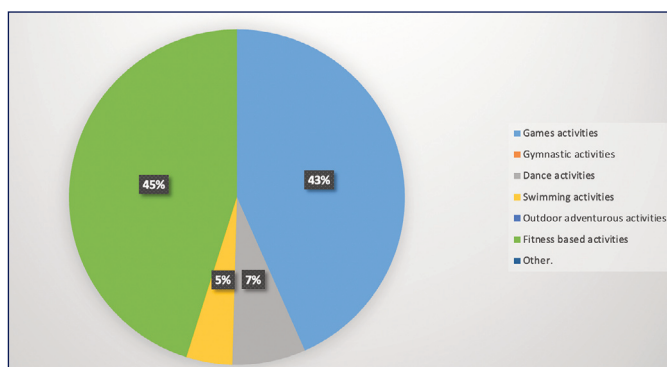


Figure 3: The percentage of time the participants spent completing typical physical activities in adulthood

Participants within my enquiry completed no gymnastics or OAA during adulthood despite learning it minimally within PE in school. Participants within my enquiry have stated they spend the majority of the time completing games (43%) and fitness based (45%) activities (Figure 3). A study conducted similarly found that adults aged 18-25 found that a gym-based activities or organised sports we considered as 'real' PA (Poobalan, et al. 2012), similar to games and fitness-based activities within my enquiry. Additionally correlating to what was attained by The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2011) as adults aged 16-44 preferred to complete health and fitness activities as a majority over other forms of PA available.

Although gymnastics is a form of PA that trains fundamental movement skills, it has amplified rates of early sport specialization (Root, et al 2019). Students who participate in gymnastics in adulthood start participation at roughly 7 years old, in comparison to games-based activities which start older (Root, et al 2019). Therefore, if gymnastics is not implemented and understood for students in PE early, the competence or desire to complete it within adulthood are minimal in conjunction with the intensity and competitiveness of

gymnastics as a form of PA. OAA additionally wasn't completed by the adults within my enquiry, despite it being described as a stimulating recreational activity that encompasses perceived levels of risk (Zwart and Ewert, 2022). PE has been stated to enrich PA in adulthood (Tammelin, et al. 2003), therefore due to limited exposure in both gymnastics and OAA in KS4 (Figure 2), corresponds with no participation in adulthood. However, it has stated that for more mature adults, it is increasingly common for them to practise OAA in later life (Smith and Dalmer, 2023). Therefore, due to the age of the participants within my enquiry currently falling within their late teens to early twenties, the desire to participate within OAA may be yet to come.

It is important to consider that adults who complete PA are not bound by a mandatory framework therefore may choose to participate in forms of PA they solely enjoy. When departing mandatory education wider determinants such as socio-economic status, occupation and levels of deprivation (PHE, 2021), impact what sports adults complete on a weekly basis. Fitness based activities can be completed at home, parks or in local gyms with no or minimal cost therefore may suggest why the figures attained show fitness-based activities as the most popular. Over two thirds of people, due to the cost-of-living surge have made changes to a particular sport of PA behaviour (SE, 2024B), due to wider determinants mentioned. The popularity of fitness-based activities aligns with the Active Lives Survey (2024) who state that for adults aged 16 plus, fitness activities have grown in popularity raising figures from 12.5 million to 13.3 million; a 0.8 million increase. Additionally, games-based activities being popular correlates to figures attained. The Active Lives Survey (2024) found that games/ team sports have attained the highest figures currently within six years. After leaving mandatory education it has been stated by Simons (2015) that moving to a different city, state or area happens frequently as students desire further education. Within university the accessibility of completing games-based activities due to the genre of clubs offered, could contribute to the high population due to the easy accessibility, affordability, and adaptability to diverse schedules.

RQ3

The main factors that motivate adults to complete PA in adulthood are physical health/fitness and mental health both at 25% (Figure 4). 18% state participation as a child has influenced PA in adulthood (Figure 4). Social benefits and enjoyment both attain 11%, passion or love for sports attains a minimal figure of 7% (Figure 4). The development of technique/ skill set at 3% is the lowest in popularity (Figure 4).

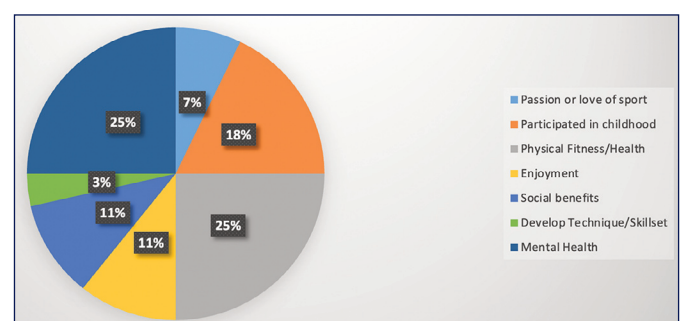


Figure 4: The motivation/inspiration participants felt to complete PA in adulthood

The motivation/inspiration for participants completing PA was coded through the process of thematic analysis which I drew out seven categories. A definitive category for an inspiration/ motivation wasn't clear however, the categories that attained the highest figures were "Mental Health" and "Physical fitness/Health", making up 50% of results. By completing PA, it has been proven that it has a positive effect on health linking to improvements in cardiovascular, immunological, metabolic, osteoarticular and brain functions (Ekkekakis, 2023), these advantages signify holistic benefits within the body aligning physical and mental well-being, reinforcing participants view on their motivation or inspiration.

Participants involved within my enquiry are all currently studying within their final degree year, PA reduces the symptoms of anxiety, improving overall mood (Taylor, et al. 1985). Emphasising a potential rationale for completing PA as it supports an element of mental health. Acute and chronic exercise aids emotional barriers in adults including anti-stress properties (Ekkekakis, 2023), which was included within my mental health category. P1 (Figure 5) aligns with this as they completed PA for their mental health due to academic stress which was caused by an emotional barrier. P2 (Figure 6) additionally states their rationale for completing exercise is to help their mental health in adulthood. However, both categories that have attained the percentage of 25% (Figure 4) have not stated their motivation or inspiration was influenced by the PE curriculum within school.

"Provide an outlet from academic stress"

Figure 5: P1 rationale for PA

"To help with my Mental Health"

Figure 6: P2 rationale for PA

However, third in popularity which links to KS4 PA completed in school, is the 18% of participants that complete PA due to the motivation or inspiration in childhood. P3 (Figure 7) stated school was the motivator to enable them to carry on completing PA after departing mandatory education. The statement that the schools PE curriculum has had a positive impact links to the school providing a meaningful experience, it has enabled the students to value PE and show through PA the quality of their live can be enhanced (Fletcher, 2021). The sports stated within Figure 7 correspond to the highest percentage attained in KS4 (Figure 2). Therefore, highlighting that due to the overrepresentation of games within the school curriculum, the sports carried through fall within the games category, this relates to why they see it as a motivation as the time spent completing them within school was more than any other form of PA. This continues to reinforce the view that the school curriculum can impact adulthood participation and influence the motivation/inspiration behind carrying on.

"Both badminton and football a lot during school has encouraged me to keep participating in these sports since I left"

Figure 7: P3 rationale for PA

The smallest category devised was the motivation or inspiration to develop their technique/skill set, attaining a percentage of 7% (Figure 4). Despite the competitive element of sport being introduced between the ages of eleven and thirteen (Maffulli, 2000), which would encourage them to develop their technique/skill set in order to improve, the desire to be competitive in adulthood has shown to be less of a priority. This may be due to the competitive element the NC desires within PE curriculums being introduced too prematurely portraying a lack of adults aiming to improve their individual technique/skill set. Instead focusing on using PA as a motivator to stay physically fit/healthy and help maintain positive mental health.

Conclusion

Throughout I investigated the relationship between the PE curriculum of 2015–2020 school leavers and the PA currently completed. Ofsted (2023) stated a minimal number of schools were able to embed a definitive and broad PE curriculum, I found this prevalent issue with 47% of participants across the duration of KS4 mainly completing game-based activities (Figure 2). When correlating data to adulthood, the high proportion of game-based activities minimally decreased but maintained a figure of 43% (Figure 3). Second in popularity at KS4 were fitness-based activities at 24% (Figure 2). The proportion of time spent completing fitness-based activities within adulthood dramatically increased attaining figures of 45% (Figure 3). However, when analysing the motivation or inspiration behind partaking in PA, the influence during adolescence was third at 18% (Figure 4). The desire to be active was more important for their physical fitness and mental health, combined making up 50% of responses (Figure 4). The findings support the idea that the school PE curriculum correlates to PA in adulthood, however the influence to participate in adulthood is not solely influenced by the KS4 curriculum. Other factors determine the participants to "lead healthy, active lives" (DfE, 2013B).

The research focused only upon participants as a group who attended school within the years of 2015-2020. This enquiry did not consider participant factors such as gender, as a result, it did not source clear inequalities or differences in the types of PA completed. Therefore, further research on the specific gender differences in activities needs to be conducted. Additionally, the enquiry was conducted during January, the coldest month and failed to analyse environmental factors. Therefore, the activities completed may differ if conducted during July as it has been shown through research that outdoor PA is more pleasurable than indoor (Wagner, et al. 2019), potentially increasing figures.

- Based on this enquiry, I would like to make the following recommendations for future practice in PE:
- 1 Two hours of core PE per week should be compulsory within every school during KS4, along with developing the competence to be active alone, it improves physical health and better mental wellbeing (DfE, 2024D), vital for students during their academic studies. However, I acknowledge the constraints that PE can reduce the time students spend on academic subjects.
 - 2 Physical fitness and mental health should be included in school PE curriculums during KS4, as 50% currently take part for a physical or mental health benefit. However, I understand some students may partake in PA for the competitive element of sport, refining skills to better performance. Therefore, the design of future school PE

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The use of autoethnography in the reflection of a critical incident and its influence on my teacher identity during the completion of a PGCE in Secondary Education with QTS

Elodie Timms – PGCE in Secondary Education (Science)

Introduction

In this reflective essay I will be navigating the transition of my teacher identity during the early stages of my Postgraduate Certificate of Education in relation to a critical incident (CI). I have chosen to analyse my teacher identity as I believe it is at the core of the teaching profession. This disagrees with Kanno and Stuart (2011) who state that novice teachers' identity development is fostered by only classroom practices and interactions with students. However, they focused primarily on classroom conflict, whereas Golombek and Klanger (2015) identify the importance of reflecting on both positive and negative formative experiences and trainings to inform teacher identity, thus suggesting the importance of all experiences in moulding teacher identity. I aim to distinguish implications for my future teaching practise and ultimately

consider the influence the CI event has had on my teaching identity.

I chose effective questioning as my research topic as it is an essential part of teaching in terms of identifying misconceptions, areas that need addressing again, as well as creating an effective learning environment (Nicholl and Tracey, 2007). Considering that 40% of classroom time is spent in question - response mode (Jackson, 1995), it is important that I effectively utilise this time within my classroom. Poorly constructed questions can stifle learning by creating confusion, intimidating students and limiting creative thinking (Ball, 2008), each of which I aim to prevent. I specifically chose to analyse the duration of the 'wait time', a component of effective questioning which refers to the lapse

of time that occurs between the teacher's question and a student's response (Tofade et al, 2013) and its positive influence on student attainment.

Although effective questioning directly encompasses multiple aspects of teaching such as student behaviour, student-teacher relationships and local policy regarding questioning (Weber, 2011) these aspects are beyond the boundaries of this assignment, so I will therefore be focusing on the impact on student attainment and my teacher identity.

The methodology: autoethnography

Autoethnography can be used to identify the differing layers that connect personal experience to the wider cultural experience (Bochner and Ellis, 2016). I have chosen this methodology as it fits suitably with my research objective of reflecting on an event and how it may influence my teacher identity for multiple reasons.

As a social profession, teaching pertains a research methodology that accommodates for its uncertain nature and the intricacies of teachers' lived experiences. Unlike quantitative methods that aim for objectivity (Holman Jones and Ellis, 2014), such as student test scores, autoethnography foregrounds the researcher's subjectivity and values the insider's perspective (Tarisayl, 2023). As a scientist I was particularly sceptical of this methodology, as I value binary hypothesis testing that allows for the establishment of conventions for data analysis as without this, the conclusions drawn are based purely on the researcher's subjective judgement (Ghaye, 2011). However, in my experience, autoethnography facilitates the sharing of insider perspectives of the very contextual complex art of teaching (Sparkes, 2020) which quantitative and other qualitative methods, such as student interviews, have not been able to achieve in my experience.

The method: Critical Incidents

There are numerous definitions of CIs; I disagree with the definition posed by Joshi (2018) who described CIs as 'unplanned'. I have selected an incident which occurred as part of my classroom routine, wasn't unplanned and was arguably not an obvious, memorable challenge to my students or to me. In fact, I was unaware of the repeated occurrence of my CI in every lesson until I experienced professional development in the form of a mentor meeting. This highlighted the importance of reflecting and critically analysing this occurrence, which led me to acknowledge and process the emotions I felt during the process of the CI. CIs provide a method that is suited to autoethnography because of its provision of an event for the researcher to review from an insider perspective.

The benefits and justification of my choice of using a CI are based around the progress it can generate within the teaching profession. By recording a CI, teachers can develop their objective criticality and self-awareness in questioning the effectiveness of their practise (Thiel, 1999). For example, when introducing a new element, teachers can deeply analyse their effectiveness. A wealth of records of CI reflections can then be developed (Thiel, 1999) which consider events that are routine, of common occurrence and can be applied to many different teaching contexts. In fact, Denlco and Pope (1990) highlight the favour of practising teachers in using others' and their own formative experience to emulate for other incidents, of which can be provided by CI records. Through these

methods, on an individual and wider scale, the creation of CI records can further and develop the teaching profession by prompting the evaluation of established procedures by the teacher (Denlco and Pope, 1990). Thus, ultimately employing our professional awareness and putting teachers in a position to reassess and adapt current structures behind their thinking to improve their, and the profession's, practise.

The main limitation of CIs links to the ethical issues of the reliance of memory as workplace evidence. Denzin et al (2011) identified the effect that a passage of time can have upon one's memory, in which the researcher begins to recall and reflect on the memory of a story, not the past event itself. As the use of the researcher's language is so important in recording CIs, it must be acknowledged that distortions to the original memory can occur that make it unreliable, as Walford (2004) highlights. However, Nyberg (2018) disagrees with this when he reflects on the notion of post-structuralism and the porous, interchangeable relationship that exists between the truth and fiction. However, I believe the use of personal memory in a CI is justified for autoethnographic research as it isn't objectifiable (Nyberg, 2018) and I can openly use the memory to reflect on my context and my own intersectionality, as previously discussed.

Method of reflection: Critical incident

A reflective model I decided against using for reflection of my CI was an iterative model from Gibbs (1988) which encompasses reflection as a cyclical process. Whilst this model facilitates the reflection to be carried out in a straightforward manner (Forrester, 2020), I believe this method could potentially lead to superficial reflection with less potential for personal or professional development. The structure of Gibbs' model doesn't encourage the reflector to consider the assumptions and values that may lie behind their actions, whereas my chosen reflective model by McAteer (2013) does. McAteer's (2013) reflective model is one of a vertical dimension that discovers both descriptive, surface level and deeper, analytical questions. It also links the reflectors past, present and potential future thoughts regarding their experience as opposed to creation of an action plan for identical situations in the future as Gibbs' does (Forrester, 2020), which provides a more in depth and broad analysis of the influence of the event on the reflectors' identity outside of just the event's parameters.

Reflection of my critical incident using McAteer's reflective model (2013)

What happened?

I had designed a series of multiple-choice questions for my mid-low set year ten class as they had been responding well to whole class assessment by a 'show of hands'. I had just finished teaching the four factors that affect the rate of diffusion and felt that they were comfortable with the content enough to attempt some low-risk assessment for learning questions (Appendix 1). The class responded well to the first few questions, all students were putting their hands up to vote and a general sense of success was apparent within the classroom. However, as we progressed to questions where knowledge had to be applied to situations, students began to stop engaging and were visibly distracted, some started their own off-task conversations and others began to doodle in their notes.

What were my immediate thoughts and responses? What is it that made the incident critical?

The change in the group struck me as the class had seemed uncharacteristically enthused initially and any progress I felt I had made in terms of their progress, was quickly dampened. Despite feeling defeated, I provided students with a series of past paper questions on the topic hoping that a different format of questioning would engage them, and it did. I couldn't understand why this would be the case, until a conversation with my mentor unveiled the CI I was witnessing and the importance of wait time for a student response. She explained the impact extending wait time can have upon student retention and the development of their sense of success.

What has changed/developed my thinking?

I completed a literature review to contextualise my reflection of the CI well as its impact on my teacher identity. I found that increasing wait time has been identified as a strategy to encourage student participation and ultimately their learning gains as it allows students to reflect more deeply upon the questions posed (Mercer and Dawes, 2008). Duell et al (1992) obtained taped sessions of 11 teachers over 180 days, they found the average wait time was 2.25 seconds. The 128 surveyed students highlighted how they felt they were not provided with the opportunity to 'think through' or discuss an answer with a teacher. Whilst this study boasts a large sample size and considers multiple lenses of the event, it considers a different level of education to my CI and also does not consider the potential bias that may be present, as students are unlikely to tell the complete truth of their teacher. Hassler and Szabo (1981) found that a wait time of six seconds increased student attainment in answering by 24% specifically in terms of application of knowledge questions, and thus their findings directly correspond to my CI. The study attempted to prevent contamination of the sample by different teachers' influences so contained the sample within one school, however they did not consider that within this school, each teacher would have compiled their own teacher identity and therefore would confound the results due to their differing relationship with their students. Additionally, all the teachers that were involved were female, which may have confounded the study in terms of the bias of female teacher intersectionality (Acker, 2006). Rowe (1972) found that extending wait time to six seconds elicited fewer failures to respond and fewer 'I don't know's' as well as eliciting an increase in speculative responses and students asking questions, both of which are correlated to higher achievement (Black et al, 2003).

In finding the 'optimum' wait time, I also must consider the impact on students if it is extended for too long. For example, Nicholl and Tracey (2007) found that a wait time of 20 seconds is perceived as threatening and can result in as equally poor responses as wait time being too short. This agrees with Black et al (2003) who identify that above seven seconds, wait time leads to an 'unbearable silence' and that children begin to 'switch off' and misbehave. Whilst this study was carried out within an elementary setting, it is consistent with my CI, thus further evidencing why I must find an 'optimum' wait time.

How might your practise change and develop as a result of this analysis and learning?

It became clear to me in completing this literature review that my teaching identity, at the time, was quite strict with very

concrete expectations in terms of my own lesson outline and the response from my pupils. I expected to execute my assessment for learning within specific timings. This was due to my primary concern being behaviour management and allowing students to pause and think without talking was a difficult feat for me at this point in my training. Also, due to the science curriculum being a very content heavy one, I felt pressure to get through all the content within my lesson plan and wasn't confident enough to prioritise adapting to student's reactions to certain questions. I feel that in light of this literature, and through this personal reflection, my identity has shifted to a calmer, more confident and more flexible teacher who, after posing a question, allows pupils the time they require to feel comfortable and able to ask further questions in order for them to reach a correct answer and garner a sense of success.

How does the findings of my data impact my future practise?

In the future, when conducting assessment for learning 'checkpoints' with any of my classes, I will pose the multiple-choice question and provide a waiting time of five seconds before asking for students to put their hands up for the correct answer. If students do not respond within the wait time, I will not extend it as this may appear threatening and impact the learning environment (Black et al, 2003) but rather provide scaffolding. With the example of the factors affecting the rate of diffusion (Appendix 1), I would link back to the knowledge that needs to be applied by cold calling 'What happens to the rate of diffusion when we increase distance?' 'Which of A or B has a larger distance?' 'Let's use this information to attempt this question again'. I would then provide the five second wait time again. As I discovered in my literature review, different researchers trialled different wait times, hence I will monitor the effectiveness of five seconds and adapt it to the responses I gather, dependent on the frequency of correct answers it garners.

Conclusion

To conclude, through completion of an autoethnographical reflection of a critical event concerning the parameters of effective questioning, I have reflected upon and analysed the development of my teacher identity. I have found that I have become a calmer and more considerate teacher who prioritises the progress of my students over delivering all the content I planned to within the lesson. I have delved into the many ethical considerations regarding the nature of this reflection and have used this, along with academic literature to complete McAteer's (2013) reflective practise framework.

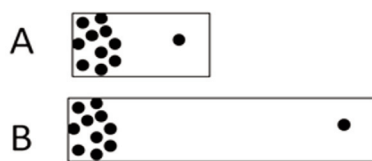
Appendix one

Example of whole class assessment with a show of hands. The first image is an example of the first questions asked, the second image is an example of how the questions got increasingly harder.

Does increasing distance...

- A) Increase the rate of diffusion
- B) Decrease the rate of diffusion

In which diagram would diffusion be quicker?



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CURRENT ENQUIRY AND PRACTICE

A reflective analysis of modern-day teaching practice in a SEND setting using aspects of Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory

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Introduction

Transformative learning is rooted in Freirean pedagogy, defined by Cranton (2006) as a deep shift in perspective, during which habits of mind become more open, permeable, and better justified. Although Rambow and Olivier (2023) concur, they advise it requires the individual to have the willingness to accept vulnerability and be open to criticism, in the form of having attitudes and assumptions changed. Wink (2004) suggests that for teachers, the transformative model of teaching is the most effective for the students, over transmissive and generative styles, and is the one they should strive to achieve. To facilitate the transformative model successfully, Freire (2003) proposes a 'critical consciousness' that must be adopted by the teacher. This enables them to reflect upon their belief systems, how the belief systems impact interpretations of observations, and how this knowledge can be used in an effective way to support the learner in the future (Stingu, 2012).

Transformative learning theories can be used to explore this notion in more depth. The theory adopted and analysed throughout this essay is Mezirow's (1997) Transformative Learning Theory (TLT), of which aspects will be used to discuss modern-day practice. There are ten stages to Mezirow's (1997) TLT. The necessary sequence of these stages is widely debated (Lim et al, 2024), as Jacobs (2019) highlights learning itself is a non-linear process and the phases will not always occur in sequence and are sometimes repeated. Melick and Melick (2010) propose some stages may even be eliminated, but this does not alter the impact of undergoing the process. With this in mind, this analysis will explore six of the ten stages. It will also explore how observations can be used as a tool to bring about change for the learner, as well as how my teaching style impacts them. It will also draw on the work of Dweck (2006), Bruner et al (1976) and Vygotsky (1978).

Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory

Mezirow's (1997) TLT is a reflective theory that originates from a study analysing women re-entering adult education in the United States, in the 1970s. Mezirow's theory acknowledges how past experiences and assumptions held by the learner influences their worldview. He refers to these assumptions as 'frames of reference', explaining these as a way of humans filtering experiences (Mezirow, 1991). They provide context for making meaning within which we choose what and how sensory information is construed (Mezirow, 2000). By undergoing a process of critical reflection, an individual can shift these frames of reference as they obtain new information, resulting in new or revised constructs of meaning followed by new patterns of action (Howie and Bagnall, 2013). The frames of reference become more inclusive and open, and the individual can make sense of their experience and is emotionally able to change (Dirkx and Mezirow, 2006).

Since examples from my classroom practice will be analysed,

Richards, Hemphill and Wright (2023) emphasise the importance of understanding my positionality, beliefs, biases and frames of reference and how this influences my practice. Hartman and Helfrich (2023) concur, as they state teachers' beliefs are much more influential in determining their own behaviour than their knowledge base. Dweck (2006) identified two types of mindset: a Fixed Mindset, which is a stagnated view of achievement centred around failure and lack of progress, while a Growth Mindset on the other hand, presents an open attitude to growing, learning and adapting to change. Keough (2019) highlights the main differences between the mindsets are how individuals view intelligence, criticism, and the success of others. I believe I adopt a Growth Mindset throughout my daily life and professional practice in the classroom, evident through the way challenges are approached with a positive mindset and wanting to continually learn and improve. Mesler, Corbin and Martin (2021) would suggest this is a result of having various positive role models throughout my childhood, such as parents and teachers, that also embodied and promoted the development of skills required for the Growth Mindset. Yeager, Carroll and Dweck (2021) found students taught by teachers adopting a Growth Mindset showed larger gains in achievement and problem-solving skills, thus demonstrating the benefits of adopting this mindset. The influences of Growth Mindset on my practice will be explored throughout the following analysis of Mezirow's TLT.

Context

Child A has a diagnosis of Autism and ADHD. He became emotionally dysregulated for prolonged periods of time over three consecutive days, and the physical behaviours (hitting, kicking, spitting, groping) were aimed at me. The triggers of these behaviours were a variety of reasons, such as not sitting during greetings when he was asked and continuing to throw his teddy around the classroom when he was asked to stop. After the third day of these physical behaviours, I felt targeted, overwhelmed, and exhausted. Consequently, I shouted, "my patience has finished, it is time for the bus" and following our school behaviour policy (School A, name withheld, 2023) and with the support of a teaching assistant (TA), I attempted to guide Child A to the bus. His behaviours grew in intensity as he continued to hit, kick and spit at me. I called for a member of the senior leadership team to change places with me, and they supported him to the bus. Historically, Child A has displayed these behaviours before in September, when us as staff members were all unfamiliar to him. We supported him with this by implementing an intervention to support the development of secure, positive attachments which reduced the behaviours until now.

Disorienting Dilemma and Self-examination of Feelings

The first two stages of Mezirow's (1997) TLT are the disorienting dilemma, defined by Mezirow (1978) as the event

that contradicts the frames of reference and causes a sense of discomfort, and self-examination of feelings. Within this situation, my behaviour and shouting at Child A is the disorienting dilemma, due to my response not fitting the frame of reference I have for how a good teacher should respond (Mezirow, 1978). I did not demonstrate the positive behaviour that is expected of Child A, and therefore did not meet Part One of the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2021). I also did not model the positive emotional regulation strategies I wanted Child A to learn to use, which Merritt et al (2012) propose is the most effective way to offer emotional education alongside offering warmth and support to diffuse aggression. Although Merritt et al's study was conducted in a mainstream school in the United States of America, the findings are still applicable for Child A since emotional education strategies were studied and when differentiated appropriately, can still be suitable for him.

As I self-examined my feelings of the disorienting dilemma, I felt an extreme sense of guilt, shame and disappointment in myself. I questioned if my view of Child A's behaviour was the cause of the problem as well as questioned my meaning perspectives, which Mezirow (2000) defines as fundamental beliefs reflecting one's past experiences. In particular, I questioned why shouting was my instinctive reaction since this is not something I recall observing during my childhood and therefore did not fit into my meaning perspective. I felt as though I had failed Child A since the behaviour had occurred on three consecutive days and I had missed a crucial teaching opportunity. Upon reflection, this began to impact how I observed Child A, how I perceived his potential, and his future behaviours. However due to the Growth Mindset (Dweck, 2006), I eventually viewed my reaction as an opportunity to transform my practice, develop how I use observations of Child A's behaviour and learn to overcome future difficulties reflexively (Stingu, 2012).

Critical Assessment of Assumptions

The third stage of Mezirow's (1997) TLT involves evaluation of assumptions and meaning perspectives maintained since childhood that influence current frames of reference, and evaluate how these might be distorted, incomplete or wrong (Belzer and Dashew, 2023). Mezirow (1991) highlights the importance of premise reflection, which includes questioning underlying assumptions, as this will be most likely to result in perspective transformation, thus complementing the TLT and gaining the most from completing the transformative process. When considering my reaction to Child A's behaviour, I began to analyse why I felt I had failed Child A and came to realise this was due to my perceptions of what a 'good' teacher should be. This perception has been influenced by the teachers experienced in my childhood, thus creating unconscious role models and expectations for how a 'good' teacher would respond to Child A's behaviour (Kurnia, 2021). At the time, I thought a 'good' teacher would have responded in a calm manner and known how to quickly diffuse every behaviour incident that occurred. Consequently, I had this expectation for myself, so when this was not my response, I believed I had failed at being a 'good' teacher. The first Teachers' Standard (DfE, 2021) also highlights how a teacher must consistently demonstrate the positive behaviour that is expected of pupils, so when I did not model the desired behaviour to Child A, the feelings of guilt and failure were reinforced.

Although I did not experience the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2021) throughout my childhood, the expectations were consis-

tently embedded throughout my teacher training course, so it could be suggested they have influenced my assumptions and frames of reference for how a teacher should conduct themselves. The standards highlight the importance of setting high expectations to support each child to reach their full potential. Through a progressive observation (Brown and Mikula-Toth, 1997), I have observed the progress Child A has made since September, regarding using his verbal language whilst emotionally regulated. He has gained lots of new vocabulary, is less echolalic and his expressive language has significantly improved by using basic set phrases I have taught him, such as "I want outside". Since making so much progress, I identified the potential for him to continue to expand his vocabulary and use his voice in a wider variety of contexts. Due to Child A making so much progress with his language since September, I set the high expectation and assumed he could use his voice to express how he was feeling when he was emotionally dysregulated. In hindsight, this expectation was set too high, especially since he did not have access to any appropriate scaffolds (Bruner et al, 1976) to support him to actualise in this respect. Findings by Calkins and Bell (2010) concur, and propose that when Child A is emotionally dysregulated, the expectations and potential for how he uses language must be reduced due to the brain spaces he has access to in fight or flight mode.

Upon reflection, my attitude and mindset towards Child A began to change due to the complex feelings of failure on my part. I realise now that I began to view the potential of Child A learning to manage his behaviour with a Fixed Mindset (Dweck, 2006). This led to me observing him differently, and I viewed his behaviour as "he will never learn to manage this" as opposed to the Growth Mindset (Dweck, 2006) view of "he has not learnt to manage his behaviour, yet". I became stuck at this point, and I could not see a way of supporting Child A to achieve his potential. It was only when reflecting upon the situation with my TAs, that I realised this did not fit into my usual approach of the Growth Mindset and I needed to seek a more knowledgeable other (Vygotsky, 1978) to offer some suggestions for how to progress. Therefore, I started to plan my course of action and arranged a meeting with the head teacher.

Planning a Course of Action and Acquisition of Knowledge

According to Mezirow (1997), the sixth and seventh stages of Mezirow's TLT are key elements of the process as it supports the accommodation of new meaning perspectives. Pappas and Jerman (2015) suggest the role of a coach is vital here, due to the coachee requiring support to formulate plans to deal with new realities and trying out new roles. In this situation, my coaches are the head and deputy head teacher. During the meeting, I explained the situation, expressed how I was feeling, my reaction and how my mindset had changed from Growth Mindset to Fixed Mindset (Dweck, 2006). The head teacher said admitting that not liking how I reacted was courageous, and suggested Child A received an internal exclusion from my classroom to give us a break from each other and allow me to prepare any resources that could support Child A the following day. Whilst exploring why my mindset had changed from Growth to Fixed, both the head and deputy head teacher redefined what a 'good' teacher is, and suggested it is one that is reflective and open to growth and development. This aligns with Rambow and Olivier's (2023) definition of a teacher open to the transformative process,

thus providing me with a new role model to strive to be like.

We then discussed the progress Child A had made since September, his potential, next steps, and what supported his progress to reach his potential when we last observed the behaviours. As Kirschner and Hendrick (2024) proposes, learning is not linear and therefore revisiting some areas of learning is to be expected. As a solution, the head and deputy head teacher suggested implementing some scaffolds (Bruner et al, 1976) to enable Child A to reach the potential I had observed, one of which was a visual choice board. This offered Child A choices of the four emotions he can identify during PSHE lessons (happy, sad, angry, worried), and to decide upon a selection of calm choices he can make instead (for example read a book or Duplo). This would reduce the expectation that Child A can use their verbal language when emotionally dysregulated, support him to communicate his needs in an alternative manner and therefore support him to reach his potential. Hayes et al (2010) suggest visual aids to support children with Autism in this manner are too time consuming to create and often used ineffectively. However, for Child A, it is a vital scaffold to support him to fulfil the potential I have identified, so it was necessary to create the resource and teach him how to use it as a priority.

As well as arranging a discussion with the head teacher, completing this module and analysis has provided me with additional tools and knowledge to support Child A to achieve the potential I observed. Moore (2004) suggests that when individuals acknowledge their personal history and frames of reference, they can move towards a notion that the 'self' is constructed and continuously developing. Knowing this enabled me to accept my reaction to Child A's behaviour and view it as a learning opportunity, thus restoring the Growth Mindset (Dweck, 2006). This module has also enabled me to acquire further knowledge about reflexive practice, defined by Pierce-Friedman and Wellner (2021) as the ability to maintain consciousness to hold and consider different perspectives. Knorthagen and Russell (2013) propose this greatly benefits teachers, as they become more aware of their pedagogical decision making in the moment, thus enabling the pupils to actualise.

Reintegration and Reassimilation

Mezirow (1997) defines the final, tenth stage of his TLT as reintegrating new experiences and learning into one's life. Jarvis, Holford and Griffin (2003) propose this phase has been achieved when the subject is more self-aware, has gained a different perspective and has transformed their meaning perspectives. Having now redefined what a 'good' teacher is and the ways in which I can support Child A to achieve the potential observed, my self-awareness has developed and has enabled me to act reflexively, consider what I observed and understand how this influences my communication with Child A. Consequently, when Child A displayed the physical behaviours during our trip to the local park, I regulated my own nervous system before approaching him to ensure I maintained consciousness (Pierce-Friedman and Wellner, 2021). I also reminded myself that he has not learnt to manage his behaviours yet, thus maintaining the positive view of the potential of behaviours observed and approaching the situation with a Growth Mindset (Dweck, 2006). By ensuring I demonstrated the desired behaviours and fulfilling the first Teachers' Standard (DfE, 2021), I was able to model how to use the scaffolds provided by the head and deputy head teacher. As a result, Child A's aggression dissipated,

concurring with findings by Merritt et al (2012) as I offered emotional education and support.

Continuing Child A's emotional education during a trip to the park aligns with Wink's (2004) transformative model of teaching. He was actively engaged with his learning through a lived experience and extended the learning of managing his own behaviours from the classroom into the community, thus bridging this gap (Wink, 2004). Findings by Pugh (2002) propose that if Child A continues to be exposed to this style of teaching, he will be more likely to experience a social transformation and thus actualise in this area, than if he were to experience transmissive or generative teaching styles. Wink (2011) concurs, and further explains that by relating the teaching and learning to real-life situations, Child A's life will be improved, and he will consequently undergo a self-transformation and in time, achieve the potential observed

Conclusion

This essay has explored the impact of a transformative style of teaching by using Mezirow's (1997) Transformative Learning Theory. Through doing this, it has demonstrated how observations can be used as a tool to identify potential in Child A and support him to actualise, as well as reflect upon my teaching style and the positive outcome of this. Completing this analysis has been a part of a journey and a process. I am now more self-aware and as a result, Child A's behaviours still occur, but they are generally diffused quicker. Learning is not linear for me or for Child A, therefore Pappas and Jerman (2015) suggest some stages of Mezirow's TLT might require revisiting in the future depending on the learner's needs, however this can be evaluated as the year progresses.

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SEND Physical Education: The Ofsted Inspector Guidance for Secondary PE verses the SEND Code of Practice

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Introduction

The 2019 revisions to Ofsted's inspection framework introduced a renewed focus on curriculum design, emphasising a structured and ambitious approach through the "three I's": Intent, Implementation, and Impact. This shift placed significant pressure on schools, particularly those offering Physical Education (PE), to align their curricula with the framework's expectations. However, a critical question

has emerged: does the framework's emphasis on measurable impact potentially overshadow the importance of a curriculum's intended learning outcomes? Drawing on my experience examining PE curriculums across England over the past three years, this article critically examines the tension between policy and practice. Specifically, it investigates whether current policy effectively translates into practical application when it prioritises standardisation

over originality in curriculum design. Concerted efforts are underway to integrate students with disabilities into regular PE classes, in alignment with government commitments to fostering inclusivity in education (Department for Education, 2019). Despite progress, challenges persist in effectively implementing inclusive practices, especially in catering to the needs of students with SEND. Tarantino and Neville (2023) highlight the importance of teacher attitudes and training in promoting inclusion, although practical hurdles remain, impacting the quality of PE experiences for students with disabilities. While research underscores the significance of aligning PE curricula with the National Curriculum and providing teacher training (Wang and Chen, 2020), ongoing discussions question the true efficacy of these measures in enhancing the PE experience for students with SEND. The SEND Code of Practice (2015) serves as a crucial framework guiding the provision of support and resources for children and young people with SEND in the UK education system. It outlines legal obligations, recommended practices, and approaches to ensure equitable access to education and support for students with SEND. By emphasising inclusivity and personalised support, the Code promotes a supportive learning environment conducive to the success and growth of students with disabilities or learning challenges. Should the curriculum closely align with the guidance of the National Curriculum, or should the SEND Code of Practice take precedence to ensure consistency in support throughout the educational journey?

The Balancing Act: Curriculum Design vs Ofsted Impact in PE for SEND Students

The 2019 revamp of Ofsted's Education Inspection Framework brought renewed focus on a key area: ensuring all students, including those with SEND, benefit from a high-quality education. This framework emphasises three crucial aspects:

- **Education Quality:** This assesses curriculum design, implementation, and impact, striving for an ambitious and inclusive curriculum that equips all students with the knowledge, skills, and cultural capital they need to succeed.
- **Behaviour and Attitudes:** This evaluates students' well-being, aspirations, and the overall school environment, fostering a positive learning space where students feel safe, supported, and motivated.
- **Personal Development:** This examines how the curriculum goes beyond academics to nurture holistic development, encompassing social, emotional, and physical growth, ensuring students acquire the necessary life skills to navigate the world beyond the classroom.

Ofsted utilises unbiased external evaluations to identify areas for improvement. These assessments are evidence-based and adhere to set criteria, including safeguarding and equality considerations (Gilmore et al., 2021). However, research by Ofsted suggests the pandemic disproportionately affected students with SEND. In the context of providing education to students with SEND, schools face the challenge of structuring curricula that accommodate diverse requirements while adhering to ambitious learning objectives. In PE, questions arise about whether to focus on basic motor skills or engaging in game-based activities, and whether students with different learning challenges progress at similar rates. These considerations highlight the need for comprehensive and ambitious curricular approaches that cater to all students.

In a recent inspection of three schools, the following data was

drawn. School 1, the curriculum was commended for its ambition and tailored approach, focusing on preparing students for adulthood and vocational progress. However, questions remain about the extent to which the curriculum addresses the diverse needs of students with SEND, particularly in PE. Cairney et al. (2019) highlight the importance of fundamental movement skills (FMS) in physical activity but suggest a need for broader skills to promote lifelong engagement in physical activities. Moreover, while School 1's assessment methods focus on evidence-based approaches, questions arise about their ability to capture nuanced learning outcomes for students with SEND (Brennan and Brown, 2019). Similarly, School 2's MOVE programme integrates education, therapy, and family insights to promote motor skills and independence. While successful in many aspects, concerns linger about the programme's ability to address individualised needs effectively. The programme aligns with National Curriculum aims but may lack specificity in addressing the diverse needs of students (Chalkley et al., 2023). Waite et al. (2021) suggest that student autonomy and choice enhance motivation in PE, but challenges exist in balancing enjoyment with academic achievement, reflecting on the National Curriculum aim 3. School 3's curriculum aims to meet national standards but may lack coherence and specificity, hindering some students' progress. In PE, there's an emphasis on fundamental movement skills, aligned with NC aims but lacking detailed strategies for students with SEND. Herold's (2020) research suggests that minimalist curricula may lead to varied interpretations among teachers and hinder the development of standardised assessment methods in PE. affected children with SEND, with some still struggling academically and socially (Ofsted, 2019).

In Chapter 6 of the SEND Code of Practice, the Department for Education in the United Kingdom outlines the pivotal role of schools in providing effective assistance and comprehensive education for students with special educational needs and disabilities. This segment underscores the significance of early identification and intervention, highlighting the responsibilities that schools have in identifying and addressing the diverse needs of their students. Despite this, various challenges and drawbacks arise in the implementation of an all-inclusive PE curriculum for students with disabilities. How can these concerns be effectively tackled within the education system? Should the curriculum align more closely with the guidance provided in the National Curriculum, or should the SEND Code of Practice take precedence to ensure parity throughout the educational journey?

Chapter 6, point 6.12 (Page 94):

"All pupils should have access to a broad and balanced curriculum. The National Curriculum Inclusion Statement states that teachers should set high expectations for every pupil, whatever their prior attainment. Teachers should use appropriate assessment to set targets which are deliberately ambitious. Potential areas of difficulty should be identified and addressed at the outset. Lessons should be planned to address potential areas of difficulty and to remove barriers to pupil achievement. In many cases, such planning will mean that pupils with SEN and disabilities will be able to study the full national curriculum".

This chapter emphasises the necessity for schools to adopt a student-centred approach, with the student being at the core of all decision-making processes. It highlights the importance

of creating comprehensive support plans tailored to the specific needs of each student, taking into account their strengths, interests, and aspirations. Additionally, it stresses the significance of fostering collaboration and partnerships between schools, parents, and various support services to establish a cohesive support network for students with SEND. The chapter also provides guidance on effective teaching strategies, reasonable adjustments, and accommodations that can be incorporated to facilitate the active engagement and participation of students with special educational needs and disabilities in the school curriculum. Despite this guidance, recent data from the SEND Data release (2023) indicates a substantial increase in the number of pupils in England with SEND needs, reaching over 1.5 million, signifying a rise from 16.6% to 17.3% from 2022 to 2023. On page 94, point 6.12 emphasises the significance of designing a curriculum that is inclusive and accessible to all students, including those with SEND. It underlines the importance of ensuring that the curriculum is tailored to meet the diverse requirements of students with SEND, fostering their active involvement and participation in learning activities. The guidance emphasises the need for schools to provide a flexible and adaptable curriculum that caters to various learning styles and abilities, allowing students with SEND to access the curriculum on an equal footing with their peers. Moreover, the Code of Practice encourages schools to consider the individual needs of students with SEND when planning and delivering lessons, incorporating suitable adjustments and support to facilitate their learning and development. Education serves as a fundamental cornerstone in the holistic development of individuals, enabling them to harness their full potential and capabilities. Special education, in particular, plays a crucial role in unlocking the latent capacities of children facing various challenges. The latest SEN data from the National Association for Special Educational Needs revealed a significant rise in the number of pupils with SEND across England, surpassing 1.5 million. This surge emphasises the growing demand for comprehensive support and tailored educational strategies for children with diverse learning needs, particularly those with mental and behavioural disabilities (Buhas, Herman, Stef, 2018; Wang, 2019; Dinan-Thompson and Penney, 2015). Students with mental and behavioural disabilities confront specific obstacles throughout their educational path, particularly concerning social interaction, the cultivation of vocational skills, and participation in leisure activities (Lynch, Simon, & Maher, 2020). King et al. (2020) concur with these observations as they investigated curriculum inclusivity, proposing that inclusiveness results from creating a sense of security, acknowledging students' voices, and dispelling presumptions about learners' disabilities. The complexities associated with these disabilities often necessitate specialised attention and intervention to ensure their seamless integration into the educational environment. The demand for additional, well-informed supervision and tailored support for these students has become increasingly critical, given the rise in the prevalence of special educational needs among the student population.

Balancing Ambition and Individual Needs

Ideally, special school curriculums should provide experiences that extend beyond what students could learn independently, fostering a sense of accomplishment and motivation. However, the challenge lies in achieving this while also addressing the diverse needs of SEND students, which

can encompass a wide range of social, emotional, and physical requirements. Special schools require flexibility within the curriculum framework to individualise learning journeys and ensure all students progress towards ambitious yet attainable goals (Department for Education, 2019). O'Connor and Sinclair (2020) highlighted the significant challenges faced by students with SEND in accessing educational opportunities, exacerbating difficulties during the transition process and potentially disadvantageous in terms of educational development. This raises two key questions: firstly, when educators struggle to adhere to National Curriculum guidelines for PE while supporting students, does this cast doubt on the effectiveness of these guidelines? Secondly, given the SEND Code of Practice 6.12's suggestion that curricula should be ambitious, how can educational leaders design curricula that promote the ambitious progress of students with SEND while also reducing barriers to their participation? Dixon, Braye and Gibbons (2022) investigated accommodations for students with SEND in educational settings, considering physical, social, and occupational dimensions. The physical dimension encompasses spaces like classrooms, gyms, and hallways, as well as assistive devices and sensory experiences. The social dimension involves individuals such as teachers, support staff, and peer relationships. Children demonstrated an ability to identify their needs and communicate necessary adjustments, suggesting interventions often involve shifting attitudes through consultations with parents and teachers. However, various factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic's aftermath, budget constraints, and reductions in funding impact the continuity of interventions. The lack of student and parental perspectives in the research prompts inquiries. Research outcomes provide valuable insights, highlighting the importance of inclusive curricula and nurturing educational paths for students with SEND. Examining a third educational policy, the Ofsted Framework, becomes imperative. This policy evaluates educational standards, aiming to ensure comprehensive fairness for all students.

However, adhering to the National Curriculum (NC) and prioritising its guidance on sports activities taught does not necessarily result in a decline in the quality and consistency of PE curriculums. The NC offers a framework for schools to ensure that students receive a comprehensive education in physical education and sports, equipping them with the requisite knowledge and skills to be physically proficient. It also facilitates schools in measuring their performance and benchmarking it against others to identify areas for improvement. By emphasising access and teaching a variety of sports, schools can furnish students with a diverse array of learning opportunities, enabling them to explore their interests and passions in physical activity. Furthermore, while teaching six or more sports may seem to impede progress, it can also enrich students' experiences and enhance their overall physical literacy. Therefore, prioritising access and adhering to NC guidance can offer a well-rounded approach to physical education. So, should we question teachers' professional competence in translating and implementing educational policy? For instance, if PE teachers interpret the NC advice to encompass a broader focus on health and wellbeing, the fundamental aspects of PE may shift, becoming part of a fitness narrative, potentially deviating from the policy objectives (Maher and Macbeth, 2014). Conversely, a curriculum more centred on sports may highlight athletic achievement but overlook the reality that such excellence

depends heavily on factors like access to facilities and equipment, as well as allocation of teaching time (Theis et al., 2021).

The Way Forward: A Collaborative Approach

Despite these challenges, creating a truly inclusive PE experience for SEND students is possible. Here's how we can move forward:

- **Prioritise Student Needs:** The National Curriculum and Ofsted inspections should prioritise student needs first and foremost. This may involve incorporating more open-ended learning objectives in PE that allow for individualization and cater to diverse learning styles.
- **Collaboration is Key:** Student and parental perspectives should be central to curriculum design. Involving students with SEND in the process fosters a sense of ownership and allows them to express their needs and preferences (Fitzgerald et al., 2018). Collaboration with parents and caregivers can ensure a more holistic approach to learning that extends beyond the classroom.
- **Embrace Flexibility:** The National Curriculum should allow for greater flexibility within its framework for PE. This empowers schools, particularly special schools, to adapt learning experiences based on individual student progress and unforeseen circumstances.
- **Support for Teachers:** Increased resources and training for teachers who work with SEND students in PE are crucial. This investment would equip educators with the necessary skills and knowledge to implement effective personalised learning strategies.
- **Ongoing Review:** Ofsted's framework and the National Curriculum should be subject to ongoing review to ensure they remain effective in supporting inclusive PE experiences for all students.

Understanding the perspectives of SEND pupils is vital for tailoring effective support systems; however, inconsistencies arise in gathering these perspectives due to various factors. Done (2019) highlights the challenge of self-efficacy among SEND pupils, impacting their ability to articulate their needs and experiences accurately. Moreover, Miller and Brown (2018) emphasise concerns regarding deficiencies in reflective abilities among this demographic, complicating efforts to elicit their viewpoints. Additionally, the process of responding to inquiries may induce stress levels among SEND pupils, further impeding their ability to provide comprehensive feedback. These inconsistencies underscore the importance of employing sensitive and adaptive methodologies to truly grasp the perspectives of SEND pupils in educational settings. Before exploring the viewpoints of PE teachers and professionals, it is imperative to consider the perspectives of Teaching Assistants (TAs) and Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) on inclusion. Maher (2016) conducted individual interviews with 12 TAs and 12 SENCOs to gauge their views on including students with SEND in mainstream schools. The findings indicated that SENCOs and TAs regarded PE as an inclusive subject, with the responsibility for defining inclusivity falling on them. However, tailoring PE programmes to meet the needs of pupils with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and supporting SEND pupils during team games and competitive sports presented significant challenges to inclusion in PE. This poses a concern for educators, given the recent emphasis on these activities as central to PE in National Curriculum. A key challenge for educators, particularly teachers and TAs, is to develop and

deliver team games and competitive sports sessions that address the needs of all pupils, including those with ASD, while ensuring they are suitably challenged. Morley et al. (2020) revisited a previous piece of research from 2005 (Morley et al., 2005) which explored the perceptions of 31 secondary school teachers in the UK regarding the integration of pupils with SEND into mainstream secondary PE. Despite notable policy developments, their findings suggest persistent challenges in achieving inclusion, with little change observed in teachers' confidence to accommodate pupils with SEND in PE. While there were some positive exceptions, such as an increased emphasis on inclusion in PE teacher education, significant hurdles remained.

Conclusion

The journey towards achieving inclusive PE experiences for students with SEND is dynamic and requires a collaborative effort from various individuals involved. The tension between curriculum design and the impact assessed by Ofsted highlights the need for a delicate balance, ensuring that ambitious learning outcomes are met while catering to the diverse needs of students. The SEND Code of Practice provides a crucial framework for guiding support and resources, emphasising inclusivity and personalised support. However, challenges persist in translating policy into effective practice, particularly in the realm of PE. Moving forward, prioritising student needs, embracing collaboration, fostering flexibility within the curriculum framework, providing support for teachers, and conducting ongoing reviews of policies are essential steps. Understanding the perspectives of SEND pupils, as well as Teaching Assistants and Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators, is vital for tailoring effective support systems. Addressing the challenges identified, such as adapting team games and competitive sports sessions and enhancing teachers' confidence in accommodating pupils with SEND, is imperative to ensure that all students have equitable access to high-quality PE experiences.

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Creating Schools of Recovery

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This article aims to report on the impact of the Creating Schools of Recovery (SoR) project, which was a two-year collaborative Theatre-in-Education (TiE) project that took place during a period of recovery from the global pandemic. Put simply, TiE is an approach to education that uses theatre as a pedagogical tool and employs actor-teachers to use the art-form collaboratively with audiences. Whilst there are a number of insightful evaluations that exist about the important TiE work of the company, such as *Engaging, Exploring, Expressing: The case for Theatre in Education* (2019)¹, the *More and Better Project* (2019)², and *Human Spaces: An evaluative case study* (2018)³, SoR happened in a very different, transient and emergent context.

SoR sought to build on previous work created by Big Brum to explore how their approach to, and model for, TiE might be extended and applied in a post-Covid period of recovery and

tested a 'project partnership model' with theatre at its heart⁴. This partnership model involved Big Brum, primary schools, their leadership teams, teachers, and the communities that those schools served.

Usefully, the project drew on evaluative contributions from six organisations based in the United Kingdom (UK) and Europe, who were defined as the 'commission'. The commission aimed to provide a well-rounded picture of how Big Brum's approach impacted on six different areas and gave value to the diverse effect of Big Brum's model and approach.

The commission's varied expertise, experience(s) in education and understanding of different elements of the educational landscape enabled them to focus on particular lines of enquiry, which included:

- 1 Prioritise Student Needs
- 2 The School Curriculum
- 3 Young Migrant Learners
- 4 Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Learners
- 5 Teacher Development
- 6 Informal Mentoring
- 7 School Communities - Beyond the school gate

¹Engaging, Exploring, Expressing: The case for Theatre in Education report can be [found and downloaded here](#)

²More and Better Project can be [found and downloaded here](#)

³Human Spaces: An evaluative case study can be [found and downloaded here](#)

⁴For more on this you might like to read about the To Be Project [see here](#)

As the lead evaluator for the project, what follows is an overview of the project's context and some of the emerging findings.

Creating Schools of Recovery - Aims

The aims of the project, and thus foci for the commission, included:

- Testing and extending a collaborative model of working to give value to the potential of this model for Big Brum, schools with whom they worked, and the teachers and children within those schools.
- To explore the value and significance of Big Brum's model and approach for schools in areas of socio-economic deprivation.
- To explore the value and significance of Big Brum's model and approach for children who were disproportionately affected by the Coronavirus crisis.
- To build on previous important work developed from the To Be Project with a larger number of schools.
- To learn about how the SoR project might impact on specific children and groups of children, through to teachers' professional development, and on to larger impacts, such as whole school and mentorship strategies.
- To learn about the impact of the SoR project on SEND children, newly arrived children and migrant children, and school communities more generally in socio-economically deprived areas.



Figure 1: Thanks to Chris Bolton and Big Brum TiE

Evaluation Context

Although much has been written about the impact of the pandemic, and in no way is this article attempting to re-present what we have all experienced, known, and felt, the project's origins are firmly rooted and located in that context. Using the themes of the commission's aims, what follows is a brief contextualisation in order to foreground the emerging outcomes of this work.

Pedagogically, the impact of the pandemic on teachers' 'normal' practice was significant and profound. It saw a move away from traditional face-to-face spaces to virtual and online platforms with many pedagogical changes arising out of necessity rather than design. For drama pedagogy, which often relies on live action and a co-creation of meaning in a social space, this move to virtual spaces was challenging. Despite this, creative adaptations in drama pedagogy emerged in a variety of ways, such as the creation of online process drama (Cziboly & Bethlenfalvy, 2020; Po-Chi, 2020), Verbatim digital storytelling (Gallagher et al., 2020), and saw moves toward more hybrid approaches as the world started to return to a sense of normality, such as the Socially Distant Stories⁵ project (Bolton & Patterson, 2022). These divergent approaches re-affirmed a fundamental aspect of drama pedagogy as one that requires a human dimension, a human connection.

Inevitably, these shifts toward virtual spaces and hybrid practices impacted on school curriculum, both in terms of form and content, and forced teachers to re-consider their curricula in terms of the reality of their context and the unrealised virtual world. Evidently, the impact on curriculum time, quality, and experience was negatively affected, with Ofqual (2021) worryingly noting that "disadvantage and deprivation appear to be most associated with less effective learning". More specifically, the research from Ofqual also found that "Teaching and learning for primary-aged students also appear[s] to have been negatively impacted". Ofsted (2022) reported that subject-specific knowledge and skills continued to be affected by changes in access to school curricula because "content had not been taught when schools were partially closed or because pupils did not learn well remotely".



Figure 2: Thanks to David Finch and Big Brum TiE

During the pandemic, particularly in the UK context but not exclusively, education was needing leadership. This need for leadership was not adequately met, with the UK government's guidance "often appear[ing] ill-informed and unhelpful" (Moss, 2021: 6) and this left schools, and their teachers often having to fathom out how to deal with "pressing issues quickly

⁵For more on the Socially Distant Stories from Beyond the screen project [see here](#)

and directly" (ibid.). This lack of leadership also revealed much about the fragility of the UK education system with Moss (2021: 6) insightfully suggesting that these issues stemmed from "... a lack of awareness of problems on the ground, and a preference for pressure-driven management linked to testing and inspection that ignores the material impacts of poverty on schools and communities". It became clear that what was being revealed by this unprecedented context was that education was not fit for purpose, was brittle, and that there was a disconnect between policy initiatives and experiences 'on-the-frontline' of education.

Clearly, the pandemic affected all children in a variety of ways, but particularly in terms of their mental health and well-being (OHID, 2022). For children with SEND and/ or young migrant children (YMC), the impact of the pandemic affected them *disproportionately*. Specifically, it was reported that children with SEND found lockdown "boring and lonely" (Ashworth et al., 2022: 1772) and that changes in routine had impacted on friendships. For many children with SEND this "exacerbated underlying social and communication difficulties" (ibid.).

For YMC no doubt there were similar experiences. Importantly, schools for YMC "are not just places where knowledge and skills are acquired, but also fundamental spaces for the development of their sense of self, belonging and citizenship" (Manzoni & D'Angelo, 2021: 60). However, lockdowns and school closures in response to the pandemic acted as "multipliers of educational inequalities" (Manzoni & D'Angelo, 2021: 57). Some of the main reasons for this multiplication are connected to familiarity with education systems and life in the UK, alongside challenges around language, and limited resources, not to mention "the traumatic personal experiences of migration" (ibid.). Strengthening the significance of this issue, the OECD (2020) reported extensively about the impact of the pandemic on children, particularly those most vulnerable, in over 188 countries.

In this evolving context, the development of teachers' identity and practice was unavoidably affected, with the increasing demand on teachers' time meaning that development opportunities, and the quality of them, were significantly reduced. Much has been written about the impact of the pandemic on in-service teachers' mental health (Kim et al., 2022; Education Support, 2021), in-service teachers' wellbeing and workload (See, 2024), and their professional development (Ofsted, 2023). With most development activities taking place online during the pandemic, research from Ofsted (2023) found that "teachers thought that it was lower in quality", which in turn had an impact upon their practice. To some extent, the brittleness of education fed into questions about the purpose of education, and no doubt led some teachers to question the purpose of their endeavours. Inevitably, feelings of anxiety, depression, and isolation in combination with elements such as panic attacks, mood swings and insomnia were all common features affecting teachers and their commitment to continued development during the pandemic (Education Support, 2021).

The relationship between teacher development and retention is well researched (NFER, 2024; McJames et al., 2023) and shows that investment in teachers' professional development positively impacts on retention within the profession. Despite the Department for Education's (DfE) (2023) 'spin' on teacher retention in 2021/22, the data showed that 39,930 teachers

left teaching during the pandemic for reasons other than retirement. Worryingly, this represented 8.8% of the workforce, which was the highest number since records began in 2010. Data from the Education Policy Institute (2023) showed that "The overall picture is, unfortunately, a fairly gloomy one" with more teachers "quitting the profession before retirement" and it "becoming harder to recruit". However, whilst the pandemic clearly exacerbated this problem, it was not the only cause.



Figure 3: Thanks to Big Brum TiE

During this changeable time, the DfE (2019)⁶ introduced the Core Content Framework (CCF) and Early Career Framework (ECF) in an attempt to establish a foundational entitlement to a structured package of support for future generations of teachers over the first three years of their career. As part of this, mentoring and support from 'expert colleagues' was intended to form a key element of this multi-year entitlement. Given the context described above, the timing of these changes to Initial Teacher Education (ITT) and for Early Career Teachers (ECT) placed significant, and additional, pressure(s) on school-based mentors and ITT providers. Hordern and Brooks (2023:800) insightfully summarise this change as one that was "orientated towards a scientism that (1) marginalises longstanding traditions of educational thought, and (2) technicises and instrumentalises teaching practice."

⁶The CCF and ECF became mandatory for all ITT providers in 2020 academic year.

Undoubtedly, the changes brought about by the pandemic context affected school communities both within the school gates and beyond. Many schools during the lockdown period(s) became important, if not vital, in terms of community cohesion. Findings from the NFER (2021) unsurprisingly showed an overwhelming need to support school communities with much more than academic and curriculum provisions. For example, pupils in primary schools were reported to be “struggling with social skills, confidence and self-esteem” (Nelson, et al., 2021:ii) and that whilst this was the case, access to working with outside agencies faced additional challenges, such as a lack of funding and the capacity to facilitate this type of support. Despite this, many teachers working in school communities went beyond their ‘traditional roles’ and saw them adopting new facets of their responsibilities as teachers. Moss et al., (2020: 6) suggested that some of these new responsibilities included running food banks, delivering food parcels, and distributing meal vouchers to support families in socio-economically deprived communities.

As Big Brum were faced with this context, the importance of developing the SoR project became stronger, particularly as the company were exploring how they might respond to this context in a meaningful and developmental way.



Figure 4: Thanks to Chris Bolton and Big Brum TiE

Themes Emerging from the Project

The diverse evaluations about the SoR project intersect on various and complex levels. Despite this, there is a sense of coherence demonstrated in the project and there exists a number of common ‘threads’ that emerged through the commission’s work.

1 Safe Space-Braver Spaces:

Clearly emerging from the commission’s work was that the SoR model and approach created space. Considering space as a concept, one might rightly think of literal and physical spaces, for example a performance of Rumpelstiltskin took place in the school hall. However, other types of spaces were facilitated by the project model. For example, SoR created social spaces for young people, teachers, and actor-teachers in which to collaboratively learn and explore. These social spaces went some way in transforming school-based learning spaces, moving them beyond traditional transmission-of-knowledge spaces towards more social constructivist and ‘connected’ spaces.

Alternatively, these social spaces might be considered as pedagogical spaces that worked in multi-layered ways. For example, the physical space created by the programmes offered- such as Minotaur- opened spaces for social

connections whereby participants were connected through the fiction of the drama. As this happened, this space became pedagogical with young people learning in an aesthetic context. Teachers also had a space to learn – either about Big Brum’s pedagogy or about their own students. However these spaces operated in practice, and whatever use they provided for participants in the project, the space created also facilitated for them a space to re-imagine, re-consider, and re-cognise themselves.

Big Brum’s artistic and pedagogical practice firmly underpinned the creation of these spaces. This underpinning was supported by their notion of a ‘crucible paradigm’, in which knowledge was *stirred around together*. This paradigmatic view of teaching and learning subverted a traditional-didactic relationship between teacher and students and instead replaced it with a much more collaborative approach that rested on a more authentic human relationship. This relationship was democratic. It gave space for inclusion, agency, and equality. It promoted feelings of belonging and empathy. Clearly, the notion of ‘no wrong answers/no right answers’ provided a philosophical foundation that helped to facilitate emotionally safe spaces. However, given the educational context briefly described above, I might push this notion of ‘safe space’ a little further to suggest ‘brave space’- a space in which teachers were asked to re-consider their view(s) of, and approaches to, teaching and learning, and young people were asked what *they think*, rather than *what they think they should think*.

2 Student Voice, Student Agency and Relationships

Clearly, Big Brum’s promotion of a pedagogical model that is based on dialogue and meaning making was evident in all of the commission’s evaluations. Whilst this was demonstrated in different ways, the voice of the student remained a central focus that was respected. This not only added to the brave spaces created but also meant that this child-centred approach went some way to re-positioning the value of the student and their experiences both in the world and *of* the world. The SoR project connected the students’ reality to the fiction of the drama and thus re-valued them as active citizens. This created a sense of agency in which their opinions, ideas, and thoughts were valued and respected.

Through the brave spaces created in SoR, young people, and in some cases their teachers, evidently felt that they had a right to express themselves and influence decisions through the dramatic experience(s). This activated students within their learning experience and enabled them to re-imagine and re-know themselves as young people. By placing the student at the centre of the work, the SoR project changed relationships. These changing relationships were evident in terms of the teacher-student relationship, the student-student relationship, and both student and teachers’ relationship with Big Brum. In collaborating and connecting with each other, the SoR project promoted a sense of belonging for the participants, however long-lasting that might be. Essentially, belonging to each other meant that the participants had a sense of responsibility either to each other and/or toward the characters in the fictional stories that were being explored. Evidently, students within the SoR project were able to develop a sense of empathy.

3 Teachers’ identity and practice:

In terms of ‘recovery’ and given the need for new and different approaches and opportunities in education, creating these brave spaces was no doubt a challenge; it required teachers

developing new(er) skill(s) and commitment, whilst recognising that this was (and still is) simultaneously threatened by the educational context above. However, if the challenge of creating these spaces is not felt and experienced by teachers, they will not change them, and this emerged as a key theme in developing the SoR model and approach.

We can see that there is a real need for teachers generally, but teachers within the SoR project specifically, to move their professional frame of *thinking* toward more of a personal and human way of *being*. No doubt, this move in the psyche of teachers is challenging, particularly given the pressure, stress, and accountability they face whilst working in the education profession. Workload expectations no doubt play a large part in teachers' difficulties with this shift. Despite these challenges, when teachers do approach and re-focus their frames of thinking and being, the impact on their students can be profound, and this might be considered as a key feature of teacher development within the SoR project. In doing so, teachers can thereby create brave spaces within their own pedagogical practice.

Another potential threat to teacher development highlighted by the project, was the way that the drama work was valued. Evidently, and on one level, the commissions' evaluations demonstrated that the artistic input provided by Big Brum's actor-teachers was affected by the physical environment in which the work took place. Perhaps underlying this issue was a lack of understanding about the environmental conditions needed for this type of model and approach to be impactful. On another level, the demands on teachers' time might also be considered as a factor impacting on the value of the work provided and how it was perceived (educationally) by teachers. This is worrying and shows that the potential of brave spaces for teachers to re-think and re-consider what is important in education are potentially being suppressed by the demands of 'being' a teacher. Adding to this complexity was that despite teachers seeing the many benefits of the SoR approach in terms of their learners' engagement and behaviour, they were unable to implement what had been modelled in their own practice. In some cases, teachers were so time-poor that they were unable to attend brief follow-up discussions with the commission! That is not to say teachers were not committed, rather it demonstrated the pressure being faced by them.



Figure 5: Thanks to Matt Reeves and Big Brum TiE

From the commission's evaluations the need to provide support for teachers – whether that be in terms of their

pedagogical approach, curriculum development, inclusive practice, or professional growth – is vital. Emerging as a theme to varying degrees implicitly or explicitly throughout the commission's work, the notion of mentoring exists as a useful form of teacher development. Interestingly, the notion of 'informal mentoring' arose from the project evaluation; a relationship that exists betwixt and between the formalities and day-to-day pressures of teaching.

Conclusions

Undeniably, there is much to learn from the SoR approach and model. This learning is not only important for Big Brum but also for teachers, artists and those connected to working with young people. The SoR project provided an alternative way of thinking about 'recovery' from the pandemic context and gives rise to new ways of working with young people that are meaningful and go well beyond more traditional advice about what young people and teachers need in a post-pandemic world.

Evidently, the SoR project and the commission's evaluation(s) give value to the extension of Big Brum's collaborative model of working and demonstrates that despite larger systemic and social challenges, this type of approach to learning and teaching is possible, has value, and can impact on various stakeholders. This means that the model promoted by Big Brum through this project is significant, particularly for those schools serving socio-economically deprived communities. I am looking forward to attending their forthcoming conference on Saturday 22nd June and presenting some of my evaluative work at the annual CSPACE conference on 3rd July.

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“The stories we tell”

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It could be argued that stories are the oldest form of research that exists. Since the earliest language formations, people have shared their experiences through storytelling. What is clear now, thanks in part to the work of French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault, is that stories hold great power and influence within and upon the social and political worlds.

In this article, which offers an insight into emerging ideas for my doctorate thesis, I have used my experience as a dramatist to examine the influence of storytelling, particularly those stories that manifest within the unconscious minds of educators and become internal frames of reference. Whilst I do not attempt to examine storytelling as a form of research, I instead will use a specifically constructed fictional story as a framework upon which to examine current issues surrounding my area of enquiry. The aim of my current enquiry involves uncovering and then unpicking the discourses within and about the English education system, I am interested in what narratives are told around what it means to be a teacher as well as the ways in which this becomes embodied by those within the profession.

The story used in the article, “Sometimes you just have to play the game- the stories we tell” which follows a fictional teacher of the arts called ‘Sarah’, has been crafted from an amalgamation of the words and experiences of teachers working within schools today. The story is not, however, a verbatim account of any one teachers’ experience, instead it employs creative license to construct a narrative which effectively highlights the debates and controversies surrounding teachers and teaching. Each chapter is named to draw out for the reader (and myself as the researcher) the complex issues apparent in current practice, as well as the literature surrounding my research enquiry. Within this article I will guide the reader through my interrogation of two key chapters, chapter 2 and 3. Using chapter 2, I delve into the contested nature of educational research through the microcosm of my experience as a teacher of the arts. Examining chapter 3, I offer critique of the dominant voices within the current English education system and the extent to which these voices contribute to current discourses about and within education.

“Sometimes you just have to play the game...” The stories we tell

Chapter 1: Education is Freedom

As a young, fresh-faced 18-year-old, Sarah sets out on her journey into higher education, with her eyes firmly fixed on the goal of becoming a teacher. Once at university she is moved by the inspiring words of great educationalists and philosophers, like Freire, Socrates and Plato. Their words resonate strongly with the young teacher, immersed in visions of impacting the lives of the generation of tomorrow, with her passion and love for learning. She fully embodies the empowering potential of education and feels herself enlightened and lifted by her studies. The more she learns the more her eyes are opened to the possibilities around her and for the first time in her adolescence, she feels truly free.

Chapter 2: Can you evidence that?

Now, following the success of her PGCE, Sarah embarks on her first teaching position in a state secondary school in a large city. Feeling creative, committed and confident, she is fueled by the fire of a dragon, ready to take her position as a guardian of the arts, inspiring the youth of tomorrow with creativity, risk-taking and individuality. However, as time goes by, Sarah is soon confronted by the unbreakable restraints of neo-liberal ideologies engulfing the English education system.

Despite this, it's the start of a new term and Sarah is full of excitement for the year ahead, her mind buzzing with creative ideas on how she can empower and engage her students in deep explorative learning. By week 2, however, Sarah begins to realize perhaps she is going to have to shift some things around to make way for CAT tests, oh and mock tests, oh and she's got to get the data trackers filled in by Easter.

Agile as she is, she continues on, without wanting to sacrifice the creative opportunities for her students, she makes time at the weekend to just get those last few bits of assessment entered – great – job done!

A few weeks pass and it's time for the year 9s to choose their options. A few brilliant students have shown an

interest and it's looking hopeful. The forms go in, the forms come back – a promising 15 becomes a grateful 5. Why the change of heart she says? "Mum and Dad say I've got to choose a sensible subject, one that will get me a good job".

Chapter 3: The Broken System

So, it's 2021 and we meet Sarah again. She's a few years into teaching now, she's a new mother and she's just emerging from the midst of a global pandemic.

Things aren't what they were, but she's soldiering on, for the good of the students. She worries for her child and for self, but if she's doing what she's told, it will be fine – at least that's what everyone says. At times, her work life balance resembles that of a highly skilled tightrope walker, carefully allocating time for her responsibly as mother and wife with the pressures of being 'teacher'. Sometimes though, the strands of herself come crashing against one another, resulting in a messy heap of priorities and plans splattered across the floor whilst all Sarah can do is watch it happen. Like, for example when her school receives 'the call', and after 24 hours of 'do whatever it takes' the report is bad. She is called in to a meeting with the whole teaching team. "You are inadequate. We are inadequate. We have failed these students, and we have a very long way to go".

You can't do much about it, they say, it's just a broken system – the whole education system is messed up. The government don't know what they are doing and SLT are just out to serve themselves. Sometimes, you just have to play the game, her colleagues tell her.

Chapter 4: It's just what's expected.

The last few months have been tough. Yes, there's been sacrifices, yes playdates have been missed, date nights axed, gym sessions lost – but she's on the up, the to do list is under control. Then, on a Friday afternoon, with the chime of her emails ringing, she begins to read a message marked 'important'. Whole school data, due in Monday 9am. But no one mentioned this she says. We've just assessed them, she thinks. I've got a family BBQ tomorrow. For her daughter's birthday. What should she do? How will she meet that deadline? She could just not do it, but then it'll probably be passed on to one of her team and then they'll get the blame. If she does it, she'll have to just call in sick, and probably cancel the BBQ OR does she just make up a grade for the students and shove anything in – all that matters is the grade, no one cares about what they're actually learning – right?

They'll be other birthdays – the data needs to be done. She'll meet the deadline, no one will know she'd struggled. It doesn't matter how the outcome was met – as long as she gets the results – whatever it costs.

discourses that teachers are exposed to early on in their careers and the lasting impact. As a teacher of drama, the challenges facing you as a professional become clear early on. It appears widely known that arts subjects are and have been for some time, under threat (Lilliedahl 2022). The knowledge of this, or perceived knowledge, has the potential to create within teachers of the arts a preconceived notion that they must *fight for their subject and become a guardian for creativity* before even entering the classroom. Ashton and Ashton (2023) provide possible justification of this stance in their recent publication which assesses creativity within the English school curriculum. They explain how over the 10 years since the EBacc was introduced in the UK the number of teachers qualifying for Drama and Music roles "has dropped by 420 whilst the number of teachers for subjects included in the EBacc has increased by 4,561" (Ashton and Ashton 2003 p455). These figures are not surprising, however, when the stories that infiltrate the minds of young people and teachers tell them inadvertently what is important, unsightly stating that arts subjects are not a priority.

When Nicky Morgan, the Secretary of State for Education in 2015 was quoted saying that if pupils choose arts subjects at school, it would "hold them back for the rest of their lives" (Hytner 2017 cited in Ashton and Ashton 2023 p488) it only added to an already tainted view of arts education. One factor fuelling hesitance towards arts subjects could possibly lie in the distinctive nature of the subjects themselves, as suggested by a recent report in A New Direction, on behalf of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. Drama, specifically, is described within their report, 'Arts in Schools' (2023) as "possibly the most politically orientated of all the arts subjects as it saw [sees] itself as providing a voice for the disengaged" (Tambling and Bacon 2023 p28). Their claim, which is supported by early literature from the work of Boal (1979, 2019) and Freire (2000) offer a view of education as an emancipatory tool for challenging oppression- a viewpoint which contradicts the ideologies of an ever increasingly neo-liberal state.

In a further examination of the ever-increasing presence of the neo-liberal state, Tambling and Bacon (2023) highlight how schools have "increasingly, and particularly in the context of pressures on budgets, schools prioritised what was inspected, and what was measured by public examinations" (p26). Even though their argument references the immediate effects of post Covid 19 schooling, it additionally points to a wider educational landscape in which the needs of individuals are ever more becoming inferior to the needs of the state. In the same way that Sarah struggles to choose between her ambitions as a teacher and the need to fulfil the demands as an employee, it seems that schools too are having to make the choice between inspiring young minds and depositing knowledge. Lilliedahl (2022) contributes to this debate in his review of how "neoliberal discourses have strengthened a performance-oriented approach to education" (p166), echoing and reinforcing the earlier views of Ball (2003) And Page (2017) with notions of 'performativity'. The need to evidence tangibly the outcomes of pupils poses a challenge for drama educators as much of what is achieved within lessons is in the realm of tacit knowledge and as pointed out by Lilliedahl (2022) often schools must consider "what is presumed to be valuable and non-valuable knowledge, which in turn is due to an underlying principle of visibility" (p170). Interestingly and of significance when planning to examine the internalised discourses of educators, Ashton and Ashton (2023) highlight an argument for the rationale behind the observed

In chapter two of Sarah's story, we see brought to the forefront the contested nature of today's education system examined through the microcosm of her experiences as a teacher of the arts. It highlights the complexities faced by teachers like Sarah in attempting to navigate between the retention of their personal beliefs or values and meeting the demands of public education.

From the beginning of her career, as a trainee teacher, she is immersed in a wave of perceptions on what it means to be 'a teacher'. Unpicking this phase of her career highlights the

marginalisation of arts within public education, proposing that “for the last two decades, the state has progressively marginalised the role of the arts in the public education system in the belief that the ‘market’ does not value the arts” (p484) yet there appears a disconnect between a society which needs young people to be equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to participate in society and the benefits that are offered by artistic subjects. One possible rationale for this disconnect is offered by Fairclough (2013) in his review of language within education. There exists, he proposes, an “often uncomfortable coexistence between what is considered traditional and what is considered new” (Fairclough 2013 p533). Here Fairclough, it seems, argues for the presence of a resistance within educational institutions whereby the need to do what has always been done is at odds with what needs to be done. The question to consider is why is this and what stories have been told to make it so?

Chapter 3 explores, through an examination of the dominant discourses within our education system, the current debates and controversies relevant to my research enquiry.

When Foucault discusses discourse, he “thinks of discourse (or discourses) in terms of bodies of knowledge” (McHoul and Grace 1993 p26) and the deliberate act of talking about a topic. In relation to the influence of discourses he states, “Discourse is not a mere effect or end-product of pre-existing Power” (McHoul and Grace 1993 p39) but instead is intertwined with the creation of power (Foucault 1977 cited in McHoul and Grace 1993).

Within education, it could be argued that power is formed by those whose voices are heard loudest. As Fairclough (2013) suggests, within education power is exercised “through ideology” (Fairclough 2013 p531). The question relevant to this debate is ‘what ideology is being fed to teachers?’ ‘What is the ‘ideal’ teacher?’ and ‘where/how is this message communicated?’ As a researcher I am particularly interested in how this ideology spreads as ‘knowledge’ and how it is interpreted at a macro, meso and micro level. Fairclough (2013) argues that the infiltration of ideology in education occurs through “the inculcation of self-disciplining practices” (p531), a concept that builds on Bentham’s model ‘the panopticon’ (Semple 1993) which Foucault has outwardly critiqued. Despite Foucault’s criticism the notion of internalised regulation appears relevant in the discussion of dominant discourses within teaching. When discussing dominant voices in education, it seems, reluctantly so, that an appropriate place to start would be to examine some of the messages disseminated from the governing body that prides itself on raising standards for education – The Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (OFSTED).

In their recently updated guidance for ‘Supporting schools not making necessary improvements’ (Department for Education, 2022), the outcome of a consultation as to what criteria should be applied to allow the government to forcefully move a local authority school into a multi academy trust, words such as “not yet good enough” or “weak” are chosen to describe those schools needing the most support. Words such as “best” and “strong” are offered in reference to the schools who will provide that support. Furthermore, in the most updated version of their School Inspection Handbook 2024, it is stated that “a school categorised as having ‘serious weaknesses’ is a school that meets the definition of ‘requiring significant improvement’ (OFSTED, 2024, p49). Reflecting on

the use of language in these documents, it is striking that highly emotionally charged words full of connotations are used with very little explanation or contextual reference. It is not surprising given these examples, which are one of many, that leaders and teachers alike find themselves emotionally entangled and vulnerable within their professional roles. In addition, statements such as “it is not right that some pupils have spent their entire compulsory education in schools that are less than Good” (DFE 2022) provoke a highly personal and emotive response. The statement, which could be seen as highly provocative, requires the assumption that being ‘good’ in the eyes of OFSTED equates to a quality education for young people and a positive school experience. What it does not consider is the multifaceted nature of a school and that what is defined as ‘good’ in one instance may be wholly different to that of another. Adding to the narrative, is the directives provided in relation to inspections; “In general, our policy is that a school judged outstanding or good will usually be inspected within the 4 academic years following its last inspection, and a school judged requires improvement or inadequate will usually be inspected within 2.5 years.” (OFSTED 2024, p37). It could be argued that this directive is telling schools ‘perform and you’ll be left to it, underperform and we will intervene’.

Delving further, examining the School Inspection Handbook, the word ‘consistently’ features in nearly all of the ‘Outstanding’ grade descriptors. The inference of this word creates an unachievable set of expectations about how we as teachers and our students should behave and ‘perform’. To do something ‘consistently’ means to do it in every case or on every occasion. The mere definition of the word holds with it an unrealistic standard of performance. Furthermore, the grade descriptor for ‘Inadequate’ states, “the quality of education is likely to be inadequate if any one of the following applies” in reference to a range of possible scenarios (OFSTED 2024, p107). The reality is that these occurrences are most likely apparent to some extent in every school more often than they would like to admit, as when dealing with human beings things are rarely ‘consistent’ and the expectation that it would be otherwise only sets those aiming to achieve it up for failure. In relation to outstanding behaviour and attitudes, schools are told pupils should “consistently have highly positive attitudes and commitment to their education. They are highly motivated and persistent in the face of difficulties. Pupils make a highly positive, tangible contribution to the life of the school and/or the wider community. Pupils actively support the well-being of other pupils” (OFSTED 2024, p108). What stands out here is the phrase ‘tangible contribution’. Just as Lilliedahl (2022) suggested in the previous chapter, this explicitly states that students should be seen contributing to the school, it is not enough for it to happen, it needs to be witnessed. Lastly, I am drawn to the use of the phrase “highly motivated and persistent in the face of difficulties” due to the narrative this offers on how not only pupils should perform but also teachers. It is not surprising, given the descriptors used, that educators may feel the pressure to consistently perform to the best of our ability and unflinching cope with adversity. A standard which is out of reach.

Contributing to the debate on standards, (Porritt and Featherstone 2019) offer an interesting discussion about female leaders in education. When exploring the notion “implications for women leading in education” (Porritt and Featherstone 2019 p31), the authors provoke a critique of the discourses that exist around progression in educational

leadership. Supporting arguments from the likes of Ball (2003) and Page (2017) Porritt and Featherstone (2019) propose that “often careers are based upon being visible in the workplace after hours rather than the results achieved” (p31). Interestingly, within this argument however is the notion that practices such as this often disadvantage women and in particular mothers that are primary care givers. This raises questions like whether this is an accepted standard or expectation. Where did it originate and in what way can it be challenged? Furthermore, others such as Cikara and Fiske (2009 cited in Porritt and Featherstone 2019) and Smith et al (2018b) make an argument for conflicting standards which are imposed on women through language. Smith et al (2018b) talk of ‘a double bind’ within research. The research in question examined the way in which performance reviews were conducted within a military context and what was most intriguing was the way in which men and women who possessed the same leadership characteristics were given very different descriptors, in most cases the descriptors for male soldiers included words such as ‘strong’ or ‘firm’ where as women were given terms such as ‘cold’ or ‘uncaring’ (Smith et al 2018b p3 cited in Porritt and Featherstone 2019 p31). The research highlights a problem which is arguably present in many more industries, education included, whereby women and men are expected to be very different things. As Cikara and Fiske (2009) describe it, “women must walk a narrow path; their competence may be doubted as a woman, but their warmth may be doubted as a professional woman” (p79, cited in Porritt and Featherstone 2019 p69). As a researcher this discussion holds a great opportunity for reflection. I intend to examine the discourses and stories around women that are in leadership. If they are assigned negative descriptors, does this permit and possibly demand that type of approach? Have women become this? And have been labelled as such? Or have women been labelled as such and have therefore become that? Does the education system perpetuate a self-fulfilling prophecy for women? Is it believed that in order to be a successful, women have to be cold and uncompassionate? According to Porritt and Featherstone (2019), this is likely the case as there is a widely believed notion that a woman must choose between being warm and compassionate or being successful, as supposedly “women can’t be both” (p32).

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Encouraging Children’s Personal, Social and Emotional Development through Outdoor Play

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The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) emphasises children’s personal, social and emotional development (PSED) as one of the three prime areas of development that underpin all learning (DfE, 2023). Outdoor play fosters personal development by supporting children’s confidence, autonomy, self-identity, self-awareness and self-esteem (Bento and Dias, 2017). Furthermore, Gleave and Cole-Hamilton (2012) argue that those with freedom and opportunities to play outdoors are more joyful, cooperative, and have stronger

friendships, while the environment provides opportunities to experience, regulate and express their emotions (Darling-Churchill and Lippman, 2016).

The outdoor environment is constantly changing and provides play opportunities that may be impossible to replicate indoors (Loebach et al., 2021). It stimulates teamwork and collaboration during practical activities and enables children to lead and initiate activities (Kiviranta et al., 2023). This impacts personal development as it promotes independence and competence as

children take responsibility for their play. Children cope with challenging situations and adapt to adversity, preparing them to respond effectively to real-life situations in the future, and strengthening emotional resilience (Gleave and Cole-Hamilton, 2012; Kiviranta et al., 2023).

Whilst outdoor play offers numerous benefits, the barriers hindering children's PSED through outdoor play appear to have increased. In the UK, children spend less time outdoors compared to their parents' childhood, perhaps due to parental safety concerns (Scott et al., 2022) and a rise in indoor, screen-based play (Loebach et al., 2021). The EYFS highlights the importance of creating enabling environments for children's PSED and requires access to an outdoor play area. However, if this is not possible providers must plan and deliver outdoor activities daily unless there are hazardous weather conditions (DfE, 2023). Kiviranta et al. (2023) depict practitioners as active facilitators, ensuring children's safety and guiding them instead of directly teaching. Hunter et al. (2019) suggest that planning for outdoor environments is less time-consuming than for indoor spaces, although effective outdoor learning requires high levels of direct teacher engagement with children (Chakravarthi, 2009).

Bilton (2014) stresses the importance of incorporating activities targeting PSED goals when planning outdoor environments. A creative area for art and music fosters personal development as children express themselves and learn through self-discovery. A role-play area promotes social and emotional development through collaborative play and sharing emotions through storytelling activities. A quiet area designated for reflection encourages emotional development as children can process their thoughts and feelings. However, Kiviranta et al. (2023) suggest practitioners' limited knowledge and motivation may hinder play opportunities due to a lack of preparation, planning and inclination.

Methodology

This research project was guided by the question, 'How do practitioners encourage children's PSED through outdoor play?'. Semi-structured interviews were completed with 3 practitioners from a day nursery. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, ensuring participants' responses were not misread and accurately documented. The researcher remained self-aware, respectful and reflective, acknowledging participants' expertise without judging their practice, therefore, ensuring the validity and reliability of the findings (Bell and Waters, 2018). Questionnaires were created on Microsoft Forms and shared on social media to early years practitioners. Nine responses were received. Ethical guidelines were followed (BERA, 2018). A participant information sheet and consent form were provided to participants. Responses were anonymised and any identifying information, such as the place of work or geographical location, has been removed.

Findings and analysis

Outdoor play enables children to form friendships and communicate effectively through sharing and turn-taking. These social interactions are key in emotional regulation as children can settle disagreements and relate to personal experiences:

Play is inherently social – kids have to negotiate their own rules of play, they have to come to consensus, they hold each other accountable, they learn to settle disagreements, they express their grievances and share the joy of a win or a good chase.

(Questionnaire participant 8)

One practitioner shared an example of when children played 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt' and how participation increased as the game progressed. This activity not only fostered children's language skills and confidence but also promoted personal and social development through active engagement and exploration of new activities. This emphasises the importance of integrating outdoor play in early years settings to enhance children's PSED.

Similar findings are reported by Kiviranta et al. (2023) who explain that children develop social and emotional skills through teamwork and collaboration as they express their feelings and interact with peers in an unstructured environment. The findings show that social interactions are key in forming friendships and effective communication. This enables children to build emotional regulation as they can learn how to settle disagreements and relate to personal experiences, although practitioners also need to support this by modelling behaviour and helping children to negotiate with each other.

Outdoor environments can be seen to build children's confidence and independence as they make choices for themselves:

Children feel calmer in the outdoors whereas some can feel overwhelmed in the indoor environment leading to emotional struggles. The outdoors can be a calming place to help regulate emotions.

(Questionnaire participant 9)

The outdoors:

Helps children to develop their confidence, independence and self-esteem.

(Questionnaire participant 4)

... it builds on their self-confidence, they're free to explore. They learn new things.

(Questionnaire participant B)

Similarly, when:

We got sticks and started making a den, had a variety of children coming up, ones who are like quieter children and the not so quiet children all joined in and helped make the den. You can see how that builds their emotional side.

(Questionnaire participant A)

Forest schools provide adventurous activities such as climbing trees, lighting fires, or using sticks to build objects, which encourage free play, socialising, creativity and emotional stability. Moreover, they improve children's perseverance, motivation and cooperation, therefore enhancing their PSED (Wilson, 2012). The importance of children's autonomy was also reflected in the present study where children directed their play and challenged themselves to climb on trees, building confidence skills. Contrastingly, they gather around the campfire and toast marshmallows, or work together to create a den using sticks. Many children enjoy these activities which encourage quieter children to participate and therefore enhance their social and emotional development. However, practitioners noted that some children may feel overwhelmed in the outdoor environment leading to challenges to their confidence and ability to engage. This underscores the importance of practitioners knowing and catering to the needs of individual children, ensuring they receive the right support to enhance their outdoor play experiences.

Barriers to outdoor play for children's PSED

Despite many benefits of outdoor play in encouraging children's PSED, it is also impeded by various barriers. Wilson (2012) argues that playgrounds pose risks to children's safety, as they can cause severe injuries such as broken bones, concussion and brain damage. However, several practitioners explained the importance of risky play in their program and mentioned that if children hurt themselves, they learn resilience, and overcoming challenges builds confidence, impacting children's PSED:

If they hurt themselves along the way they learn resilience. Overcoming challenges builds confidence, we do a lot of risky play in our programs.

(Questionnaire participant 8)

Maynard and Waters (2014) advise practitioners to regularly reflect on and re-evaluate the outdoor environment to make continuous improvements so that children have opportunities to assess risky situations and navigate future risks independently (Loebach et al., 2021). Bilton (2014) recommends regular risk assessments to maintain a safe environment for all children. However, one practitioner explained that they encourage children to complete their own risk assessments by asking various phrases, for example, "Have you considered this?" or "What is your vision here?" (Questionnaire participant 8). This strategy has not been widely documented in the literature and offers a unique approach to risk assessment aiding children's active involvement in managing their own risks and therefore enhancing their learning and development.

Across both the interviews and questionnaires, practitioners identified weather conditions as the predominant barrier to outdoor play. Snow, heavy rain and thunder, make it challenging for practitioners to provide stimulating but safe play opportunities outdoors. Additionally, several practitioners noted that children may not be as keen to go outside if it is wet and cold and therefore this limits their motivation to play outdoors. During the interviews, practitioners explained how they addressed this barrier by having to, 'prepare with wetsuits, wellies, hats and gloves.' And 'if you've got thunderstorms or high winds you have to put those things into place, you have to risk assess to avoid putting the children in danger'. These findings confirm those of other studies, stressing the importance of appropriate clothing for the weather conditions and effective risk assessment so that children to have enjoyable outdoor experiences and are able to engage in outdoor learning (Bento and Dias, 2017).

Parents' influence on outdoor play has been highlighted as a barrier to children's PSED within the literature review and also in this study. However, they provide contrasting perspectives. Bento and Dias (2017) focus on play outside the home where they highlight parents' concerns about safety, such as interactions with strangers. In this study the focus was on educational settings where practitioners discussed parents' fear of children getting hurt during outdoor play as a common barrier. Moreover, practitioners commented on how some parents are reluctant to allow children to get dirty:

Sometimes the parents aren't always on board with getting outside and getting dirty. How parents react to that dirt as well can sometimes be a bit tricky.

(Interview participant C)

The challenges are:

Parents! And rules. And too much focus on academics.

Parents fear their child getting hurt or falling behind, but play is a necessity of childhood growth and development, especially self-directed play outdoors. We establish boundaries in our space, and then children are free to run wild.

(Interview participant A)

Participants also shared strategies to overcome these barriers, including explaining to parents the impact that outdoor play has on children's PSED, and how they enjoy playing outdoors. For example:

Helping parents understand that yes, they're coming home with a bag of filthy clothing but they've had a wonderful experience and they're really happy and they want to do it all again tomorrow.

(Interview participant C)

This was a common finding in research exploring parents' perspectives of outdoor play (Dankiw et al., 2023) and it suggests that as practitioners may hesitate to offer outdoor experiences if parents are not in agreement, there is a clear need for collaboration and improved parent partnership. Furthermore, practitioners play a pivotal role in supporting children's PSED. Participants agreed it is crucial to plan and provide a range of outdoor activities and resources which cater to all children's interests. These activities must be easily accessible for children to participate in, and can encourage social interactions between children and adults:

I find it best to get involved with the children's activities such as asking open ended questions or just simply joining in with a game. There is also a range of toys that is easily accessible to them that they can pick and choose from.

(Questionnaire participant 5)

Effective outdoor learning requires high levels of direct teacher engagement with children (Chakravarthi, 2009; Hunter et al., 2019). In this study, practitioners explored strategies for fostering social interactions among children and adults, including active participation in their play, asking open-ended questions, and modelling positive social behaviours. Participants also reflected on potentially damaging interactions:

Educators and leaders can inhibit this development by being overly authoritative, disciplining and reprimanding. This disempowers kids from being able to face their own challenges.

(Questionnaire participant 8)

Kiviranta et al. (2023) suggest practitioners' limited knowledge and motivation may hinder the use of outdoor environments due to insufficient preparation, planning and inclination, therefore affecting children's play opportunities in promoting PSED. Wilson (2012) indicates that while early years playgrounds commonly include traditional equipment such as climbing structures, slides and swings, this fixed equipment constrains children's exploration and experimentation as it cannot be moved or adapted to suit children's impulses, hindering personal development.

Examples of effective outdoor activities included:

Role play activities - kitchen, restaurant, jobs, "teachers", "mum and dads". Sensory activities - mud café, scavenger hunts.

(Questionnaire participant 1)

Individual activities impacted on PSED in different ways, for example:

When we have the bikes and scooters out, the children have to work out how to make turn taking fair and to support one another.

(Questionnaire participant 6)

An interesting activity found to be effective in promoting children's personal and emotional development was mindfulness activities and outdoor yoga. Children develop a positive sense of self and enhance their confidence in developing relationships with their key person during these activities (Rashedi et al., 2021). During this activity:

Children will have the opportunity to explore age-appropriate yoga poses with early years practitioners supporting them to develop a positive sense of self and supporting their confidence in developing key personal relationships.

(Questionnaire participant 3)

Furthermore, participants stressed that self-directed play is essential outdoors, explaining that adults establish boundaries in the space and then afford children the freedom to explore. They agreed that children in this setting have an adequate number of opportunities to engage in outdoor play:

...often multiple times throughout the day, however there's no specific figure as our curriculum is free-flow.

(Questionnaire participant 3)

Conclusion

Outdoor play promotes independence, confidence, positive relationships and social-emotional development including cooperation and resilience. However, barriers such as poor weather conditions, parental expectations, safety concerns and limited practitioner knowledge may hinder children's access to these important opportunities and can impact on the key areas, personal, social and emotional development that underpin all other learning.

This study has shown that in good settings with effective outdoor provision, these barriers can be addressed through careful risk assessment, strong parent partnership, weather adaptations, and providing suitable clothing. However, the research literature suggests not all practitioners feel confident to implement outdoor learning. Therefore, the implications for future practice include the significance of continual professional development for practitioners to elevate their understanding and implementation of outdoor play strategies, and therefore, to harness the potential of the outdoors to enhance children's personal, social and emotional development as prime areas of their learning and development.

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INDIVIDUAL ENQUIRY AND SCHOLARSHIP

Educomix: towards a critical, HE-ready comics-based pedagogy

Kevin Hoffin – Senior Lecturer, Birmingham City University

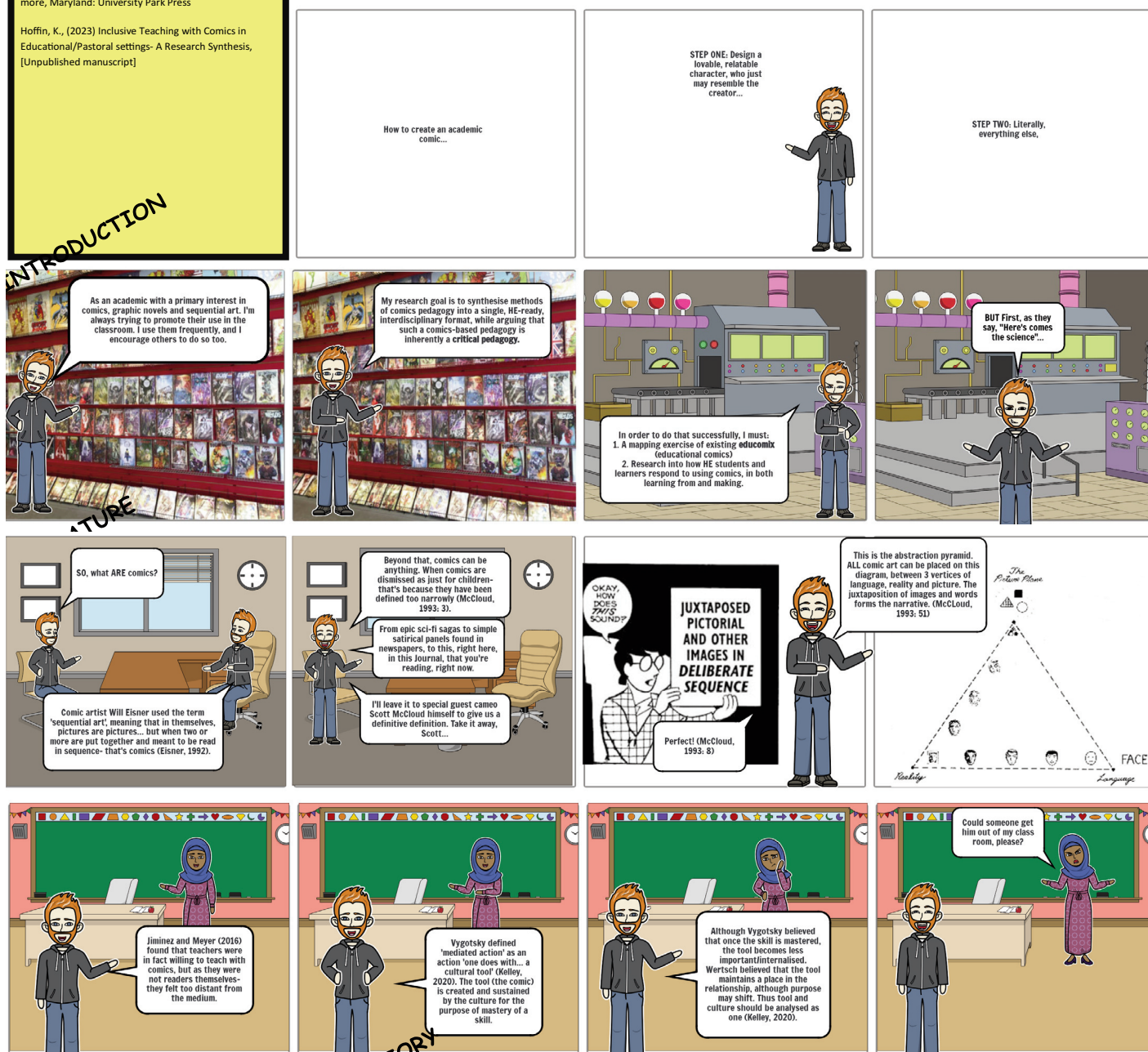
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EDUCOMIX: TOWARDS A CRITICAL, HE-READY COMICS-BASED PEDAGOGY

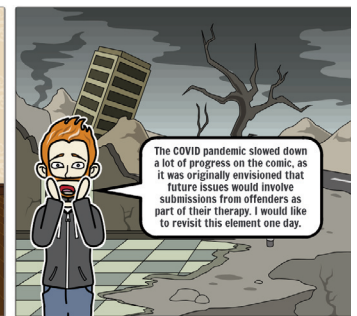
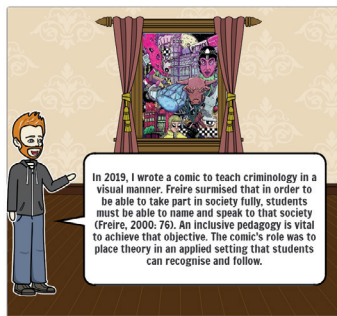
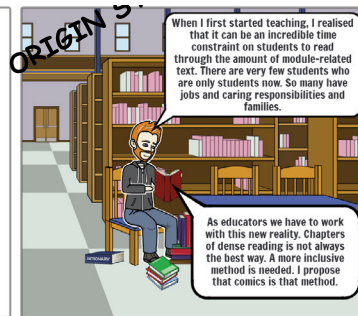
The following is a comic based upon my research project on educational comics (educomix), the project aims towards creating an HE-ready comics pedagogy as well as arguing that it would be inherently a critical pedagogy. Contact me for more: Kevin.Hoffin@BCU.ac.uk

Accessibility: To listen to an audio description of this comic, please visit www.bcu.ac.uk/inclusive-teaching-comic-audio



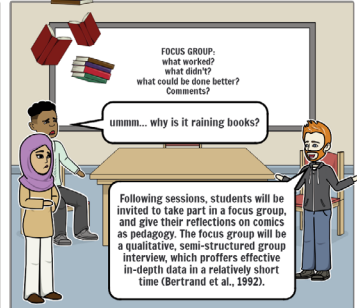
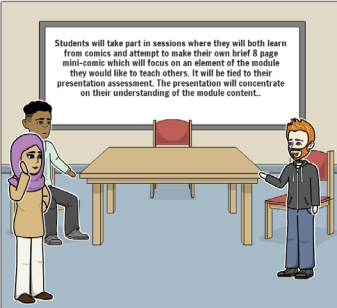
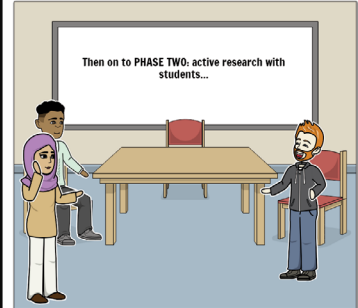
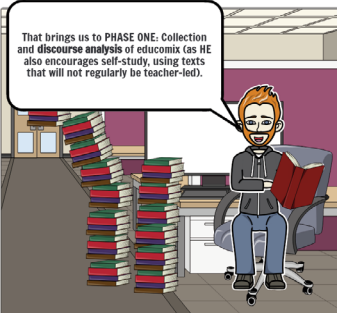
We interrupt this story to bring you an important message from our sponsors. If YOU are reading this and wondering: Just how does he do this? Check out www.storyboardthat.com

OK, now back to the comic. When we last saw Kevin talking about some of the literature that has informed this project. Now when we return, we will see the origin story of Kevin's career pursuit of teaching with comics...



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METHOD:

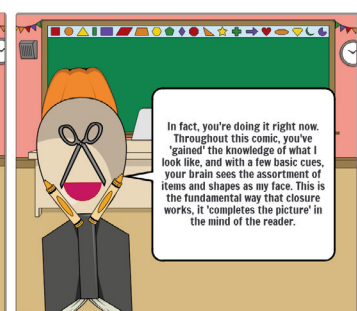
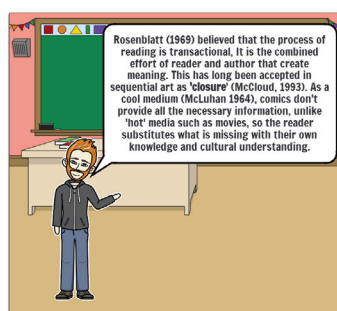
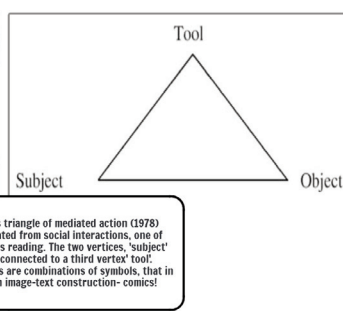
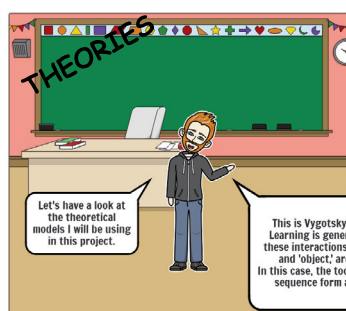
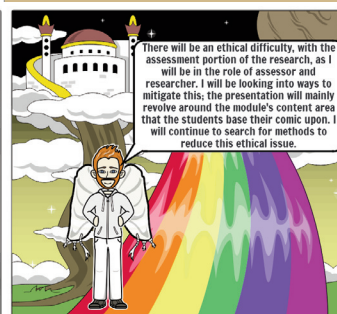
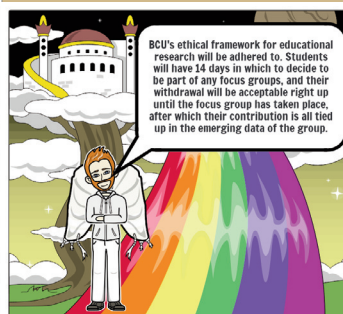
ANALYSIS

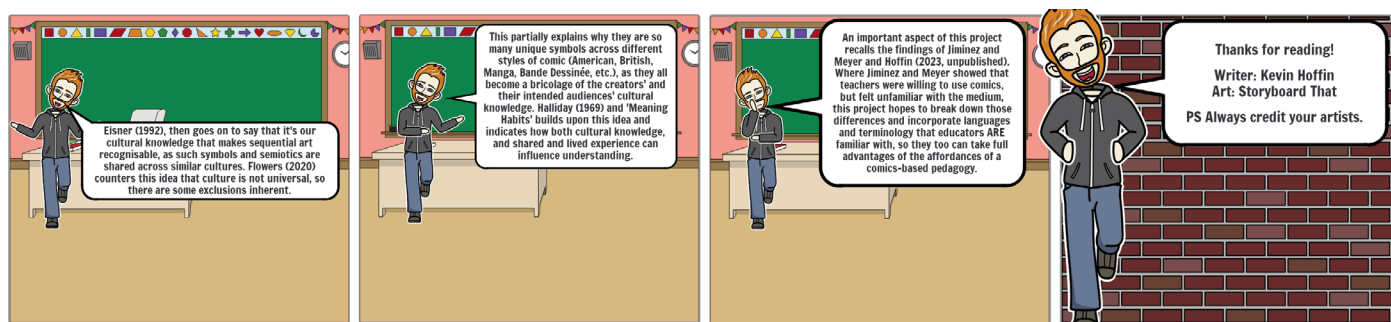
Data from the PHASE TWO focus groups will be analysed via discourse analysis. The theoretical freedoms associated with this kind of analysis make it an efficient data analysis tool for education into research and comics. It allows for flexibility and seamless integration with the findings of PHASE ONE (Burr, 2000)

Due to the social constructivist nature of the research and the 'theoretical' frameworks involved (Vygotsky and Wertsch with 'mediated actions', Rosenblatt's 'transactional theory of reading', Halliday's 'Meaning Habits') Discourse analysis will require a sense of reflexivity, being that 'talk' about comics is as vital to the culture as the 'comics themselves' (Burr, 2000: 161)

To ensure the trustworthiness of data, interpretation and adherence to ethical considerations, the analysis model will incorporate elements of the analytical model set out by Nowell et al., (2017).

To ensure the trustworthiness of data, interpretation and adherence to ethical considerations, the analysis model will incorporate elements of the analytical model set out by Nowell et al., (2017).





A qualitative narrative study of commuter students – a pilot study

Aida Thompson – Senior Teaching Fellow in Accounting, Birmingham City University

Introduction

As a practitioner within the Higher Education field, I am troubled by the language used towards commuting students. They are viewed as a problematic group that does not engage well (Maguire and Morris, 2018). Blame is put on the students rather than institutions trying to understand the challenges that they face so that they can provide appropriate support to these students. The dominant discourse within university is that students need to live within university accommodation (Fisher *et al.*, 2011) in order to develop what Bourdieu (1986) would term as social capital. Further research claims that living in university accommodation helps to develop students' sense of belonging (Kretovics, 2015). Such a neo-liberalistic view conceals inequalities and marginalises those who do not conform to the norm (Reay *et al.*, 2009). Curtis *et al.* (2021) stated that students whose habitus does not align with that of the institution could be othered, thereby affecting their sense of belonging.

Therefore, the purpose of this pilot study is to examine the experiences of commuter students. In so doing, it will address the following research question:

RQ1: What challenges do commuter students face?

Literature review

Commuter Student Landscape

Researchers have struggled to conceptualise the term commuter students because of the broad range of students' ages, living situations, backgrounds, and personal circumstances (Graham *et al.*, 2018). Different terms such as stay-education, non-traditional students, live at home students, and off-campus students (Pokorny *et al.*, 2017), have been used to describe commuter students. Furthermore, a recent study by Maslin (2023) stated that most universities do not appear to have a definition for commuter students. Those who do, define them as 'local' students. Such a term is problematic as it assumes that students live within a short distance to their university (Thomas and Jones, 2017). Despite the various definitions of commuter students, there is a general agreement that this group of students live off-campus (Alfano and Eduljee, 2013). Therefore, this study adopted Thomas and Jones' (2017: 15) definition of commuter students which describes them as "Those who travel to their higher education provider (HEP) from their parental or family home, which they lived in prior to entering higher education – rather than having re-located to live in student accommodation (or close to their HEP) for the purposes of studying".

Commuter students are more likely to be mature, disadvantaged and from either a Black, Asian or ethnic minority background (Maguire and Morris, 2018). However, Fjellkner-Pihl (2023) noted that as more students commute, because of replacement of maintenance grants by loans (Christie, 2007), increased tuition fees and living costs (Weale, 2016), this simplified image of commuter students may no longer hold true and might mask the complexities surrounding this group of students. Furthermore, Maslin (2023) stated that although commuter students might be from similar demographics, their experiences of commuting might be different, hence the need to understand their experiences better.

Commuter student challenges

Institutional policies

Universities still follow a dominant discourse that for students to experience university life, they need to live within university accommodation (Fisher *et al.*, 2011). Integral to this is an assumption that living in university accommodation develops what Bourdieu (1986: 241) terms as 'social capital' – "a benefit that accrues to the individual through the development of relationships and friendships". Many university websites use language and images that portray a certain student image, which might not be relevant to commuter students, thereby making them feel like a 'fish out of water' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Furthermore, a study by Jacoby and Garland (2004) found that many institutions do not provide any physical spaces, such as lockers, and lounges for commuter students to enable them to feel more connected to the university environment.

Staff perceptions

Due to the limited time on campus, commuter students are likely to have limited contact with academic staff, including faculty members (Alfano and Eduljee, 2013). This is also due to the way in which timetables are scheduled. Sessions are spread out throughout the week, with some early morning or late evening classes, which may lead commuter students to make strategic decisions as to whether to attend classes or rely on on-line resources (Hodgson, 2024). According to Miah (2018), this could be perceived as poor engagement by staff who have traditional expectations of students – that of being on campus full-time. A study by Thomas and Jones (2017) reported commuter students being locked out of lectures or made to wait outside classes for being late. This could leave commuter students feeling humiliated, thereby affecting their engagement.

Change in identity

Southall *et al.* (2016) assert that the movement between two habitus – home and university, causes conflicting demands for commuter students and could destabilise their identities. Bourdieu referred to this as habitus clivé (Bourdieu, 1999). Abrahams and Ingram (2013: 216) believes that commuter students must “*become ‘chameleon-like’ in adjusting to the new field of university whilst remaining within their local environment*”, which could impact their sense of belonging. This viewpoint is also supported by Southall *et al.* (2016) who asserted that as commuter students have to leave the campus on a daily basis and return to being children, parents, partners, siblings or carers, this could impact the development of both their social and learner identity.

Arguments raised through the literature suggest that commuter students face several challenges. Although research about commuter students has been widely researched in the United States, there is still limited research regarding this group of students within the UK (Thomas, 2020). Therefore, this pilot study will address these research gaps by exploring commuter students’ experiences using Bourdieu’s concepts of field and social capital.

Methodology

As this pilot study explored experiences of commuter students, an interpretivism paradigm was adopted, positioned within a narrative enquiry methodology, which is based on people’s perception of life and the meaning drawn from it (Webster and Mertova, 2007).

Previous research within the commuter student context has employed semi-structured interviews – where participants respond to preset and unplanned open-ended interviews, or questionnaires as tools for collecting data from participants (Fjelkner-Pihl, 2023). Although semi-structured interviews are recognised as an effective data collection tool (Ruslin *et al.*, 2022), I was concerned that participants might provide standard responses to questions posed. I decided to incorporate a creative activity (Mason, 2017) within the semi-structured interview that required participants to produce a drawing signifying their journey or experience as a commuter student. This allowed for deeper understanding to be uncovered.

Recruitment and data analysis

Ethical approval was granted before participants were recruited for this study. Purposive sampling was employed for this pilot study (Palinkas *et al.*, 2015). Students who self-identified as commuter students were targeted for this study. The inclusion criteria were second or third-year students enrolled onto the BSc (Hons) Accounting and Finance course at a post-92 university. Researcher believed these students would have had the experience of commuting for at least a year, therefore would be able to share a more meaningful experience. The exclusion criteria were students in year 1 of the course, as their experience would be limited.

Two participants expressed their interest in the study. An initial meeting was arranged with both participants individually to fully explain the purpose of the study and for relevant documentation to be shared. Participants were reminded of their right to withdraw from the study; however, they were reminded that withdrawal would not be possible once data had been analysed. There were no potential physical risks, however there was a potential psychological risk through

participants’ recollection of their experiences. Participants were reminded to ask for a break where needed, and they were made aware of the student support services within the University.

The face-to-face interviews took approximately 50 minutes, and they were recorded using an approved university digital recorder. Memoing was utilised immediately after interviews to write down initial thoughts, ideas, and assumptions (Birks *et al.*, 2008). To maintain participant anonymity and confidentiality, pseudonyms were used and attached to each participant. After the interview, it was transcribed and sent to participants to review for accuracy before being analysed.

Findings

Timetabling

This theme was highlighted as an important factor affecting both participants’ engagement with wider University opportunities. A mentioned that “*The only problem I have is timetabling because, I don’t like anything past 4:00pm, it gets really busy. And if lessons finish for five, it’s just a bit of a hassle because the trains are packed...*” B also felt that “*The way the timetable is scheduled, I think it can be worked around to make some changes. We have to come in four days a week... And it is not like it cannot be worked out to fit into 3 or 2 days... So, I’ve looked at one of my sessions like on a Thursday. In the morning I’m free until 3:00pm. There are other sessions happening from 9:00am and 10:00am. I could have any of those, but they are like we cannot change it*”. B highlighted the reluctance of the university to make any timetable changes unless it is related to childcare, “*when you have an excuse of childcare problems, you can ask them to change your timetable, but... people could have other problems and of course, not just childcare*”.

Campus space

This was an interesting theme as there were different opinions from both participants. A stated that, “*I don’t think the university has enough space. It feels a bit cramped in certain areas, especially the cafeteria and the library as well, especially busy hours like, ten till three, for example... It’s very hard to find a seat where all friends can sit together*”. A mentioned having to “*sit in the computer rooms during breaks or there’s a pool place down in Digbeth. We usually go there*”. B highlighted the need for the university to provide storage space for commuter students, “*I have other colleagues that live on campus... when we on break, they can go home... and then come back but I cannot... I usually bring my laptop with me on days I have a gap, but my bag can get heavy*”.

Student relationships

Both participants stated that as a commuter student, your personality constantly changes as you move from home to the university. A explained that “*The way I act at home is different from uni. I feel like I can be more childish at home*”. B also stated that “*I am a student at the university and a mother at home. This constant change in personality can be tiring, although my son is grown and can take care of himself*”. This can also impact on how students interact with others. Both participants highlighted that they have limited peer interaction, as A mentioned that, “*Most of my friends commute... so we all will tend to meet whenever we have the same lessons, and hang out*”.

Staff relationships

Both participants highlighted the importance of this theme.

B mentioned that staff relationships depend “on what lecturers you have. Some are understanding and others are not”. A further highlighted that the “relationship between academic staff and students, I think it’s just a professional understanding... I don’t interact with the academic staff outside of the classroom”. B further stated that, “some staff do not understand our lives.... Some expect you to send an email beforehand if you are going to be late....others might not let you in...this impacts on how you interact with staff members and how you belong”.

Discussion

The data from our study reveals the different fields commuter students must navigate as evidenced within the timetabling and campus space themes. The fact that participant B cannot change her timetable to suit her needs shows the rigidity of rules within the university field. Such rules create expectations that students need to attend sessions assigned to them no matter the day or time, however this ignores other commitments they might have. This leads to commuter students missing some classes which can impact on their acquisition of cultural capital as well as social capital through limited interaction with staff and peers. The findings from this study support those of Hodgson (2024) which stated commuter students might make strategic decisions as to whether to attend classes or rely on on-line resources.

Furthermore, the lack of campus space where commuter students can relax and hang out during classes can also impact on their sense of belonging and development of social capital. Participant A mentioned not being able to find a place to sit with all his friends. These results are in line with those of Jacoby and Garland (2004) found that many institutions do not provide any physical spaces, such as lockers, and lounges for commuter students to enable them to feel more connected to the university environment. Strange and Banning (2001) asserted that students need ‘third places’ where they can talk away from the complexities of the teaching spaces. This explains why participant A mentioned having to go to a place in Digbeth as this provides a conducive environment that the university field fails to provide.

The narratives collected further suggest that commuter students might have limited opportunities to build relationships thereby impacting on the development of their social capital. The fact that A stated that all his friends commute shows that his social capital network is limited. An interesting finding from this study was the limited interaction that participants from this study had with academic staff. Referring to Bourdieu’s concepts, the way that some staff engage within the university field is probably influenced by their habitus. Their practices can influence the way in which other staff members engage with commuter students which might create a culture that marginalises these students.

The findings from this study suggest the need for HE institutions to further understand the challenges faced by commuter students, and to provide appropriate support to this group of students.

Limitations of this study and future direction

This study was based on only two participants from one course and university and therefore does not make generalisations for wider population of commuter students. Nevertheless, it adds some value to the literature around this topic which could be used to inform the current practice in

supporting commuter students. Further research would be recommended at other universities, possibly a pre-1992 and post-1992, to add value to the research findings. It would also add value to capture narratives of commuter students from different courses to ascertain whether their experiences are similar or different and whether the course they are enrolled on makes a difference.

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Balancing Motherhood, Academia, and Teaching: A Doctoral Student's Journey

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Introduction

Motherhood, an esteemed yet multifaceted role, often intersects with professional pursuits, including academia and teaching (Barnett and Hyde, 2001). This article examines the challenges and strategies encountered by a doctoral student and lecturer at Birmingham City University (BCU) who recently transitioned into motherhood. Drawing upon personal experiences, relevant literature and theoretical paradigms, this narrative offers insights into the complexities of balancing family responsibilities with academic and professional endeavours.

My journey as a Doctor of Education (EdD) student and lecturer for the Department of Childhood, Youth and Community at BCU has been transformative, intertwining motherhood with the demands of academia and teaching. The shift into motherhood has been profound, necessitating adjustments in my personal and professional life. It has introduced a new set of responsibilities and priorities that have reshaped my daily routines and perspectives on time management and productivity. The challenges of caring for a newborn while maintaining the rigours of doctoral studies and lecturing responsibilities have been both daunting and rewarding. Throughout this journey, I have strived to navigate the complexities of motherhood, academia, and teaching

while seeking to maintain a sense of balance in my life. This has prompted the exploration of various strategies to navigate this multifaceted journey, including seeking institutional support, fostering personal resilience, and embracing the role of a positive role model for my baby daughter.

Embracing Change: The Transition to Motherhood

Transitioning into motherhood marks a profound life change, necessitating adjustments in both personal and professional spheres. Becoming a mother brought forth a whirlwind of emotions – from exhilarating joy to moments of doubt and uncertainty. As I welcomed my newborn baby girl into the world, I realised that my academic pursuits would need to adapt to accommodate this new chapter of life. Balancing the demands of caring for a newborn with the rigours of doctoral studies and lecturing presented a formidable challenge, prompting a reassessment of priorities and time management strategies.

Barnett and Hyde (2001) highlight the importance of flexibility and adaptability during significant life transitions, such as motherhood. Integrating motherhood with professional roles often requires a renegotiation of identity and priorities as individuals strive to maintain a sense of balance amidst competing demands. Gatrell (2011) further explores how

motherhood influences women's professional trajectories, noting that societal expectations and workplace policies often necessitate significant adjustments in both personal and professional spheres. Recognising the challenges posed by the transition to motherhood, researchers emphasise the importance of establishing robust support networks and implementing effective coping strategies to navigate this transformative journey (Johnstone and Lee, 2009). These strategies assist in managing the immediate demands of motherhood and support long-term career sustainability and personal well-being. By examining these approaches, one can better understand how mothers in academia successfully balance their dual roles and maintain their professional and personal identities.

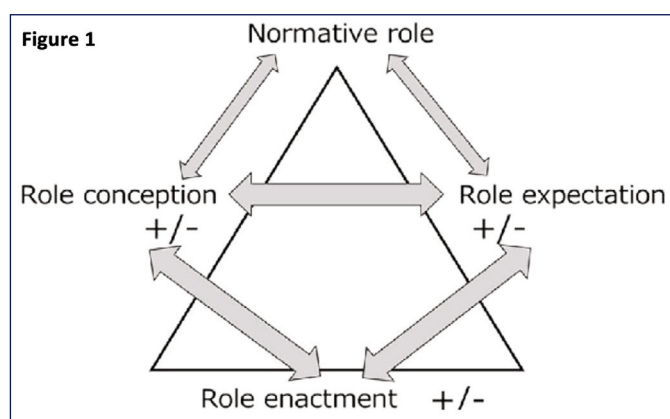


Figure 1: The concept of role theory and its dynamics

According to Biddle (1979), role theory offers valuable insights into individuals' diverse roles and associated expectations. Morris's contributions to role theory further elaborate on this understanding, as depicted in Figure 1, which illustrates the concept of role theory and its dynamics. This diagram highlights four key components: normative roles, which are the socially defined roles that individuals are expected to fulfil; role conception, referring to an individual's understanding and perception of their roles; role expectation, which encompasses the behaviours and responsibilities expected of an individual by others concerning their roles; and role enactment, which is how individuals perform and embody their roles. A minus sign between these components indicates the potential for role conflict. For example, as a new mother, the expectations related to caregiving (role expectation) may clash with the academic and teaching responsibilities (role enactment), resulting in role strain (Biddle, 1979; Morris, 1979). This tension may lead to feelings of guilt or inadequacy when juggling a newborn baby's nurturing needs with the intellectual and professional demands of academia. By examining the roles of motherhood, doctoral student, and lecturer through this framework, we can better understand the challenges and adjustments required to manage these identities. This comprehensive view helps to elucidate the complex interplay between different roles and the emotional and practical adjustments necessary to navigate them effectively.

Similarly, Role Strain Theory, proposed by Goode (1960), provides insight into the stress that arises from the multiple roles individuals occupy. The constant juggling of responsibilities as a mother, doctoral student, and lecturer often resulted in role strain, characterised by fatigue and moments of self-doubt. Recognising this strain helped me seek support and implement strategies to mitigate stress, such as time

management techniques, delegating tasks when possible and having opportunities to complete my work for my teaching role and my doctorate at home.

Moreover, intersectionality theory, as articulated by Crenshaw (1991), underscores the interconnected nature of various aspects of identity and their impact on individuals' experiences. When applied to the experience of motherhood in academia, intersectionality sheds light on how factors such as gender, race, and professional status intersect to shape individuals' experiences. For instance, women of colour may encounter compounded difficulties in balancing motherhood and academia due to systemic inequalities and biases, including racial discrimination and gender stereotypes (Crenshaw, 1991). These compounded challenges can exacerbate role strain and conflict, as discussed in role theory by Biddle and Morris and Goode's role strain theory, by adding additional layers of expectations and obstacles. Figure 2, often referred to as an "Intersectionality Wheel," visually represents the concept of intersectionality by showing how personal, social/cultural, and organisational factors intersect to shape individual experiences. This diagram can help to visually convey the complexity of intersectionality and its implications for individuals navigating multiple, intersecting roles.

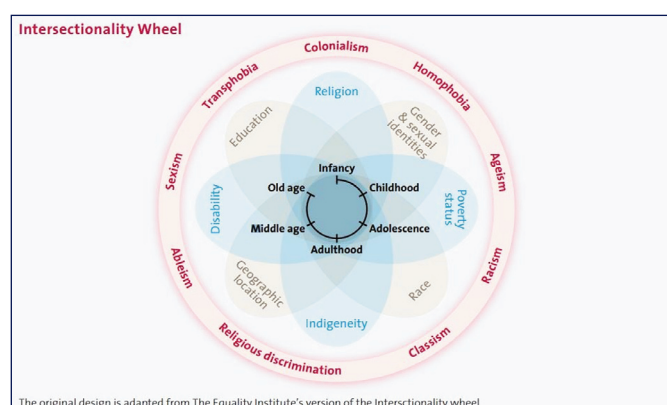


Figure 2: Intersectionality Wheel

Crenshaw's intersectionality theory provides a framework for understanding the multifaceted nature of these experiences, emphasising that solutions must also be multifaceted and all institutions, such as universities, must consider their members' intersectional identities to offer effective support. This could include policies that address not only gender but also race and other aspects of identity to create a more inclusive academic environment. By integrating the insights from role theory and intersectionality, we gain a more nuanced understanding of the difficulties faced by mothers in academia, highlighting both personal and structural factors.

Although Crenshaw's work primarily addresses the unique challenges faced by women of colour, the broader principles of intersectionality can be applied to understand how different aspects of identity interact for all individuals. For instance, a mother in academia might face challenges related to gender and professional status, and these can be further compounded by other factors such as socioeconomic status or personal background. These overlapping identities can lead to compounded forms of role strain and conflict. These theoretical frameworks provide a nuanced understanding of the difficulties faced, emphasising the intricate interplay of personal and structural factors in shaping the academic experiences of mothers. They also highlight potential avenues for institutional support and policy interventions to alleviate these compounded

challenges. These theoretical frameworks suggest possible avenues for institutional support and policy interventions, such as providing flexible working arrangements, mentoring programs, and addressing systemic biases within academic institutions.

While theoretical perspectives and relative literature and research provide valuable insights, the journey of balancing motherhood with academic and professional responsibilities is profoundly personal and multifaceted. As I navigated this transition, I found solace in the shared experiences of fellow mothers and the support of my academic community. By embracing the complexities of my roles as a mother, doctoral student, and university lecturer, I have discovered a reservoir of resilience and strength that I never knew I possessed. This journey underscores the importance of recognising and addressing the challenges mothers face in academia, fostering a supportive environment that enables individuals to thrive personally and professionally.

Strategies for Success: Navigating Multiple Roles

Navigating doctoral studies amidst the demands of early motherhood required balance and demanded strength and tenacity. I found solace in establishing a flexible study schedule that aligned with my baby daughter's routine, maximising productivity during nap times and late evenings (Grzywacz and Bass, 2003). Embracing technology facilitated remote research and collaboration, allowing me to engage in scholarly pursuits while tending to my newborn daughter's needs. Despite the challenges, the pursuit of knowledge remained a source of fulfilment and purpose. These strategies, along with the support of my academic community and the resilience I discovered within myself, have been instrumental in my journey.

Research on the experiences of doctoral students who are also mothers highlights the crucial role of proactive time management and self-regulation strategies in achieving academic success. Maintaining progress in doctoral programs while balancing the demands of motherhood requires flexibility in study schedules and the skill to make the most of fragmented time periods for university work. For instance, many mothers, including myself, find that early mornings, late evenings, and nap times are the most productive periods for focused academic activities. Effective self-regulation, including setting specific goals and creating structured plans, helps optimise these short, uninterrupted periods. Additionally, leveraging technological tools for remote collaboration and accessing online resources can improve productivity and facilitate scholarly engagement for mothers pursuing postgraduate research degrees (Gatrell, 2011). For instance, virtual doctorate supervision meetings and digital communication platforms, such as Microsoft Teams, allow for continuous academic involvement without the need for physical presence on campus, therefore providing the flexibility needed to manage both academic and parental responsibilities effectively. These factors helped me maintain a balance that supports both professional growth and personal well-being while enhancing my academic productivity and fulfilling my teaching job role to the best of my ability.

Various theoretical perspectives offer valuable insights into understanding the intricate dynamics between motherhood and doctoral studies. As Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) proposed, the work-family conflict theory explores the tensions that arise when demands from work and family

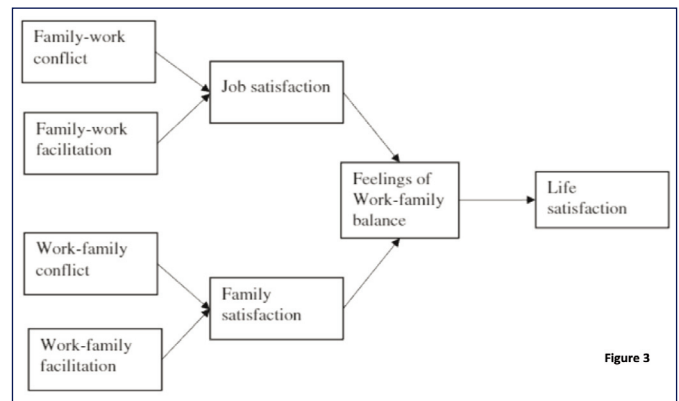


Figure 3

domains are incompatible. This theory resonated deeply with my experiences, particularly during periods of peak academic activity. Balancing responsibilities such as planning and leading innovative and engaging teaching sessions for my students, marking student assignments at the culmination of the semester, and progressing with my EdD assignments often overlapped with meeting my daughter's needs. These simultaneous demands frequently led to feelings of guilt and stress, underscoring the emotional effort required to manage these roles effectively.

Figure 3 visually articulates this dynamic. Arrows connect boxes labelled "Family-Work Conflict" and "Family-Work Facilitation" to "Job Satisfaction," illustrating how challenges and supports in managing work and family responsibilities impact my overall satisfaction with my job. Similarly, arrows from "Work-Family Conflict" and "Work-Family Facilitation" converge on "Family Satisfaction," indicating how conflicts and facilitations in these domains influence my satisfaction within the family context. These connections underscore how managing work and family roles involves navigating complex interactions that affect personal satisfaction and mental well-being. The strain of balancing these responsibilities has not only shaped my satisfaction levels but has also impacted my mental health, highlighting the critical importance of achieving a balanced approach. The arrows culminate in "Feelings of Work-Family Balance," reflecting the pivotal role of achieving equilibrium between these domains in determining my overall "Life Satisfaction." This model provides a topical theoretical framework and resonates deeply with my lived experiences, illustrating the intricate interplay between work demands, family responsibilities, and mental well-being.

Conversely, as Greenhaus and Powell (2006) suggested, the work-family enrichment theory posits that engagement in one domain can positively influence experiences in the other. Reflecting on my journey, there were numerous instances where skills developed through motherhood, such as patience and multitasking, enriched my academic pursuits. The empathy and understanding cultivated as a mother often enhanced my interactions with students and colleagues, fostering a more supportive and collaborative academic environment. Figure 4 visually demonstrates how resources and skills from various domains contribute to enriching both work and family experiences. This model underscores how skills, experiences, and resources gained in one domain can benefit and enhance experiences in the other domain, and it illustrates that skills gained through managing family responsibilities can positively impact professional tasks and

vice versa. For example, my experiences as a mother provided me with valuable skills that enhanced my academic work, such as time management and interpersonal skills. Reflecting on how motherhood enriched my academic pursuits while also sometimes conflicting with them provides valuable insights into the complex interplay between these domains. It offers a holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities mothers face pursuing postgraduate degrees, emphasising the dynamic relationship between personal and professional life.

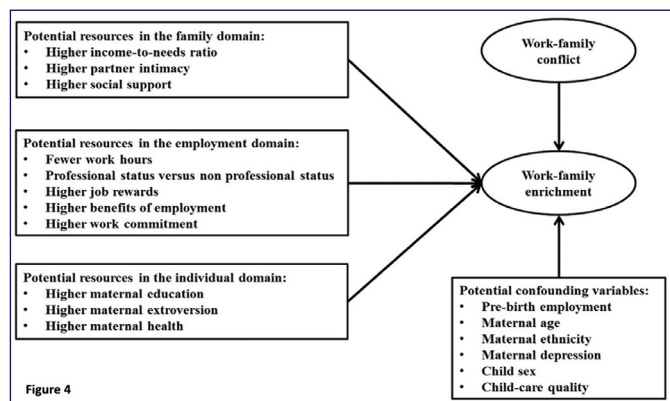


Figure 4

The journey through doctoral studies as a mother intertwines rigorous academic endeavours with the profound responsibilities of parenthood. Each day brought new challenges and triumphs, reinforcing the need for adaptive strategies and robust support systems. Embracing flexibility, leveraging technology, and drawing strength from both personal resilience and community support have proven to be crucial elements. The insights gained from balancing these dual roles contribute to academic success and enhance personal growth and fulfilment, underscoring the unique and powerful experience of being a working mother in academia. Navigating these responsibilities has shaped my academic journey and positioned me as a positive role model for my daughter. I aim to inspire her with a strong work ethic and a commitment to lifelong learning by demonstrating dedication to my doctoral studies and familial responsibilities. This dual role has provided opportunities to instil values of perseverance and resilience, fostering a supportive environment that benefits both my academic and family life.

Institutional Support and Personal Resilience: Overcoming Challenges

Balancing lecturer responsibilities with the demands of motherhood demanded meticulous planning and crucial institutional support. BCU provided invaluable accommodations such as flexible teaching arrangements, hybrid meeting options, and a reduced teaching schedule (Allen et al., 2004). The understanding of colleagues and institutional support in the context of both my teaching role and my doctorate supervision team created an environment conducive to fulfilling professional commitments while prioritising family well-being. These accommodations alleviated the burden of managing multiple roles, enabling me to thrive both personally and professionally.

Institutional support is critical in facilitating the integration of motherhood with academic and professional roles, and policies promoting work-life balance, including flexible scheduling and access to childcare services, are essential for

supporting mothers' academic and professional advancement in higher education settings. Moreover, fostering a culture of empathy among colleagues and supervisors can create a supportive environment, empowering mothers to navigate the challenges of multiple roles with confidence and resilience (Deem et al., 2015).



Figure 5

To delve deeper into the concept of resilience, Resilience Theory, initially pioneered by Garmezy (1991), explores individuals' capacity to bounce back from adversity and thrive despite challenges (Masten, 2001). Reflecting on personal resilience in balancing motherhood, doctoral studies, and lecturing provides insights into the factors contributing to resilience and well-being in challenging circumstances. Mason's Resilience Model (Figure 5) stems from Garmezy's foundational work. This model illustrates the dynamic interplay between personal qualities, environmental factors, and processes contributing to resilience. This model resonates deeply with my experience of navigating the demands of motherhood alongside rigorous academic pursuits. It highlights the importance of adaptive strategies, support systems, and psychological strengths in maintaining momentum and effectively overcoming setbacks in complex situations. In my journey, moments of juggling deadlines, familial responsibilities, and professional obligations underscored the significance of resilience-building factors such as self-efficacy, social support, and problem-solving skills. These elements were pivotal in sustaining motivation and fostering resilience amidst challenges. Additionally, cultivating a sense of purpose and maintaining a positive outlook was essential in mitigating the impact of stressors associated with multiple roles (Fredrickson, 2001; Southwick et al., 2014). This aligns with Resilience Theory's emphasis on psychological strengths that enable individuals to thrive in adverse conditions. In navigating the complexities of motherhood, academia, and teaching, institutional support and personal resilience emerge as crucial determinants of success. By leveraging available resources, new mothers can balance multiple roles while thriving personally and professionally.

Building on the insights of resilience theory, which explores individuals' capacity to thrive amidst challenges (Garmezy, 1991; Masten, 2001), Social Support Theory, as articulated by House (1981), underscores the critical role of social support in mitigating stress and enhancing well-being. Throughout my doctoral journey, the unwavering support from my EdD supervisors, work colleagues, and friends and family has

been indispensable in navigating the intricate balance between motherhood and academic responsibilities. Boundary Theory, as outlined by Ashforth et al. (2000), elucidates how setting clear boundaries between academic work and family life is crucial. Establishing dedicated times and spaces for academic tasks, such as working on my EdD work, or marking student assignments, separate from family areas at home, has been instrumental in maintaining a sense of control and balance. This structured approach has helped me prevent burnout while ensuring focused attention on both my daughter and my doctoral studies.

Moreover, Self-Determination Theory, developed by Deci and Ryan (2000), highlights the significance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in motivation. The flexibility of academic schedules has empowered me with the autonomy to manage competing demands effectively, sustaining my motivation throughout challenging periods. Gaining competence in navigating dual roles has been pivotal in bolstering my resilience and developing essential skills such as time management and multitasking. Engaging actively within the supportive academic community of BCU, particularly within the Department of Childhood, Youth and Community, has fostered a sense of relatedness, providing crucial emotional support and encouragement that has been vital for my well-being and persistence in making progress with my EdD and my career development. These intertwined theoretical frameworks collectively enrich one's understanding of the adaptive strategies and resilience demonstrated by mothers navigating complex postgraduate degrees, such as a doctorate.

Reflection and Final Thoughts

The intersection of motherhood, academia, and teaching presents both challenges and rewards. Through proactive strategies and institutional support, individuals can successfully balance familial responsibilities and professional aspirations. This narrative aims to serve as a testament to the resilience and adaptability required to manage the complexities of multiple roles, including the significant impact on mental health. My personal journey as a new mother and doctoral student at BCU highlights the inherent challenges and rewards of balancing these roles. By embracing these challenges, individuals can foster personal and professional growth, enriching the academic community with diverse perspectives and experiences.

Moreover, as a new mother, I am driven to be a positive role model for my daughter, demonstrating the importance of perseverance, determination, and the pursuit of knowledge. I hope that my experiences serve as a testament to the idea that with dedication and support, individuals can overcome obstacles and achieve their goals, all while prioritising mental health and well-being. Therefore, I encourage readers to embrace these challenges, seek support from their academic community, and pursue their aspirations with confidence and determination, knowing that resilience and perseverance can lead to both personal fulfilment and professional success.

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Igniting Inquiry: A Journey from Basic Questions to Deeper Understanding. A Case Study in a Seventh-Grade Classroom in Mathematics

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Abstract

This paper presents a case study conducted in a seventh-grade classroom at AIMEE International School, Vijayawada, India. The study focused on the interplay of thought-provoking questions, progression in complexity, inclusive discussions, and active student engagement to create an enriched learning environment. The inquiry-based approach followed a structured process involving five stages. These stages included initiating with open-ended questions, guiding students through an investigative journey, promoting collaborative discussions, refining strategies through investigation, and incorporating reflective activities. This approach aimed to foster a deep comprehension of fundamental concepts and develop crucial 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, creative thinking, communication, and collaboration.

The study illustrates how the classroom transformed into a hub of intellectual discovery, where students engaged actively in exploring and understanding mathematical concepts. Through activities involving matchsticks and geometric shapes, students learned to observe patterns, create generalized statements using variables, and solve problems using mathematical reasoning.

The study also highlights the pivotal role of discussions in the learning process. Inclusive conversations not only allowed students to share their perspectives but also encouraged them to think critically and respect diverse viewpoints. The use of well-crafted questions sparked curiosity, motivating students to seek answers and delve deeper into the subject matter. This approach empowered students as co-pilots of their learning journey, fostering a sense of ownership and participation.

In conclusion, the case study demonstrates how inquiry-based teaching-learning can create an enriched learning environment that promotes curiosity, critical thinking, and collaborative learning. It emphasizes the significance of inquiry-based pedagogy in fostering student engagement and intellectual growth. The study showcases the potential of this approach to nurture lifelong learners who actively seek knowledge and engage in meaningful discussions.

Contextual Landscape: School Atmosphere and Pedagogical Approach

I work at AIMEE International School in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh, India. Our school follows an approach where we learn by asking questions. One day, a parent came to me and said, "My child can work with numbers in Maths, but encounters challenges with letters. Can you help?" This got me thinking – could our way of teaching, through questions, be the solution?

After careful consideration and reflection, I decided to explore whether using questions that make students think would help with the problem the parent talked about. This became the hypothesis for this study. This is a common challenge in education, when students need to move from simple math to more complex thinking. Our school is already using the method where students learn by exploring and thinking, not

just by memorizing. So, I wanted to find out if using this method could help the students who struggle with abstraction.

By doing this research, I hope to find a way to help not just this one student, but also to help teachers everywhere who might have similar challenges. I believe that the results of my study could show how using questions in teaching can make math easier to understand, foster logical and analytical thinking and problem-solving skills.

The Inquiry Approach – What, Why and How?

The process of inquiry-based teaching and learning in mathematics is a dynamic approach that fosters a deeper understanding of mathematical concepts through active engagement and critical thinking. This teaching learning approach follows a structured series of stages aimed at guiding both educators and students in their exploration of mathematical concepts.

Stage 1: Initiating the process involves posing open-ended questions or presenting complex problems that spark curiosity and prompt students to think beyond mere memorization.

Stage 2: Students begin an investigative journey, where they delve into various strategies, gather pertinent information, and formulate hypotheses.

Stage 3: Collaborative discussions take place, enabling students to exchange their findings, compare approaches, and scrutinize inconsistencies. This interaction refines their understanding through dialogues.

Stage 4: As students persist in their investigation, they enhance their strategies, critically assess their solutions, and establish connections with their existing mathematical knowledge.

Stage 5: Ultimately, the inquiry process reaches a conclusion with reflective activities that encourage students to amalgamate their insights, draw inferences, and ponder the broader implications of their discoveries.

This holistic approach for mathematics education not only fosters a deep comprehension of fundamental concepts but also fosters the development of vital skills, including analytical reasoning, effective problem-solving, adept communication, and autonomous thought. These proficiencies, identified by the OECD (2009) as 21st-century skills, are commonly denoted as the '4 C's': Critical thinking, Creative thinking, Communication, and Collaboration.

Organizing an Inquiry-Based Strategy

The investigation encompassed seventh-grade students who had recently concluded their geometry and were in the process of progressing to the subsequent lesson, "Expressions, Formulae, and Equations". Students were organized into groups, each receiving a dedicated worksheet ([Power of Patterns](#)), accompanied by clear instructions to ensure clarity. The arrangement entailed seating the groups in a semicircular pattern to facilitate interaction and engagement.

Transacting an inquiry-based session

The session started with a challenge. They were given a few matchsticks and asked to frame the alphabetical letter L. All the groups formed the letter L with two sticks. After this, they were asked to form another L adjacent to the first one. Once the task was done, they were further asked to form as many L's as they could from the matchsticks they had, in a similar pattern, (third L adjacent to the second and so on). Responses were different from different groups, some of them could form as many as 12 L's while others could only form 6L's. This activity helped them visualize the formation of a pattern. The activity was followed by a question "What type of pattern is it?". The groups used phrases like "Additive pattern, Growing Pattern" etc. The next question was "What made the pattern grow?". This time all their answers were "We are increasing the number of matchsticks every time". Followed by this response, they were asked to look upon the worksheet handed over to them. The worksheet had a table where they needed to find out the number of matchsticks needed for 1L, 2L, 3L, 4L and so on (Figure 1)

No. of L's formed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Number of matchsticks required										

Figure 1: Table used to calculate the number of matchsticks required for making the letter L

The table in the worksheet was followed by prompts like "I _____ the number of matchsticks to _____ the number of L".

By this time, they had already observed that no. of matchsticks increases by 2 for every subsequent increase in the number of L. The questions were extended further when the groups were asked to give a generalized statement about their observation of the relationship between matchsticks and no. of L formed. One of the group responded, "Every time we are adding 2 matchsticks to make a new L". The conversation became interesting when another group responded, "The no. of matchsticks used is twice the number of L formed". This response was built upon by the facilitator by asking them another question "What if they wanted to find out the no. of matchsticks required for 100 L's or 200 L's without using the matchsticks?". To this, all of them were on the same page. They immediately responded that they would be multiplying the no. of L by 2. This question helped them sense the need to create a generalized statement. Again, the same question was asked, "Can you frame a generalised statement for this problem. The classroom echoed with, "No. of matchsticks needed = 2 times the no. of L formed". Since it was already time for the bell, the facilitator posed an open-ended question "Write down the generalized statement for the problem without the term "the no. of L formed" to explore.

Extending an inquiry-based session

The next day the session began by recalling what was discussed previously. The facilitator was reminded of the exploration task assigned to them. Two groups had already explored that an alphabetical letter like n or k or t could be used to represent the no. of L. To this, the remaining groups cross questioned "How can we use alphabets in Maths?", "Why can we not use a, b or c?", "Why are we not using the number 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 to represent the no. of L's?" etc. The classroom buzzed with arguments, negotiations and

contradictions. This is a situation where students learn to **Mathematise their thought processes** (NCERT, 2005).

Here, the facilitator presented the concept of variables as "something whose value isn't fixed. It can take any value 1, 2, 3, 4, 5..... While solving problems these variables are represented by alphabetical letters". The facilitator further added, "You can pick any letter, like m, l, p, x, y, z, and so on. These letters can show us things that can change. We call these things "variables." Now, think of a variable as a number that can be different, not always staying the same. For example, numbers like 5 or 100 never change, so we don't call them variables. You know how a triangle's angles are always 3, and a four-sided shape's corners are always 4? Those aren't variables either because they're always the same. But let's look at 'n' in our examples. 'n' is a variable because it can be different, like 1, 2, 3, 4, and more. It doesn't stick to one fixed value like those other numbers or shapes do."

A similar activity was done for forming the letter F using matchsticks and this time students could themselves come up to the generalizations using variables. At the end students were asked to create a problem from their day to day life and give a generalized statement for the same using variables. While the students were brainstorming to solve this problem, the bell rang, and they were left with another problem to think about before the next class.

Discussion

At the genesis of each class session, a deliberate strategy was employed: the introduction of challenging questions. This pedagogical strategy made a remarkable impact, igniting the spark of curiosity within the students. Asking these questions in a structured way had a magical effect on the students, making them excited and curious. This curiosity, in turn, metamorphosed into an intrinsic motivation that compelled them to seek out answers and delve deeper into the subject matter. It was as if the questions acted as intellectual magnets, drawing the students into the learning experience with a sense of purpose and determination.

Lessons transitioned from simpler, more tangible concepts to abstract complexity. This deliberate scaffolding ensured that students were not confronted with insurmountable barriers early on, but rather built a solid foundation upon which to construct more intricate understandings. This order can be quoted as "**Low ceiling, High Walls**" (Stiker, 1999). The classroom thrived on discussions, like the heartbeat of our learning. Here, ideas flowed together, creating a big river of sharing thoughts. Talking together was how we learned best. Different points of view made our discussions rich and colorful. Even when we didn't agree, it helped us think carefully. When we heard different opinions, we had to understand them and explain our own ideas clearly. This made us better at thinking, open to new ideas, and respectful in our conversations.

A defining feature of the classroom experience was its vibrancy. It was not a setting dominated by the teacher's voice alone; instead, it reverberated with the collective voices of the students. They were not mere passengers on the educational journey but co-pilots, shaping the trajectory with their insights and inquiries. Working together to make knowledge gave the class a feeling like it belonged to us. It was like we were part of how we learned (Beswick, 2021).

In summary, the dynamic interaction of stimulating inquiries,

a carefully designed transition from known to unknown concepts, inclusive and comprehensive conversations, along with the enthusiastic involvement of students, painted a portrait of an enriched learning environment. It was an environment where curiosity flourished, logical and analytical thinking skills were nurtured, students reflecting on their own thoughts emerged not just as consumers but as contributors of knowledge.

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Inclusive Pathways: Perspectives of Students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities in Physical Education

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Personal narrative

"Sometimes, simplicity can mask the profound exploration and impactful illustration that lie beneath the surface" (Roberts and Keohane, 1985).

In the ever-changing world of education, I believe strongly in using new teaching methods and planning effective curriculums. My passion for teaching started during a gap year and has grown through various educational roles, from verifying sports education standards to earning a Masters in Education. Now, I am pursuing a doctorate to explore and improve curriculum design, especially in physical education (PE) and for students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). I have updated PE curriculums and shared my ideas at the Association for PE conference. As a Head of Department, I aim to instil core values in physical education, helping to develop disciplined, respectful, and well-rounded students. Starting this research to align PE curriculums for children with SEND with the National Curriculum, I feel a strong sense of purpose. The number of students receiving SEN support has increased by 5% from 2022 to 2023, reaching 1,183,000—a 19% rise since 2016. Meanwhile, the total student population only grew by 6%. As of January 2022, a quarter of all students with SEN had an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan (*Special educational needs in England, academic year 2022/23 2023*). These numbers show a growing need for support for students with SEN. Schools must be ready to meet these needs with proper resources, staff training, and personalised learning plans. A 2023 Ofsted report (*Levelling the playing field: The Physical Education Subject Report 2023*) highlighted mixed results for students with SEND in PE, noting that success came from adapting support to fit each student's needs. My experience as a Secondary PE teacher and Department Head drives my dedication to inclusive education. This study aims to improve inclusive education and create opportunities for all students to succeed, especially in PE. Throughout my career, I have focused on inclusivity in PE, conducting research on PE performance, interventions, and supporting SEND within PE. Recently, I have reviewed PE curriculums to ensure they align with the National Curriculum. The English PE education

system and the SEND Code of Practice (*The send code of practice: 0–25 Years 2015*) guide my assessment of inclusive practices. Reflecting on my work adapting curriculums for diverse student needs, I see the importance of flexibility and innovative approaches in curriculum design.

Understanding perspectives of SEND

Understanding the perspectives of students with SEND is paramount in developing effective support systems that emphasises equity over equality, whereby the system or allows for every student to feel included, individually (Dixon et al., 2020) However, challenges arise in gathering these perspectives due to various factors. Cairney et al. (2019) underscores the issue of self-efficacy among SEND students, which affects their ability to articulate their needs and experiences accurately. Furthermore, Pantic and Florian (2015) highlight concerns regarding deficits in reflective abilities among this demographic, complicating efforts to elicit their viewpoints. Additionally, the process of responding to inquiries may induce stress levels among SEND students, further hindering their ability to provide comprehensive feedback. These inconsistencies underscore the importance of employing sensitive and adaptable methodologies, that contribute the interpretation of social justice, to truly understand the perspectives of SEND students in educational settings.

However, while acknowledging the significance of understanding SEND students' perspectives, it is essential to consider perspectives that challenge the feasibility and efficacy of gathering such viewpoints. Critics may argue that the diverse nature of SEND makes it challenging to develop a one-size-fits-all approach to gathering perspectives. Each student's condition varies, leading to differences in communication abilities, cognitive functioning, and emotional regulation. Therefore, some may question the practicality of employing methodologies that are sensitive enough to capture the perspectives of all SEND students in line with the term "inclusion". O'Connell and Sinclair (2020) propose an inclusive definition of equality that encompasses acceptance irrespective of socio-economic status, physical well-being, or cognitive disorders. However, implementing such a definition

presents significant challenges, especially in educational settings, where teachers must address specific characteristics to facilitate academic progress, raising concerns about achieving genuine equality when focusing on individual needs. Kenny and Hage (2009) further elaborate on the complexities of equality by highlighting the distinction between social justice and access to resources within communities. While equality is depicted as a combination of inclusion, collaboration, cooperation, and equal opportunities, individual vulnerabilities hinder access to these opportunities, necessitating a nuanced understanding of equality that transcends simplistic notions of equal treatment.

Before delving into the perspectives of PE teachers and professionals, it is crucial to explore the viewpoints of learning support assistants (LSAs) and special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs) on inclusion, as the Department of Education (2019) report on deploying TAs in schools emphasises the importance of promoting TA support to ensure positive impact on SEND pupil impact and academic achievement. Maher (2018) conducted individual interviews with 12 LSAs and 12 SENCOs to gauge their opinions on including students with SEND in mainstream schools. The findings indicated that SENCOs and LSAs perceived PE as an inclusive subject, with the responsibility for defining inclusivity falling on them. However, tailoring PE programmes to meet the needs of students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and supporting SEND students during team games and competitive sports presented significant challenges, such as necessary support, physical development and efforts to address to personalised support, for inclusion in PE. This poses a concern for educators, given the recent emphasis on these activities as central to PE in the National Curriculum.

Pratt et al. (2021) significantly contribute to promoting physical activity and sports to enhance the health and well-being of children and young people with disabilities. They advocate for more accessible opportunities in these areas. Their meta-analyses showed that health benefits can be achieved with less than 150 minutes of weekly physical activity, suggesting that any level of activity is better than none. Meta-analyses on interventions to increase physical activity for people with disabilities (PLWD) support these findings. Although personalised curricula aim to provide a fulfilling PE experience for all students, concerns remain about the overall quality of education for students with disabilities. Despite efforts to tailor the curriculum, there may still be limitations in effectively meeting the individual needs of these students. However, have these studies examined the importance of providing proper training and support to PE teachers to help them integrate students with disabilities into PE effectively? Lynch et al. (2020) researched the impact of inclusive PE on the physical activity experiences of children with disabilities, exploring both positive and negative factors affecting their participation. Their findings show various elements that either enable or hinder the involvement of children with disabilities in physical activities in inclusive settings. The study found a strong link between limited engagement in PE and significant communication needs (92.9%), including those evaluating disability (88.6%) and those examining poverty (100%). The findings provide valuable insights into fostering inclusive PE environments and addressing diverse contextual factors such as physical and social development needs and promoting physical literacy, which affect participation and communication among SEND students.

Research by Smith et al. (2019), McKay, Block, and Park (2015), and Chalkley et al. (2023) have highlighted the impact of the National Curriculum on the quality of PE curricula for SEND students. They commonly suggest that obstacles to development through physical activity affect the quality of the experience during participation, often overlooked when considering SEND. Notably, Richardson et al. (2020) explored aligning the National Curriculum with the principles of Inclusive PE, focusing on students with ADHD. They examined the connection between the National Curriculum and more inclusive PE curricula, aiming to create fair opportunities for students with disabilities. By questioning the curricular framework, they showed how such adjustments could promote a more inclusive environment, suggesting the removal of assessment criteria for SEND and ADHD pupils. However, did the study contribute to improving the quality of PE curricula for students with special educational needs and disabilities while addressing their diverse requirements? This research underscores the importance of developing a tailored curriculum that integrates adaptive and accessible learning approaches, ensuring a more meaningful and engaging PE experience. While Richardson et al. (2020) highlight the need for policy coherence and collaboration, their research also underscores the critical need for teacher training to bridge the gap between policy and effective practice. This includes supporting students with SEND, students with mobility issues, and continuous professional development. However, it raises questions about the core purpose of physical education if continuous adaptations are required to support students who may not be able to meet its demands.

SEND Code of Practice, 0–25 Years Old

In 2015, the Department of Education released the SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years (*The send code of practice: 0–25 Years 2015*), which acts as an essential guide for providing help and resources to children and young people with SEND. It outlines the legal duties, suggested methods, and approaches that schools, local councils, and other important groups must follow to make sure students with SEND get the support they need to succeed in education. These principles assist in identifying children's needs early and provide early intervention for the best possible support. They encourage cooperation between education, health, and social care services. By correlating these principles, educators ensure effective preparation for adulthood, including promoting independent living and opportunities whenever feasible, which in-return could be the main reason for the rise in SEND statistics in England. This surge emphasises the growing demand for support and tailored educational strategies for children with diverse learning needs, particularly those with mental and behavioural disabilities (Buhar, Herman, Stef, 2018; Wang, 2019; Dinan-Thompson and Penney, 2015; Evans, 2013). Students with mental and behavioural disabilities confront specific obstacles throughout their educational path, such as social interaction, the basics of vocational skills, and participation in physical activities (Lynch, Simon, & Maher, 2020). Herold (2020) concur with these observations as they investigated curriculum inclusivity, proposing that inclusiveness results from creating a sense of security, acknowledging students' voices, and removing presumptions about learners' disabilities. The complexities associated with these disabilities often require a specialised attention and intervention to ensure integration into the educational setting. The demand for additional, well-informed supervision and tailored support for these students

has become critical, given the rise in the number of SEN among the student population.

Chapter 6 of the SEND Code of Practice, outlined by the Department for Education in the United Kingdom, underscores the pivotal role of schools in providing effective assistance and comprehensive education for students with special educational needs and disabilities. This segment emphasises the significance of early identification and intervention, highlighting the responsibilities that schools have in identifying and addressing the diverse needs of their students. Despite this, various challenges and drawbacks arise in the implementation of an all-inclusive PE curriculum for students with disabilities. These concerns can be effectively tackled within the education system by aligning the curriculum more closely with the guidance provided in the National Curriculum or by giving precedence to the SEND Code of Practice to ensure parity throughout the educational journey.

Chapter 6, point 6.12, on page 94, underscores the importance of designing a curriculum that is inclusive and accessible to all students, including those with SEND. It highlights the need for schools to provide a flexible and adaptable curriculum that caters to students' ability to learn and mental capabilities, allowing students with SEND to access the curriculum on an equal footing with their peers. Moreover, the Code of Practice encourages schools to consider the individual needs of students with SEND when planning and delivering lessons, incorporating suitable adjustments and support to facilitate their learning and development.

Kingston et al (2023) suggested education serves as a fundamental cornerstone in the holistic development of individuals' physical capabilities, enabling them to harness their full potential and capabilities. Special education plays a crucial role in supporting the academic and social development of children with mental and behavioural disabilities; it is important to acknowledge the challenges associated with implementing such practices effectively. Despite the emphasis on personalised approaches, several studies have pointed out the limitations and complexities involved in catering to the diverse needs of these students (Smith et al., 2019). For instance, the allocation of sufficient resources and specialised support staff is often a significant hurdle for educational institutions, especially in the face of limited budgets and competing priorities within the education sector. The latest SEND data from the National Association for Special Educational Needs revealed a significant rise in the number of pupils with SEND across England, surpassing 1.5 million. This surge emphasises the growing demand for comprehensive support and tailored educational strategies for children with diverse learning needs, particularly those with mental and behavioural disabilities.

Students with mental and behavioural disabilities confront specific obstacles throughout their educational path, particularly concerning social interaction, the cultivation of vocational skills, and participation in leisure activities. Effective educational practices that account for the specific requirements and capabilities of children with SEND are essential to enable their active engagement and progress in various academic pursuits and leisure activities (Darcy, Lock and Taylor, 2017). While it is undeniable that personalised educational practices play a crucial role in supporting the academic and social development of children with mental and behavioural disabilities, it is important to acknowledge the challenges associated with implementing such practices

effectively. Despite the emphasis on personalised approaches, several studies have pointed out the limitations and complexities involved in catering to the diverse needs of these students (Smith et al., 2019). For instance, the allocation of sufficient resources and specialised support staff is often a significant hurdle for educational institutions, especially in the face of limited budgets and competing priorities within the education sector.

Despite the emphasis on personalised approaches, several studies (Waite et al., 2021; Theis et al., 2021; Herold, 2020; Fitzgerald, 2012a) have pointed out the limitations and complexities involved in catering to the diverse needs of these students. For instance, the allocation of sufficient resources and specialised support staff is often a significant hurdle for educational institutions, especially in the face of limited budgets and competing priorities within the education sector. Lynch, Simon, and Maher's (2020) investigation delved into the leadership aspects within the implementation of PE curriculums, introducing the concept of "ideological leadership" as a notable gap in the existing literature on PE. The study identified six overarching themes that encapsulated the perspectives and experiences of participants regarding the fundamental principles, objectives, and importance of PE for students with SEND. These themes encompassed various aspects, including the belief that PE in special schools should mirror that of mainstream schools, the emphasis on sports and team games, the promotion of physical activity and health, the need for a tailored PE curriculum, the development of physical skills, and the fostering of life skills. While the study acknowledged that there is still much to explore regarding the long-term impact of special school placements and their transferability to mainstream educational settings, it emphasised the vital role of such placements as an essential educational tool for aspiring teachers. Furthermore, the study emphasised how these placements can contribute to building the confidence and competence of prospective PE teachers. Teachers ought to contemplate instructional approaches that involve active participation in physical activities to reinforce this understanding and establish connections with the updated content descriptions in the curriculum section emphasising the importance of making active choices (Brown, 2023).

The results obtained from Goodyear's (2017) research indicate a positive association between physical activity (PA) and various dimensions of SEND, such as enjoyment, self-worth, self-competence, mental well-being, and overall quality of life, among children with special educational needs. Moreover, the study highlights a negative correlation between PA and feelings of anxiety and fatigue within this demographic. Notably, the investigation reveals that unstructured physical activities exhibited the most robust link with mental health, whereas structured PA demonstrated a stronger relationship with mental well-being compared to overall physical activity. In conclusion, given the substantial increase in the number of pupils with SEND and the growing demand for tailored support strategies, it is crucial for educational institutions in the UK to address the pervasive challenge of resource limitations. This includes allocating adequate funds and specialised staff to effectively implement personalised educational practices for students with mental and behavioural disabilities. Recent statistics from the Department for Education in England (2022) indicate a significant rise in the proportion of students with SEND during the academic year 2021-2022, with the overall percentage increasing to 15.8% of all pupils.

Literature Review

Morley et al. (2020) undertook a study revisiting previous research conducted in 2005 (Morley et al., 2005), which explored the perspectives of 31 secondary school teachers in the UK regarding the integration of pupils with SEND into mainstream secondary PE. Despite notable policy advancements, such as flexibility with (sporting) activities, changes to (practical and theoretical) assessment and methods of monitoring physical development (i.e. Fundamental movement skills) through observations, their findings indicate persistent challenges in achieving inclusion, with minimal changes observed in teachers' confidence in accommodating pupils with SEND in PE. PE primarily focuses on physical development, with the National Curriculum (NC) encouraging regular physical activity to boost confidence, knowledge, and skills in PE (Department for Education, 2015). While the NC suggests various sports to teach, they're not compulsory. Therefore, PE curriculums should cover the NC and offer opportunities for physical and social growth, like confidence and self-esteem, even if they are not explicitly stated in the curriculum. There has been a concerted effort to integrate students with SEND into regular PE classes whenever feasible (NC PE Aim 4), enabling their participation alongside their peers. This approach aligns with the government's commitment to promote a vision of inclusion and equality in education. While contemporary understandings of disability have influenced the drive towards inclusivity, it is crucial to recognise that challenges and gaps persist in the effective implementation of inclusive practices. Acknowledging that progress in making PE and school sports more inclusive is not without obstacles and complexities is essential. While some positive developments were noted, such as increased emphasis on inclusion in PE teacher education, significant obstacles remained. A synthesis of comments highlighted several concerns:

- Students with social difficulties present significant challenges in PE due to the focus on group work, leading to disruptions and conflicts among peers.
- Those with social and emotional issues encounter difficulties, particularly in handling competition and coping with losing games, necessitating careful attention from teachers amidst larger class sizes.
- Planning for students with physical disabilities is comparatively easier as their behaviour is more predictable, unlike students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) whose needs require reactive adjustments, making lesson planning uncertain.
- Integrating students with physical disabilities, such as those requiring wheelchairs, into mainstream PE settings necessitates specialist support and alternative opportunities due to logistical challenges.
- Activities such as dance and gymnastics are more inclusive for pupils with SEND as they allow for individual pacing and aesthetic self-management, alleviating pressure from peers.

These challenges are exacerbated by the national PE curriculum at Key Stages 3, which prioritises competitive sports, advanced techniques, and outdoor activities, potentially marginalising pupils with SEND. I recently conducted a research piece on "Using the National Curriculum & Ofsted Inspection Framework to examine correlations & compromises within Key Stage 3 and 4 Physical Education Curriculums in the UK", examining thirty recently Ofsted examined Schools

and their PE curriculums. The curriculum's emphasis on achieving personal bests and participating in competitive sports clubs outside of school may inadvertently exacerbate feelings of exclusion and inadequacy among these pupils. However, Smith and McGannon (2018) have proposed an inconsistency between the understanding of inclusion and its demonstration, arguing that while teachers advocate for inclusion, the lack of equality means ensuring that children with SEND can participate fully in sports and physical activities alongside their peers, tailored to their individual needs. Dinan-Thompson and Penney (2015) suggests that to make assessment in PE inclusive for all pupils, teachers should have the freedom and flexibility to adapt tasks, environments, and approaches. Using standardised assessment methods in PE could potentially disadvantage pupils with SEND, as their individual needs and strengths are often overlooked or not adequately appreciated. Reflecting on my own teaching experience, during which I was tasked with redesigning a Key Stage 3 PE curriculum in an area where only 28% of KS4 students achieved a grade 5 (formerly known as GCSE grade C) or above in English and Maths, with around 31.4% of children coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, nearly double the national average. In developing the curriculum, our priority was to focus on assessment and growth opportunities before considering specific activities and sports to include. We utilised the 1970s Boston Matrix, originally a marketing tool, to create a framework that introduced conceptual theories into PE. This matrix empowered students to take charge of their personal development journey, with each dimension prompting reflection on their position in the broader context. We adapted the dimensions to form a pedagogical foundation, focusing on assessment methods that encouraged self-direction and reflection. By referencing Ofsted's latest expectations (Ofsted, Subject report series: PE 2023), our curriculum aimed to offer a diverse range of PE experiences to benefit students in various ways.

Dixon, Braye, and Gibbons (2022) conducted an examination of the integration of pupils with SEND in PE by interviewing the pupils, teachers, and teacher training providers. Through semi-structured interviews spanning from September 2017 to September 2019, involving 34 participants from these cohorts, disabled children continued to face numerous barriers to participation in PE lessons within 'mainstream' schools in England. They expressed sentiments such as:

"I enjoy football, but at school, I don't get to play because nobody passes to me. They ignore me because they think I'm not good enough due to my legs."

"I felt like I was treated differently in PE, and I never got picked because they think I'm not good at anything. It's not fair, but I get it, it still makes me sad." (Page 8)

Highlighting the earlier remark underscores the challenge of supporting students' self-efficacy and alleviating anxieties and stress. Moreover, teaching professionals demonstrate a lack of preparedness to accommodate disabled children in PE. Lastly, both parents and teaching professionals (teachers and training providers) proposed recommendations to enhance the inclusion of disabled children in PE. The findings indicate that disabled children remain marginalised in PE within mainstream schools.

However, a perspective to teachers' avoidance of inclusive PE aligns with the SEND Code of Practice's emphasis on teachers' responsibility for all pupils, including those with SEND. Despite the challenges highlighted by Dixon, Braye,

and Gibbons (2022), inclusive PE isn't solely about competence but also about a commitment to meeting diverse needs. Teachers must establish an inclusive environment where every pupil feels valued. By embracing the SEND Code of Practice, educators can foster inclusivity in PE, prioritising self-efficacy and emotional well-being. Instead of shying away from inclusivity due to apprehension, teachers should pursue training, collaborate, and implement strategies to ensure all pupils thrive in PE.

This reluctance not only perpetuates the exclusion of disabled pupils from mainstream PE but also reflects a broader failure to address their diverse needs within educational settings. By evading the challenge of inclusive PE, teachers inadvertently perpetuate inequitable practices and deprive disabled pupils of the opportunity to fully participate and benefit from PE alongside their peers.

Conclusion

To conclude, understanding the views of students with SEND is key for creating effective support systems in schools. Collecting these views is challenging due to factors like self-confidence issues among SEND students and their difficulties in self-reflection. It is important to use sensitive and adaptable methods to accurately understand SEND students' perspectives. While tackling these challenges, potential objections about gathering diverse perspectives must be considered. Despite these obstacles, it is essential to follow inclusive practices outlined in policies such as the SEND Code of Practice. Educators need to work together, receive training, and apply strategies to help all students, including those with SEND, succeed in activities like Physical Education. By working together, inclusive practices can be developed, benefiting all students and promoting fairness in education.

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The Journey towards becoming a Physical Education Teacher with a Club Foot

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This article is a focus on what challenges exist for those who are new to teaching Physical Education (PE) in secondary schools with the physical disability of a club foot. I hope to go into depth about what a club foot is, what barriers there are for participating in physical activity with a club foot, and what barriers there are when teaching with a club foot. Through supporting literature, this article discusses what a person with a club foot may face when participating in physical activity whilst growing up, and what obstacles they may face when aspiring to inspire others to participate in physical activity and improve young people's physical literacy.

What is a club foot?

According to the NHS (2021), "a club foot is where a baby is born with a foot or feet that turn in and under – also called talipes." This means that one or both of the person's feet is twisted and turned inwards from birth and is often caused due to an unnatural position whilst in the womb (NHS, 2021). The NHS also state that the diagnosis can be identified and made throughout an ultrasound scan which is done between 18 and 21 weeks (NHS, 2021). A club foot used to be operated with surgery when the person was born, but now doctors will often use casting or bracing to treat the club foot over a longer period of time which helps slowly move the foot into the correct position (Nichols, 2022).

So, what is casting? Casting is a technique used by surgeons to help babies who are born with a club foot to return their club foot into the correct position of a "normal" foot. According to Nichols (2022), casting is where the doctor will put a cast on the baby a week or two after the baby is born. The baby will then have interval visits every week with the surgeon to track progress with how the foot is moving back into the correct position and will acquire a new cast position each time the baby visits. This allows the cast to move the foot into the correct position more and more every week eventually allowing the club foot to grow into its new correct position – this process usually lasts over a few weeks with approximately 5 to 7 different casts over the duration (Nichols, 2022).

Bracing is a process in which when the club foot has returned to the correct position, the surgeon will implement a brace instead of a cast which prevents the club foot from twisting back to its original club foot position (Nichols, 2022). This is due to the speed of in which feet can grow at the early stages

of life, club feet tend to want to return to their original position after being force grown into the correct position. The brace is a bar with special shoes at the end which will prevent the foot from twisting back and reversing the growth it has already done into the correct position (Nichols, 2022).

What impact does it have on people who have it?

A club foot can affect a person in a variety of different ways, a treated club foot has much less complications in comparison to a club foot which has not been treated. If a club foot has been treated, then some possible complications or impacts the person may find are movement, length of the leg, shoe size, and calf size (MayoClinic, 2019). The movement of the affected foot may be less flexible than the normal flexibility of a foot due to the growth being unnatural. The leg length of the affected foot may be slightly shorter due to the foot's unnatural repositioning whilst bones are still growing – this often does not have any impact on the affected foot's mobility (MayoClinic, 2019). The size of the affected foot's calf is also often smaller than an unaffected foot's calf, this is due to the shortening of tendons in surgery and how the foot grows once it is in the correct position – this will never change for the person with the affected foot no matter how much the person works on trying to grow the muscle.

If the club foot is not treated from birth and is not grown back into the correct position it should be in, it can cause more severe complications and impacts for the person with the affected foot. These impacts include complications such as arthritis, poor self-image, and an inability to walk normally (MayoClinic, 2019). The child is highly likely to develop arthritis in the affected area in the long-term which can cause a significant amount of pain further down the line of the person's life and experiences with their club foot. From a young age, the person may have a poor self-image as it is a usual appearance for a foot and is also not highly common, which may lead mental health concerns – especially in the teenage adolescent years. The child will also have mobility barriers as the person would not be able to walk on their club foot correctly without pain, meaning the person would have to live their life using a wheelchair, or crutches to move around which can be a barrier to many daily life activities the person may face throughout their lifetime.

What impact can it have on physical activity?

Even if the club foot has been treated, the strength and mobility of the club foot will not be as able as the other affected foot. Minnesota Department of Health states that the muscles of the affected leg may not be as strong or well developed compared to the muscles on the unaffected leg, tendons and ligaments that are involved in the ankle joint and other joints in the foot may be resistant to lengthening by stretching and may require a surgical intervention. This means that the person may find the foot will be less flexible and will struggle to move the club foot in specific ways in comparison to the unaffected foot, making it harder for the person to learn and execute certain sporting techniques, for example pointing your toe in dance, kicking a ball in football, or even running on your toes. The foot can also experience fatigue and pain much easier in comparison to an unaffected foot as it is working extra hard to be able to do the same movements as an unaffected foot (Health 2024). This can eventually cause the person to stop performing in exercise or sporting exercise due to the pain they experience after long periods of activity.

What impact can it have on physical education?

Due to the pain of the club foot after long periods or exercise, becoming a PE teacher faces challenges. If the person is on their feet all day every day, as well as occasionally involving themselves in the activity they are participating in the lesson, the teacher with a club foot can experience much pain in their club foot. This is because of the amount of work the club foot is having to do without the person being able to rest or change the fact must get up and teach the pupils a physical activity. The teacher also must take their lack of flexibility in their club foot into consideration when performing demonstrations or their involvement in physical activity. The teacher must do this as they do not want to show pupils an incorrect technique of a sporting technique as the pupils role model this teacher and replicate the movements of the teacher, yet if the teacher's movements are incorrect due to their club foot, they must identify this or work around this barrier otherwise the pupils will replicate an incorrect technique.

Although, despite there being challenges for the teacher with a club foot when teaching physical education, there are different techniques to battle this and overcome these challenges. For the pain that the person may experience, wearing an ankle guard/support can help support the club foot whilst it is working during everyday life activities, teaching or sporting activity participation. This can help the pain of the club foot from being so severe that they must stop or rest the foot in an inconvenient situation. Instead, it avoids this and allows the person to experience less pain in their club foot and allows the person to continue with their everyday activities and teaching lessons. The person with a club foot can also remove their footwear and elevate the foot when resting to help allow the club foot to recover if they are experiencing fatigue or pain after or during physical activity, or teaching. This allows the foot to recover from the activity it has just had to do and prevent the foot from hurting once the teacher must get up and start teaching again, whether that's the next period or the next day. This can be inconvenient as a teacher's lifestyle is very active and does not have much time to rest a physical foot for very long before having to complete another task.

What is involved when becoming a PE teacher?

My philosophy behind why becoming a PE teacher is so important is to increase whole participation in physical activity and show those who do not believe they can participate in physical activity, that they can, and potentially to a very high level. George Mason University found that students may develop negative feelings about physical education for a variety of reasons – activities may be too competitive or difficult, PE lessons may be too early in the mornings, not enough variety in activities, and having activities which may not align with student interest; this is only a few of many reasons why students may not enjoy physical education lessons and/or physical activity (Banville et al, 2022). The National Career Service states that physical education teachers should, “teach a range of different sports and activities to students of different age and abilities”, as well as “motivate students to fulfil their potential” (NCS, 2023). From my personal experience, the challenges that young people with physical disabilities may face are social and mental challenges. Mental barriers are factors such as low self-esteem and low self-confidence, which can stop young people from participating in physical activity due to the fear of failure and fear of feeling worse than they already may feel. The social challenges in which young people with a physical disability is the fear of what others may think, about the appearance of the ability, and of the performance level within the activity they are participating in.

Despite having these barriers to students not being motivated to participate in physical activity, I have found that having my own disability has motivated me to show those with other disabilities that they can participate in physical activities even with their disability. Keeping lessons engaging to students can be accomplished when you know your students' interests, which allows students to then become engaged with the lesson. Including a fun warm up at the start of a physical education lesson is an effective way of engaging the students with the lesson before they even know the lesson objectives (PEBlog, 2023). Understanding student interests and putting this into a fun activity such as a warmup can engage students who usually do not enjoy participating in physical activity. Having an inclusive teacher who also can allow young people to feel comfortable and confident enough to participate in physical activity is so important for the young person's self-esteem and self-confidence. Once there is an understanding that the participation is the important part and not the ability, the young person will be able to thrive and an increased chance of having lifelong participation in physical activity – which is a role of what a physical education teacher is. Creating a safe and positive environment within a class will help battle any social barriers in the way from allowing the young person from participating in physical activity. It will create a comfortable environment for a person with a disability to participate in physical activity, which again increases the chances of allowing this person to have a lifelong participation within physical activity.

I personally was born with my right foot being affected with having a club foot, which started treatment from birth. When I was 2 weeks old, my casting process began. I would go to the hospital every week to get my cast altered to help the growth of my foot and reshape it so it would be naturally facing the same direction as my other foot. This continued every week until I was 9 months old, which is when I had an operation on my club foot. This operation consisted of

surgically opening the back of my foot, and having to break 4 bones in my foot, and cutting 2 tendons (one being my Achilles tendon). My foot was then put in a cast for 6 weeks with the open wound to allow natural healing whilst also in the correct shape it should be. After the 6 weeks, my foot was then put into a splint which was required to be on for 23 hours of a 24-hour day, every day until I could walk confidently (aged approximately 19 months). Only then was I given orthopaedic shoes in which I could wear to help me walk at a young age with my club foot, until I was aged 3 where I was required to wear normal shoes both being the same size, to allow me to learn how to walk with 2 different sized feet with the same sized shoes. To this day, I still wear the same size shoes despite having 2 different sized feet, as this is what I deem as normal, due to the fact I have learned how to walk like this from a very young age and I do not know any different to how I have learned. My club foot has a natural high curve on the top of my foot, which is due to the operation I have had when I was 9 months. I have never found this to be a problem for me, if anything I believe it has benefited how well shoes fit my club foot. Although, I have been offered an optional operation in which the surgeons would lift my shin bone, which straightens and flattens my foot allowing more flexibility and mobility in my foot.

My parents were told by the doctor that due to my club foot; I personally would never be able to participate in any contact-based sporting activity whilst I was growing up to my adult years. This was due to the high risk of injury my foot may receive, especially with contact sports (such as football and rugby). My club foot meant I naturally have a higher risk of gaining a severe injury due to the lack of flexibility, shortened size of my foot, low muscle protection in my right leg, and natural weakness in my right leg and foot in comparison to my other foot.

Despite medical recommendation against participation in contact sport-based activities, I gained a high interest in a variety of different sports from a young age, such as Dance, Rugby, Football and Swimming. I participated in Dance from age 6 to age 13, Rugby from age 4 to age 15, Football from aged 10 to age 12, and Swimming from age 5 to age 20. Growing up, I never seen my foot and the barriers I faced as an excuse or a blockage to not participate in sporting activities I had interests for. I faced many barriers but with the help and support of my family, coaches and school teachers, I was always able to participate in sporting activities and overcome any barriers I faced along the way. For example, I faced high levels of fatigue causing a significant amount of pain after playing rugby games – I overcome this barrier by informing my parents and coaches, who were able to get me an ankle guard which helped support my foot whilst playing rugby. This ankle guard helped me significantly as it allowed me to experience little to no pain after a rugby game, without it I could've stopped playing the sport I enjoyed due to the level of pain I experienced. Due to the little impact it has had on my success when participating in physical activity, I am in the current mentality of not needing the optional operation of straightening and flattening my club foot, as mentioned previously.

To summarise, the overall impact of having a clubfoot – from everyday activities and tasks to participating regularly in a variety of physical contact sports, it has a big impact and is something to always consider. It can easily fatigue through everyday activities as well as sport participation, yet this

barrier can be overcome by a foot guard and taking intervals throughout the day to rest. Personally, I have faced many barriers to participating in sport, which I have identified throughout this text, and I have always worked towards what I dreamed of from a young age, despite the barriers I have faced. This leads on to how I have also overcome barriers due to my clubfoot whilst working towards becoming a physical education teacher. Now, in 2024, I have met the recommendations for qualified teacher status, and I look forward to starting my career as a secondary PE teacher, of which I have always dreamed of becoming.

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The Ofsted RE Subject Report 2024: Who is ready to take the deep dive?

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Introduction

The long-awaited religious education (RE) subject report, *Deep and meaningful? The religious education subject report* was published in April 2024. This thorough and research-informed report examined the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum and its teaching. It is based on Ofsted's visits to 50 schools in England between September 2021 and April 2023. The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) is responsible for regulating school standards in England.

Like its predecessor subject report (Ofsted, 2013), this latest one prominently presents RE as a rigorous, challenging and personally inspiring subject for young people growing up in Britain. Through RE, it asserts, pupils encounter ancient and living traditions that have shaped the world. They explore foundational texts and the way that individuals and groups live in the world, as well as the values, beliefs and ideas that bind people together. Pupils consider deep questions that have inspired human thought throughout history, and that still challenge children and adults alike today (Ofsted, 2024). Building on their research review into RE (Ofsted, 2021), it considers the curriculum content that pupils learn in RE lessons; pedagogy and how schools teach and implement the curriculum; assessment and how RE is organised in schools and teacher education and professional development.

In relation to the report, the aim of this article is three-fold: to review responses from key RE stakeholders; to highlight critical issues impacting the subject; and to critique the shaping of a particular discourse by Ofsted that impacts the way RE is being conceptualised nationally.

To address these, this article discusses the following topics: (1) Responses from RE communities; (2) the legal status and contribution of RE in England; (3) a comparison of Ofsted 2013 and Ofsted 2024; (4) Curriculum matters; (5) the significance of timetabling RE; (6) other reports on RE beyond Ofsted; (7) Calling the Government to act; (8) Holding schools accountable for RE; (9) reflections on the National Plan; (10) a consideration of the national content standard; and (11) Diving into the future.

Responses from RE communities

Major RE organisations have welcomed the report revealing their hopes for an action-orientated response to their findings and recommendations. For example, Deborah Weston OBE (Weston, 2024), Chair of the Religious Education Policy Unit, stated:

We are pleased to see the Ofsted subject report, which recognises the need for high-quality RE for every young person in every school. It asserts the potential that religious education has in helping young people make sense of the complex, multifaceted nature of belief in modern Britain, while providing them with personal and intellectual development.

From the influential Culham St Gabriel Trust, their chief executive admitted that the report was a sobering read, nevertheless, there was hope for the subject (Wright, 2024). The report, Wright noted, foregrounds issues which those working directly in RE have raised for years and have lobbied the government about. In addition, the Chair of the National

Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE) was pleased to see the emphasis given to subject-specific professional development for all those teaching RE in primary and secondary schools (Freeman, 2024). In their response to the report, Humanists UK, called for the UK Government to carry out a long overdue reform of the teaching of RE to meet the needs of modern society. For them, the report shows that the curriculum often lacks sufficient substance to prepare pupils to live in a complex world (Humanist UK, 2024).

Aside from these organisations, *The Church Times* reported the chief education officer of the Church of England, the Revd Nigel Genders, say that Ofsted's concerns "deeply resonate" and urged educators and policymakers to heed the recommendations by refining the curriculum content, enhancing teacher training and ensuring consistent assessment practices (Martin, 2024).

These positive and enthusiastic responses demonstrate that RE is indeed an important subject for the education of all children in England. It also exposes some of the fault lines that exist between the various stakeholders vis-à-vis the nature of the subject. The report records that while the RE sector generally agrees that RE contributes to pupils' personal development, it does not agree on "the distinct body of knowledge that pupils learn in RE" (Ofsted, 2024). Thus, the report explores the content and substance of what pupils learn in RE. It is worthy of mention that it is rare to find someone in the RE world who would disagree that RE does not need some change. However, what that change should be is debated. Therefore, it is heartening to find an exposition of what good quality RE looks like, of challenges, shortcomings and recommendations for improvement.

Legal status of RE in England

Historically, RE has been secured in the school curriculum as the only mandated subject before 1988 and whose compulsory nature was retained in the 1944 legislation (Barnes, Lundie, McKinney, Williams, Cullen, 2024). This has remained unchanged and RE maintains its compulsory status. However, it is unsurprising to read that "a notable proportion of schools did not meet the statutory requirement to teach RE to pupils at all stages of their schooling" (Ofsted, 2024), as these concerns have been raised previously (Ofsted, 2013; APPG, 2016). Moreso, across all school types, 33.4% offered no RE at all in KS 4 in 2016. This represented almost 900 schools offering no RE (REC, 2018). However, in 2022 a different situation was reported in a survey among 500 teachers which showed that 96% of respondents reported that legal requirements were met in their school (NATRE, 2022).

Thus, the latest report has delivered to schools a strong reminder that they continue to be duty-bound to make provision for the subject. Children are entitled to RE unless withdrawn by their parents. Sir Martyn Oliver, Ofsted's chief inspector, reiterated this legal position stating a "strong RE curriculum is not only important for pupils' cultural development," but also "a requirement of law and too many schools are not meeting that obligation" (Oliver, 2024). Therefore, schools must include RE as part of a broad and balanced curriculum offered to their pupils, otherwise, they may well be taken through the justice system.

The contribution of RE

It is concerning to read that “the RE curriculum often lacked sufficient substance to prepare pupils to live in a complex world” (Ofsted, 2024). The demographics of the United Kingdom and the faith and non-faith landscape of England continue to change. Children, like their counterparts across the world, are experiencing a different milieu, where fake news, artificial intelligence, and ideological warfare are the order of the day. For this reason, it is important to understand the purpose of RE in the state sector.

Currently, in England, RE is an educational endeavour. It is no longer a subject for catechism, propaganda or indoctrination of the past century, though its aims are multiple (Orchard, 2020) and contested – a problem in itself. RE is foundational to an understanding of what it is to be a citizen of global Britain in a rapidly changing world. RE prepares young people to live in modern societies (Ofsted, 2024). Thus, Ofsted’s recommendation to the Government that it “should urgently update guidance for schools about its statutory expectations for RE” rather than regard RE as an afterthought is commendable (Ofsted, 2024). Equally significant is Ofsted’s allusion that the subject should be treated in its own right. Otherwise, if it is not taught as a standalone subject, pupil outcomes might suffer (Freeman, 2024).

Having discussed two fundamental features of RE, i.e., its statutory status and its potential to contribute to children’s personal, social, cultural, moral and spiritual development, other matters are considered.

Comparing Ofsted 2013 with Ofsted 2024

The current report highlights deficiencies in the RE curriculum in many schools despite efforts to improve. Over the decade, there appears to have been little progress since its previous report. It is therefore prudent to revisit some of the key features of that report so that recurring themes of concern and the need for urgent action in these areas become evident.

In their 2013 survey, Ofsted found not enough that had been done since Ofsted (2010). In other words, some issues have persisted for over 14 years, making the current recommendations critical, if the subject is to truly serve its numerous purposes. The evidence base of the previous report was much larger than the current one. The *RE: Realising the Potential* report was based on evidence drawn from 185 schools visited between September 2009 and July 2012. It also drew on evidence from a telephone survey of a further 30 schools, examination results, other reports published by Ofsted, extended discussions with teachers, members of SACREs and other RE professionals, and wider surveys carried out by professional associations for RE (Ofsted, 2013). Eight major concerns were discussed then. Parallel findings from the current report are juxtapositioned in Table 1.

In other words, when Ofsted 2013 is considered in light of the current report, according to Ofsted itself, the potential of RE remains a potential rather than a reality. This is because “the unrealised potential of the subject remains now, as it was then” (Ofsted, 2024).

Ofsted 2013	Ofsted 2024
Low standards	Teaching was rarely enough for pupils to make sense of religious and non-religious traditions
Weak teaching	Long gaps between lessons hindered pupils’ recall. When pupils had regular RE lessons, they remembered more.
Problems in developing a curriculum	Curriculum often lacked sufficient substance to prepare pupils to live in a complex world. the content selected rarely was collectively enough to ensure that pupils were well prepared to engage in a multi-religious and multi-secular society.
Weak leadership and management	A few subject leaders had visited classes as a way of supporting their colleagues. Most did not receive any dedicated leadership time to improve the quality in their school.
Weaknesses in examination (assessment)	In most schools visited, there was no assessment in place.
Gaps in training	Over 60% of teachers in the primary sample had not received any professional development in RE about what they were supposed to teach or how they should teach it.
The impact of recent changes in education policy	Just under half of the schools visited had recently introduced new curriculums. Leaders of several other schools were refining existing curriculums.

Table 1: Comparing Ofsted 2013 and Ofsted 2024

Curriculum matters

The legal position for RE is such that its curricula are determined locally. This means that its content, the structure of this content and its quality vary from one local authority to another. Unlike other curriculum subjects, where the content and how the subject is taught are micromanaged, RE has flexibility and independence. Within this localised system, there are a growing number of academies operating using their own syllabi. Given this complex phenomenon, the report has placed the matter of the curriculum at the heart of its call for quality. The most telling feature is its conclusion that there is a lack of clarity on the RE curriculum and its suggestion that the government should provide better guidance about what should be taught and when (Ofsted, 2024).

The report is primarily concerned with the school RE curriculum considered through the lens of the quality of education judgement. Some of its main findings included:

- a superficially broad curriculum does not always provide pupils with the depth of knowledge they require for future study
- The RE curriculum rarely enabled pupils to systematically build disciplinary knowledge or personal knowledge

The report highlights that the quality of RE is not determined by the type of school or the source of its curriculum. In other words, it could be any and not necessary a locally agreed syllabus. Ofsted found better quality RE in a range of schools, from small primary schools to non-selective and selective secondary schools. The factors that contributed towards this include:

- strong teacher subject knowledge
- access to professional development
- regular time for RE lessons
- a well-organised curriculum containing knowledge chosen by leaders to enable pupils to deepen their understanding term by term

Thus, there is a clear implication for primary schools, in particular, to raise the status of RE, develop their curriculum and assessment and provide training. School leaders must find ways to improve teachers' subject expertise and share good practices. A coordinated effort is needed by stakeholders to address the quality of RE. Importantly, it highlights that the source of the curriculum does not determine its quality. These issues have not been addressed for fourteen years and the latest report appears to signal that this will continue. Policy in that respect appears to be about the acknowledgement of weakness and then inertia. This means that RE may well be left to take its course until such a time that most or all schools convert to academies, which in turn might eventually lead the structures that sustain RE dismantling.

The significance of timetabling RE

One of the most concerning and frequently raised issues that RE faces relates to the time allocated to teaching. The legal requirements for the provision of RE in maintained schools do not specify any particular time allocation. Schools are expected to make their own decisions about how to divide curriculum time. However, they must ensure that sufficient time is given to RE so that pupils can meet the standards and expectations set out in their respective syllabi.

In some schools when RE is provided often the time allocated for it is 'squeezed' in both primary and secondary schools due to a variety of factors. This lowers the status of the subjects

and pupils are left with reduced opportunities to gain deep knowledge about and engage critically with different religions and beliefs. They may come to regard RE as being of trivial importance (APPG, 2016:13). In contrasting schools, there is irregularity in teaching. Research indicates that RE in schools, which did not have a religious character, was less likely to be taught regularly (NATRE, 2018). This suggests that trainee teachers may be less likely to teach or observe RE while on placement and this has implications for their preparedness and confidence to deliver the subject.

However, the current situation from Ofsted is encouraging. In most schools they visited RE was taught for around 36 hours at KS1 and 45 hours at KS2 over the academic year. This is the minimum recommended time in many syllabi across the country (Mogra, 2023). However, in schools where teaching time was less than this, the quality of RE was weaker. Importantly, the quality of RE was not decided by time allocation alone. In some schools where the timetable did allow for this amount of time, the curriculum did not have the impact that leaders intended. But, in the schools where the quality of the planned and taught RE curriculum was stronger, RE was featured on the timetable weekly for at least an hour at KS1 and KS2 (Ofsted, 2024). In other words, both the delivery of regular RE lessons and a coherent, rigorous, distinct, and challenging curriculum are needed to raise the quality. Schools are therefore urged to "organise the timetable for RE so that gaps for pupils between teaching are minimised (Ofsted, 2024).

There is a variety in the way in which time allocations are organised in schools. In some, where RE was solely taught through special RE days, the quality of RE was weaker. However, to enhance the quality of RE in such schools, there would need to be timetabled weekly lessons as well. In over 30% of schools, RE was taught fortnightly or in blocked half terms, alternating with PSHE. RE was weaker in these schools. In cases where RE was not taught weekly, pupils remembered less as pupils did not have the opportunities that they needed to return to important content and recall it. They also found that in almost a third of primary schools, RE was taught in other ways. These included fortnightly lessons, a half-termly rotation with PSHE or drop-down days. Where RE was not as strong, these ways of organising the timetable for RE were more prevalent (Ofsted, 2024). Thus, there is a need for a distinct curriculum so that pupils have the opportunity to deepen their knowledge progressively over time.

Other reports beyond Ofsted

Moreover, the need to act is further compounded as RE has been subjected to criticism in two other important recent reports.

The Bloom Review was one of the largest public calls for evidence the government has had into how it engages with faith. It called the government to "look again at why religious education (RE) in schools has become the 'Cinderella subject' and should consider methods for improving the teaching of faith literacy and RE, both in schools and society as a whole (Bloom, 2023:20).

In addition to the provision of RE being considered unfit and undervalued, another debate in the House of Lords was legitimately critical of the demise of RE in England. A former President of the Methodist Conference, who had spent 40 years involved in school governance, reported that, in that period, "the situation has become ever more dire" (Griffiths,

2024). This is a reflection and an assessment based on vast experience and finds echo in another Christian tradition. A former head teacher of a Church of England school said that 25% of schools use teaching assistants to deliver the subject, while 20% of RE teachers have received no training and only 63% of teachers feel confident in teaching the subject – a worse situation than three years ago” (Storey, 2024).

This is not a new phenomenon as previous research has reported similar concerns. RE in primary schools is often taught by someone other than the class teacher, a practice that is out of step with most other subjects (APPG, 2016; NATRE, 2013). However, in the latest sample of schools, Ofsted (2024) found that in nearly 70% of schools, RE had at least a weekly timetabled lesson and, in almost all cases, these lessons were taught by the class teacher. This stark reality raises critical questions about the training and experiences afforded to future teachers as it is at this foundational stage that confidence is enhanced.

However, before proceeding to reflect on the other substantive matters of the report, it is important to acknowledge that teachers and schools across the country work hard to offer high-quality RE. Many schools go unreported. However, a snapshot from the awards which schools have achieved through the RE Quality Mark, which celebrates the work of RE staff and students, reveals that in the last three years, a total of 157 schools have gained either a bronze, silver or gold award (REQM, 2024). The REQM award recognises high-quality RE and good practice in all schools. It is awarded based on the REQM criteria and schools gather evidence for an assessment according to the level they apply for.

Calling the Government to act

Many of the challenges identified in RE are long-term and structural. With the academisation programme, the capacity of local authorities to support RE has reduced considerably. Although there are subject associations, organisations, networks and charities which advocate for RE, the report highlights that there is no centrally coordinated support for RE teachers.

Thus, at the highest level, it is gratifying to see that Ofsted (2024) records the importance of government action in bringing about change. However, it could be argued that even this may be insufficient for the desired actions to be realised, as discussed hereunder. As noted earlier, the previous report (Ofsted, 2013) had also called on the then government to improve RE, but it resulted in minimum action, if any.

Granted that RE sits outside the National Curriculum (NC), as a school curriculum in the last review of the NC, RE had been left adrift (DfE, 2011a). It left the Religious Education Council of England and Wales to produce *A Curriculum Framework for Religious Education in England* (REC, 2013). This framework, according to Michael Gove, the then Secretary of State for Education, had “the endorsement of a very wide range of professional organisations and bodies representing faiths and other worldviews” and provided a rigorous model (Gove, 2013:5). This is all that this framework received from the government, even though it had had wide currency and had influenced many locally agreed syllabi. Be that as it may, within the RE community, the *Framework* was criticised for missing an opportunity to articulate a model of RE that was appropriate to the aims of liberal education in a democratic, increasingly diverse English society (Barnes and Felderhof, 2014).

Following this and other concerns about RE and national developments, to improve the quality and rigour of RE and its capacity to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain, an independent Commission on RE was established by the REC in 2016. Its remit was to review the legal, education and policy frameworks based on a wide-ranging, inclusive and evidence-based process designed to inform policymakers about these areas. Accordingly, in September 2018, the Commission released its final report, *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward. A National Plan*. This set out a National Plan for RE comprising 11 recommendations and called on the Government to consider and adopt it (REC, 2018). Aside from the criticisms levied against the review process and the secularising approach to RE adopted by the REC (Barnes, 2022), the curriculum for RE had received a lukewarm response from the government perhaps due to its reform agenda or the assumption that its statutory special status was sufficient. Equally, recommendations from other reports (Clarke and Woodhead 2018) about structural and curricular reform have all but been ignored. Presumably, this is because the Government stated in February 2019 that it had a “commitment to make no changes to the curriculum” for the remaining lifetime of the Parliament elected in 2017 (Long, Hubble, Danechi and Loft 2019).

In response to the current report, the REC (2024) has pointed out that the Government has failed to make provision for a coherent approach to the subject and for an infrastructure to support it. They assert that for many years the subject has been underfunded. They too share the view that there needs to be serious attention and support given to reverse the fortunes of RE in schools.

Moreover, former HMCI, Amanda Spielman in her annual report also called for the Government to act. She lamented that RE still does not receive the attention it deserves and highlighted that the curriculum “pupils receive is of a poor quality and not fit for purpose”. Although it is a statutory subject, schools often consider RE as an afterthought, as there are different levels of what constitutes statutory. In other words, not all subjects are treated the same. As a subject on the curriculum, it is under-valued. RE is a complex subject, and the lack of clarity and support from government makes schools’ job harder” (Spielman, 2023). The focus of her concern relates to the relevance, and contemporariness of the curriculum and the extent to which it meets the current spiritual, moral and religious challenges.

Furthermore the report recognises that “statutory guidance has not kept pace with national changes, including the growth of multi-academy trusts” [MATs] (Ofsted, 2024). In addition to centralising tendencies in RE discussed earlier, the growth in MATs is further fragmenting the curriculum landscape for RE as more are being added to the collection of existing local ones which might prompt change. There is some optimism as this report acknowledges that the challenges faced by schools should not be underestimated and has called for some immediate action.

Holding schools accountable for RE

Consistent delivery of lessons over a long period helps pupils secure their current knowledge base and begin to see the developing bigger picture. Hence regular lessons are required for this. However, inspectors found that some RE was being taught in all the primary schools visited. In 3 schools, RE was not taught in every year group (Ofsted, 2024). For some years,

research has found that some schools routinely flout their statutory obligations (APPG, 2016). This unfortunate situation was recently raised in a short debate in the House of Lords where the Government was asked what steps they were taking to improve the quality of RE.

Lord Harries observed that “the present situation was lamentable” (Harries, 2024). Referring to the school work-force data, he mentions that “one in five schools offers zero hours of RE in year 11; this equates to around 500 secondary schools.” In the absence of a national standard, he maintained that the current Government had no mechanism to challenge this. However Ofsted could if given government instruction. Nevertheless, in response, Baroness Barran (2024) stated that the Government “do not monitor each school’s compliance with the duty to teach RE”. However, “if there are concerns that a school is not teaching RE, they can be raised via the school’s complaints procedure. If they are not resolved, they can be escalated to the department.” In other words, the onus is on the parents and carers to ensure that their children, if they so wish, to receive their entitlement to religious education.

It is worthwhile reflecting on a case that became public in September 2018. A parent complained that an academy failed to comply with its Funding Agreement regarding the provision of RE. After a lengthy process, the ESFA wrote to the parents to inform them that the Academy had revised its provision in a way that was judged to be compliant with the Academy Funding Agreement. They provided the parent with full details including the decision that the Agreed Syllabus would be followed. The parent reviewed the 2020/2021 timetable and found RE had been reinstated as a distinct subject (NATRE, n.d.)

Reflections on the national plan

Currently, it is apparent that the Government treats RE as being important, rather than an afterthought and acknowledges that it is a subject that has a contribution to make to the education of children in England. However, unlike, for example, music (DfE, 2011b), there is no national plan for RE.

In RE, the call for a national plan, framework, national curriculum or entitlement gathered particular momentum from 2010 onwards when radical calls began to be made. Some scholars and researchers, RE organisations and the independent commission set up by the REC urged the Government to consider changes at the national level (cf. Mogra, 2023). This galvanised a unity of purpose amongst the RE communities as some feared that the subject would not survive in its current state. It could be argued that the diversity and fragmentation of different interest groups and the lack of genuine ecumenism might be one reason why RE does not have the reach that it might have. Still, currently, there are no apparent plans for the government to centralise or nationalise RE.

Nevertheless, to avoid confusion it is important to recognise that the proposal from the Commission on RE (REC, 2018) was for the introduction of a statutory ‘national entitlement’, rather than a curriculum. The entitlement set out what all pupils in publicly funded schools should be entitled to be taught up to the end of year 11. The report argued that implementation of the entitlement should be subject to inspection and schools should be required to publish details of how they provide this entitlement.

However, in response to the Commission’s report, the

government had said it was “not the time to begin these reforms” (Hinds, 2018:2). It said the government’s priority was to “provide stability to schools” while embedding the “significant and necessary reforms” that were being made at that time to the curriculum and qualifications. Moreover, recently the Minister for the School System and Student Finance, Baroness Barran (2024), stressed that “There were no plans to introduce a national plan for RE”, as the “policy remains that curricula should be determined locally.” Some scholars too have problematised a national approach to RE and support the local determination for any RE syllabus (Barnes, 2022; RENetwork, 2024).

Considering the national content standard

Historically, the status of RE has been that of a mandatory subject but not part of the national curriculum, perhaps this positioning outside the NC is another way in which its statutory status is undermined. This has resulted in a significant variation in approaches to the subject as evident in the locally agreed syllabuses across the country. As such, it has been argued that this situation makes improving overall standards harder and creates inconsistencies in assessment and training.

Moreover, in the absence of a national standard for RE, it can be challenging for syllabus providers including SACREs, Academy Trusts and others to know if their RE provision is of high quality when compared to other subjects, schools, and regions. It can be difficult also to set targets for improvement in provision especially when Ofsted describes RE as lacking breadth, depth and/or ambition (REC, 2023a). Furthermore, Ofsted admits that a system that is increasingly hyper-localised is confusing for leaders and teachers to navigate (Ofsted, 2024)

Perhaps, to remedy this predicament a *National Content Standard for RE for England* was published in July 2023. It provides clarification and a benchmark for excellence in religion and worldviews/religious education. It offers a non-statutory benchmark for syllabus providers and other bodies to evaluate their work. However, it is not a curriculum and it does not determine precisely what content schools should teach. It is a standard by which different RE curricula, content, pedagogy, and provision can be benchmarked. It uses the format of a National Curriculum Programme of Study (REC, 2023b).

The publication of Ofsted’s (2024) report has provided further impetus and justification for a national initiative. Thus, following its publication, the REC (2024) notes the recommendation that the government should urgently update guidance and reinforce the significance of their *National Content Standard for RE in England*.

However, as is the case with the national plan, here again, there is no consensus among RE professionals on this much-publicised approach. The RE Network, for example, rejects it. In addition to being anxious about State control of RE, RENET asserts that this Standard represents an attempt to steer RE in the direction of a ‘worldviews’ agenda which promotes a secularised ‘worldviews’ direction for RE. Moreover, ‘the Standard calls upon teachers to be agents of change in their pupils’. Such a stance, they maintain, ‘seems to encourage a form of secular indoctrination, which goes against the principle of avoiding religious or non-faith-based indoctrination in RE’. They stress that ‘the role of the RE teacher is not to impose beliefs on students’ (RENetwork, n.d.).

Diving into the future

RE is an important part of the curriculum on offer to pupils in England, and, likewise, there is an overwhelming willingness to teach it. However, the reality is that RE (with a few other subjects) gets pushed to the periphery by a combination of factors, a case in point is the Government's decision to exclude RE from the English baccalaureate and currently, there are no plans to include it. The marginalisation of this is connected to neoliberal hegemony concerning the purpose of education (Maisuria and Cole, 2017).

The report could be considered unrepresentative considering the 25,000+ schools in the country. Nevertheless, the report has rightly stressed that "in far too many schools across the country RE does not fulfil the subject's potential" (Ofsted, 2024). It has outlined many factors which can be addressed easily to support high-quality RE. The four main areas are strong teacher subject knowledge, access to professional learning, regular time, and a well-organised curriculum.

Strong teacher subject knowledge and access to professional development contribute towards better quality RE. To support teachers with their continuing learning development, Culham St Gabriel's provides freely accessible subject knowledge material through RE:ONLINE and the e-learning platform. Their different scholarships, especially the leadership programme showcases curriculum subject knowledge, pedagogy and research.

The report has called for clearer government guidance on RE curriculum requirements. Within existing legislation, if the government were to provide, for example, clear national expectations then these would be non-statutory, like the one issued previously (QCA, 2004). The purposes of that national framework were (i) to establish an entitlement (ii) to establish standards (iii) to promote continuity and coherence, and (iv) to promote public understanding. Likewise, the proposed framework can be one option to address inconsistencies and could be used by schools and curriculum developers to inform their rigorous, challenging and personally inspiring curriculum. The government must also continue with its bursaries and support the recruitment of teachers. At grassroots levels, it can provide support for RE hubs and networks which are at the forefront in offering professional learning opportunities to teachers.

The report highlights "the need for teachers to engage with subject-specific research" (Ofsted, 2024). Many schools subscribe to *REToday*, the termly full-colour magazine which offers not only all the latest RE news, developments and reviews along with classroom activities but incorporates *Professional REflection – the journal of NATRE* which provides informed comment on the theory and practice of RE.

The report is unambiguous about the importance of offering teachers continued professional learning opportunities. It notes "Although a few teachers had received subject-based professional development in RE, the overwhelming majority had not." It added that "given the complexity of the subject and the kind of misconceptions that pupils were left with, this is a significant concern" (Ofsted, 2024). Thus, schools should ensure, through regular training, that all teachers have the subject and pedagogical knowledge that they need to teach RE well. Those involved in training teachers should assist trainees gain the subject knowledge that they need. Those involved in providing professional development should increase access to training available to all leaders and teachers.

The report also reveals what Ofsted can do further. This report is based on 50 inspections and while it discusses 125 points (Ofsted, 2024), this low number of deep dives has the potential to imply to schools that RE holds a differentiated status. NATRE (2024) hopes that because of this report, Ofsted will take responsibility for its role and there will be considerably more deep dives into RE during the ordinary inspection process *.

There is a wealth of information in the report. Schools, ITE providers and other training providers will need to consider these key findings and share them in their contexts. Beyond these local contexts, policymakers will want to heed the recommendations to support matters of the curriculum, teaching of RE in schools, training of teachers and ensuring consistent assessment practices.

Looking to the near future, the REC has entered into a partnership with the NATRE and has created the Religious Education Policy Unit (REPU). This Unit represents more than 60 organisations and teachers in 4000 schools. In May 2024, the REC will launch a curriculum toolkit, based on research and good practice to assist schools in developing their syllabus and teaching practices.

One of the most beneficial features of the report is that examples of effective RE curriculum practices have been included. These useful examples of good RE curriculum will assist schools in developing their own practices and support the development of a rigorous RE curriculum.

The report is lengthy. Leaders and teachers are pressed for time. However, bearing in mind that it is the first subject report in a decade and during this period much has been done to RE and much is being done for RE, the reading of this report in conjunction with the RE research review (Ofsted, 2021) is relevant and the recommendations within them should be considered for appropriate action.

Conclusion

Religious Education remains a statutory subject for maintained schools, academies and free schools in England. It is an important curriculum which supports the personal, social, cultural, moral and spiritual development of children and its inclusion contributes to the delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum for pupils in a complex and pluralistic country. Among other aims, it helps pupils to know what religion is and to understand what it means to have a faith and not have one.

The report has been welcomed by key stakeholders and there appears to be a consensus on the idea that 'something' needs to be done so that the true potential of RE can be brought into existence. However, what needs to be done to bring about that change is contested and controversial. The nature of the discourse appears to be heading towards centralising and nationalising the subject.

The conclusions do reflect important areas of development for the subject. The report affirms that high-quality RE is an entitlement for every pupil in every school. Granted that some challenges persist in RE, this report endorses the possibility of developing an ambitious, coherent, rigorous curriculum. Still, the report regrets that for over a decade little has changed to make the subject serve its full potential.

*However, on 4 May 2024, Ofsted announced changes: 'Deep dives' removed from ungraded inspections - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk), so the implication of this is awaited

Therefore, urgent support is needed to reverse this trend and make necessary improvements so that this important subject can have the desired positive impact not only on pupils' knowledge but also to foster respect, and critical thinking and help them navigate the complexities and uncertainties of contemporary life.

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