**The involvement of external agencies in extra-curricular physical education: Reinforcing or challenging gender and ability inequities?**

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Within the UK and internationally, schools are increasingly being encouraged to call on external agencies and draw on the services of individuals, including sport coaches, to ‘help teach or lead sports within the school setting and out of school time’ (Sport England 2003, p. 111). This trend arises from and has contributed to a changing policy landscape and relations that characterise ‘Physical Education and School Sport’ and the growing use of the terminology of ‘PESS’. Previous research has highlighted that neither PESS considered broadly as a policy space, nor specific initiatives centring on ‘partnership-based’ development of physical education and/or sport in schools, can be assumed to facilitate greater equity in provision for young people. This paper reports on research that has sought to build on past studies revealing gender and ability inequities amidst PESS developments. The research was designed as a small-scale case-study investigation to critically explore the equity related messages being conveyed in and through the hidden curriculum in a context of coaches’ involvement in extra-curricular provision. Utilising observations and interviews with coaches and physical education teachers, data collection focused on ways in which ideas of ability, masculinity and femininity were being constructed and reproduced in and through coach’s pedagogy, and sought insight into the prospective impact of the particular constructions on girls’ and boys’ involvement in extra-curricular physical education. Analysis revealed that the hidden curriculum expressed in and through the organisation of extra-curricular physical education and coaches’ pedagogical practices in this context can be seen as reaffirming limited conceptions of ability in physical education and gender inequity in relation to girls’ and boys’ respective participation opportunities. Discussion critically addresses the relationship between policy and pedagogy in physical education and school sport in pursuing apparently ongoing tendencies for longstanding inequities to be reproduced in and through extra-curricular provision.

**Key Words:** Hidden curriculum; extra-curricular physical education; coaches; outsourcing; gender; ability

**Introduction: the policy context of coaches as sport deliverers in schools**

Since the turn of the century, physical education in England has consistently been the target of government pronouncements and initiatives. Developments have reaffirmed that physical education and school sport represents a ‘crowded policy space’ (Houlihan, 2000), but have also signalled that the policy and pedagogical relations within the space have changed significantly over the course of a decade. While focusing in England, this paper engages with issues that have clear international relevance, with recent research in New Zealand (Petrie, Penney & Fellows, 2014) providing a vivid illustration of the way in which the ‘curriculum and pedagogical space’ of Health and Physical Education (HPE) in primary schools now features a multitude of organisations and agencies. Other international studies have similarly illustrated the extent to which ‘external’ agencies are integral to the provision of physical education, HPE, physical activity and/or sport in schools (Whipp, Hutton, Grove & Jackson, 2011; Williams, Hay & Macdonald, 2011; Williams & Macdonald, 2014). Furthermore, the interests in equity that we foreground are ones that in our view continue to call for local, national and international engagement. In this regard, our work builds on research that has highlighted that new initiatives centring on ‘partnership-based’ development of physical education and/or sport in schools, cannot be assumed to facilitate greater equity in provision for young people (Flintoff, 2008), nor more specifically, challenge the long-established discourse of ‘more of the same for the more able’ associated with extra-curricular1 provision (Penney & Harris, 1997). As we explain below, this research utilised the hidden curriculum as a conceptual and analytical framework to critically examine equity issues in extra-curricular1 physical education in a context of coaches’ involvement in provision at one co-educational secondary school, with a focus on gender and ability. The study reveals overt and subtle ways in which coaches’ organisation and pedagogical enactment of extra-curricular physical education can be seen to reaffirm discourses and practices that legitimate and contribute to the ongoing perpetuation of inequities in physical education, physical activity and sport that arise from narrow conceptualisations of ability, masculinity and femininity. Discussion directs attention to issues arising for policy, pedagogic practice and research in physical education and points to the merits of further work utilising the hidden curriculum as a framework for exploration and analysis of provision associated with partnership-based developments.

**PESS in England: External agencies central to provision, and coaches as pedagogues in schools.**

In England, the national *Physical Education and School Sport Club Links Strategy* (PESSCL) (Department for Education and Skills [DFES]/Department for Culture Media and Sport [DCMS], 2003), can be regarded as critical in re-shaping relations between schools, teachers and external sport providers. The strategy was explicitly aimed at ‘increasing the percentage of school children in England who spend a minimum of two hours each week on high quality2 PE and school sport within and beyond the curriculum’ (from 25 per cent in 2002 to 75 per cent by 2006) (DfES/DCMS, 2003, p. 2). A conspicuous feature of the PESSCL strategy was an expectation that schools should increasingly make use of, and cultivate links with, external sports providers (e.g. sports coaches, local sport organisations, clubs and their National Governing Bodies (NGBs)) to extend the range of structured opportunities for young people and to promote positive youth sport participation in the wider community (Green, 2002; 2008; Smith, Thurston, Green & Lamb, 2007). Accordingly, the government suggested that coaches would play a ‘key role in supporting the delivery of high quality extra-curricular sport programmes on school sites’ (DfES/DCMS, 2003, p. 15).

Past commentaries have highlighted the proliferation in the number of outside agencies supporting the delivery of, and providing physical activity opportunities for young people in physical education, and more specifically, extra-curricular physical education (Sport England, 2003; Sports Coach UK, 2011). Sport England (2003) reported that over two thirds of secondary schools had called on outside providers to help teach or lead sports out of school time. A survey conducted by Sports Coach UK in 2011 revealed some 118,665 coaches operating within curriculum physical education and 209,605 coaches working within a school outside of physical education lessons. Sports Coach UK (2011) additionally indicated that the most frequent environment for a full-time coach is in a school setting.

This trend in patterns of provision and specifically, staffing, has continued to be endorsed and reaffirmed in policy developments. In 2008, the *PE and Sport Strategy for Young People* (PESSYP3) reiterated the identification of coaches as key bridge builders for young people in their transition from school to clubs (Youth Sport Trust, 2009). Moreover, Sport England’s 2012-2017 strategy *Creating a Sporting Habit for Life* explicitly prescribes the creation of effective and lasting links locally between school sport, sports clubs (including coaches) in the community and NGBs whose sports are played in schools (DCMS, 2012). Sport England explicitly advocate the development of partnerships between schools, the community and sport as a means to raise the proportion of 14-25 year olds who want to play sport and to keep young people playing sport up to and beyond the age of 25 (DCMS, 2012).

The promotion of coaches and their specialist sport knowledge can be seen as a positive move that will boost sporting opportunities for young people. At a surface level, coaches and clubs have considerable expertise which can potentially support and enhance efforts to extend sporting opportunities for young people in extra-curricular PE and in the wider community (Cale, 2000; Smith *et al*., 2007). Yet past research (e.g. Penney & Harris, 1997; Flintoff, 2008; Green, 2008) prompts caution, and the need to consider whether the involvement of coaches in curricular and extra-curricular contexts will serve to challenge or further contribute to exclusionary practices by confining opportunities to the most ‘able’ students. Green (2008) points to the fallacy of assuming that increasing partnerships between the ‘intertwined, but distinctive fields of PE and sport’ (Fisher, 1996, p. 132) will lead to an increase in opportunities for ‘all’ young people. Green (2008) comments that sports coaches and physical education teachers differ in their raison d'être, insofar as ‘coaches tend to have elite sporting objectives rather than educational priorities’ (p. 229); tend to prefer working with the more ‘able’ individuals and are inclined to focus on identifying and supplying such individuals to outside agencies and local clubs. Although there is a need to caution against making generalisations about the prime interests and orientations of either all coaches or all physical education teachers, there is nevertheless a case for continued critique of what, and therefore whose, needs and interests are at the fore of provision emerging from policy and funding contexts that promote ‘partnership-based’ delivery models. Indeed, while the involvement of coaches is promoted as an apparently productive strategy to maximise the quality, quantity and coherence of physical education and community sport opportunities (Flintoff, 2003) ‘school-community links may not always see educational (and specifically equity) agendas remaining intact’ (Macdonald, 2002, p. 215). Flintoff’s (2008) research centring on the School Sport Partnership Programme particularly drew attention to the significance of pedagogy in relation to the prospect of coaching sessions for school children expressing discourses of inclusion. The policy emphases of external resources and use of coaches being central to provision of sport in schools, thus bring to the fore a number of important pedagogical questions, including: Will increasing links between physical education departments, clubs and coaches further ‘presage an emphasis on sport performance’ (Penney & Evans, 1997, p. 28) at the expense of a broader focus on increasing young people’s physical activity and sport involvement in terms of lifelong-learning?; Will some physical education departments and/or coaches divert finite resources to support students who display an acquired level of competence at the expense of providing for ‘all’ young people in extra-curricular physical education? Of particular concern in this research was a desire to better understand the values and discourses implicit in coaches’ pedagogical and discursive practices in relation to students’ developing understandings about ability and the intersection of ability with gender. We thus sought to critically examine the values implicit in the practices of coaches, centring on issues of ability and gender, and the messages being generated in and through their pedagogy in extra-curricular settings, about students as able or not, and about who has the ‘ability’ to legitimately participate in various ways in physical education and sport. This line of inquiry directs attention to the need to acknowledge the powerful messages about ability and belonging that are generated in and through the pedagogies of physical education and sport. As Evans and Davies (1986) highlighted almost thirty years ago, ‘children *do* learn all sorts of things in the PE curriculum’ (p. 15), including whether or not they and their particular abilities are ones that are recognised and valued. Extra-curricular physical education should similarly be acknowledged as a context in which these issues can be at the fore of students’ experiences. Past research points to it as a context in which discourses of sporting excellence and/or competitive sport are likely to provide the dominant frame for understandings of ability (Penney & Harris, 1997; Flintoff, 2008).

In order to comprehend and interrogate the subtle, complex and often taken-for-granted practices in a context of coaches’ involvement in provision of extra-curricular PE we draw on the theoretical construct of the hidden curriculum. By critically engaging with the implicit discourses that are conveyed in and through coaches’ pedagogy in extra-curricular PE we seek to make more visible processes that remain largely opaque, normalised, orthodox and furthermore, potentially exclusionary and inequitable. As Evans and Davies (1986; 1993; 2006) have long emphasised, pursuing such visibility remains a key challenge for sociological studies in our field, and one that is arguably all the more critical to engage with amidst ‘the restructuring of education discourse and provision within and between the multiple agencies now involved in new and emerging relations of schooling’ (Evans & Davies, 2014, p. 8).

**Hidden curriculum. A productive conceptual lens through which to pursue equity issues in PESS**

A number of writers (e.g. Bain, 1986; 1990; Fernández-Balboa, 1993; Nutt & Clarke, 2002; Rønholt, 2002; Solmon & Lee, 2008) have pointed out that students learn much more in schools than is explicitly prescribed within formal curriculum guides, syllabi and lesson plans. What students learn in schools is therefore not always consistent with teachers’ educational intentions and the aims of the formal, overt or official curriculum (Kirk, 1992). The hidden curriculum directs attention to the implicit, subconscious learning of knowledge, attitudes, values, norms and assumptions are transmitted to students unconsciously in and through educational processes (Skelton, 1997; Nutt & Clarke, 2002). As Cushion and Jones (2014, p. 277) observe ‘because much of the resultant learning is covert and embedded within daily routine and practice, it is misrecognised and becomes part of a hidden curriculum’.

Nutt and Clarke, (2002) note that the sex-differentiated structure of physical education reinforces a hidden curriculum in which powerful gender messages are conveyed about what respectively constitutes acceptable practice and behaviour for girls and boys. Through participation in a differentiated curriculum, girls and boys are subtly and differently socialised into dominant stereotyped notions of masculinity/femininity. In essence, participation in activities that continue to have an underlying association with dominant versions of femininity or masculinity is far from value free. For example, in netball and dance, girls are variously (explicitly and subtly) encouraged to express and embody an ‘acceptable’ feminine physicality which emphasises being graceful, aesthetic and non-aggressive (Cockburn & Clarke, 2002; Flintoff & Scraton, 2006). Azzarito (2012, p. 80) cogently remarks, ‘when girls are channelled into the practice of netball through PE netball works implicitly as a ‘gendered’ hidden curriculum to normalise, discipline and regulate young women to the ideals of acceptable femininity’. In contrast, team games can serve to encourage boys to develop a masculine physicality which is competitive, aggressive and assertive (Flintoff & Scraton, 2006).

A number of researchers (e.g. Cockburn & Clarke, 2002; Nutt & Clarke, 2002; Fisette, 2013) have also pointed to the significance of the pedagogical nature of the hidden curriculum as it operates within daily routine and practice. As Nutt and Clarke (2002, p. 152) succinctly assert ‘the hidden curriculum is not unitary but operates on different levels and in different ways’. Through their pedagogical practices teachers can impart implicit messages to students about, for example, stereotypical notions of appropriate male and female behaviours and abilities. Thus the notion of the hidden curriculum also encompasses and can be identified in the routines and rituals of pedagogic practice. In this regard, we add that alongside and embedded within stereotypical gendered messages, ability discourses and messages are overtly reinforced through the particular activities offered in physical education and by teachers’ and coaches’ actions, comments and behaviours.

Hay and Macdonald’s (2010) analysis of practices within a senior secondary physical education has provided one of all too few vivid insights into not only the complexities of ability construction in and through pedagogical practices, but also, the *pedagogical consequences* for students who are differently positioned in relation to dominant ability discourses. These consequences encompassed ‘students’ sense of self, potential achievement and learning opportunities’ (p. 16). Fisette’s (2013) recent qualitative study of 9th and 10th grade secondary-school girls’ coeducational physical education, provides a further example of how teachers’ actions and behaviours can send implicit messages to students about expected and appropriate ways of being, that are inherently tied to understandings of both gender and ability. Fisette’s account (2013) reveals how the teachers used their positions of power to select activities (e.g. football and fitness) that perpetuated gender differences and allowed the male and high-skilled students to have a voice in which activities were offered. These decisions communicated implicit messages to other participants that they were less skilled and less worthy, and that the girls’ perspectives were less of a concern to the teachers.

Although an extensive literature (e.g. Bain, 1986, 1990; Kirk, 1992; Solmon & Lee, 2008) has drawn attention to the hidden curriculum in physical education, its application in a context of ‘partnership-based’ provision of PESS has not been pursued. In many contemporary school contexts in England, coaches may now be as significant as teachers in conveying values and assumptions to students about social identities. We argue, along with others such as Varpalotai (1987) and Solmon and Lee (2008), that the concept of the hidden curriculum has widespread applicability and reiterate largely unanswered calls for further investigations of the unintended learning that goes on in differently nuanced contexts. Drawing on data from a small-scale study we offer an empirically based critical discussion of seemingly ‘taken-for-granted’ assumptions and practices in coaching within an extra-curricular physical education context. Our analysis endeavours to bring to the fore unintended and unanticipated consequences of departments forging ‘well-intentioned’ alliances with ‘external’ agencies and personnel (specifically sport coaches), and in particular, to expose potential pitfalls of such associations in relation to the reproduction of inequity in education and sport. More specifically, this study sought to explore:

1.  How, if at all, does the hidden curriculum manifest amidst the processes of coaches' pedagogy?

2.  How specifically, are ideas of ability, masculinity and femininity constructed and reproduced in and through coaches’ pedagogy? And

3. What are the prospective consequences of these ideas for girls’ and boys’ involvement in extra-curricular physical education?

**Method**

*Participants and setting*

This paper draws on qualitative data generated through a study of one co-educational secondary school (11-18 year olds) in the North East of England. The methods and analysis were based within the interpretive paradigm. The interpretive paradigm is concerned with understanding the social world through the examination of the interpretation and experiences of that world by its participants (Bryman, 2012). The school (referred to with the pseudonym Hirst View) is located in a small semi-rural town in a catchment area of predominantly white working-class and some middle-class families. The physical education department consists of four full-time teachers: one female who is also the overall Head of Physical Education; one male teacher who is identified as the ‘Head of Boys’ Physical Education and two other teachers (one male and one female). In subsequent reporting and discussion of data the abbreviation ‘PE’ is used in referring to the specific staff positions. The positions reflect that the curriculum at Hirst View is demarcated around conventional ‘gender distinctions’ (Lines & Stidder, 2003, p. 65). In many secondary schools in England (and especially in years 9 and above), girls and boys are taught in single-sex groups (Lines & Stidder, 2003; Green, 2008). At Hirst View physical education for girls comprises netball, hockey, tennis, gymnastics, badminton, athletics, rounders and dance. Provision for boys centres on football, rugby, tennis, badminton, athletics, cricket and gymnastics. Provision beyond curriculum time comprises a few extra-curricular clubs that are also demarcated by gender. Girls are offered netball (delivered by a female coach), a dance club and a gymnastics club (provided by the Head of PE and female PE teacher). Boys have opportunities to participate in a football club (provided by a male coach and the Head of Boys’ PE) and a rugby club (delivered by the male PE teacher).

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the University Research Ethics Committee. Prior to the commencement of data collection consent forms were distributed to the Head of PE, the Head of Boys’ PE and two extra-curricular sport coaches in the school (one male football coach and one female netball coach). Data were gathered over a four month period through observations of the two coaches (with field notes) and individual semi-structured interviews with the Head of PE, the Head of Boys’ PE and the two coaches. The two Heads of PE were purposefully selected as participants for this study as they are responsible for the promotion and provision of physical activity opportunities within the department (Cale, 2000) and, more significantly, responsible for the ‘scale or form’ (Green, 2005, p. 107) of involvement of coaches within curricular and extra-curricular physical education in the school. Pseudonyms are used subsequently in referring to the participants.

Michael, the male football coach is a Level 2 qualified club coach and has a casual contract with the county Football Association. He has delivered an extra-curricular football club to students at Hirst View for three years. Emily, the female netball coach is a club coach and has a Level 3 Certificate in Coaching Netball. This is the second year that she has provided extra-curricular opportunities to students at Hirst View. Paul is in his fourth year of teaching at the school and is in his first year as Head of Boys PE. Liz has taught at the school for 16 years and has been in the position of Head of PE for 9 years.

At this juncture it is important to note that no data was collected from students. Rather, attention was directed towards interrogating how particular conceptions of ability, masculinity and femininity were encoded in the content and organisation of the extra-curricular curriculum and reflected in coach’s pedagogical practices. Whilst the investigation of students’ perspectives would provide for a more holistic explication of the dynamics of the hidden curriculum amidst coached extra-curricular provision, it was acknowledged as beyond the scope of this study. A necessary next step in unravelling the pedagogic consequences of the hidden curriculum in extra-curricular coaching is therefore the inclusion of students’ voices.

*Data collection and analysis*

Data collection proceeded in two phases. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Liz and Paul to elicit data on the desirability of external agencies supporting the delivery of physical activity opportunities in extra-curricular physical education, and the reasoning for using coaches in this context. Field observations of a total of 12 extra-curricular classes (6 coached netball and 6 coached football) were then undertaken over a period of four months. Substantive field notes were written during each observation and focussed on coach pedagogy, and how coaches interacted with students during activities. Finally, at the conclusion of field observations both coaches were interviewed. The semi-structured interviews focussed on matters emanating from the observations (germane to the research foci) and sought information about the nature and purposes of the coaches’ involvement in extra-curricular physical education and the ways in which issues of gender and/or ability impacted upon students opportunities to access extra-curricular clubs or activities.

The data generated via the observations and semi-structured interviews were subjected to a systematic process of inductive thematic coding. The interview data were transcribed verbatim and field notes word-processed into narratives (Fisette, 2013). The data were scrutinised thoroughly (read and re-read multiple times) in order to detect initial patterns, relationships and inconsistencies within and across the data-set. Quotes considered to represent the ‘same meaning’ (Whitehead & Biddle, 2008, p. 245) were grouped together and assigned a category label. Conversely, where data appeared incompatible with the emerging dominant themes, additional themes or sub-themes were generated to define these patterns. The identified categories form the basis for the discussion of findings reported below.

**Findings and discussion:** *Extra-curricular programmes: Reinforcing social injustices?*

Here we consider a number of important questions regarding the role of coaches in extra-curricular physical education and the prospective implications of this association for the involvement and related experiences of young people. Particular attention is given to the philosophy underpinning the provision of extra-curricular activities at Hirst View and the purported value of, and reasoning for involving coaches in the delivery of extra-curricular programmes. We also seek to illustrate a number of messages that the hidden curriculum conveys (particularly about gender, ability and participation) through the patterns of provision and the primacies and pedagogical practices of coaches in the extra-curricular context.

According to Liz (the Head of PE), the extra-curricular context at Hirst View is significant for two reasons: mass participation/equality of opportunity and talent identification. As many readers will be aware, tensions have often been associated with policy developments and provision that has sought to simultaneously engage with these discourses. Liz’s explanation of provision indicated that the two sets of interests are seen as compatible and that furthermore, participation for all students is the prime interest:

First and foremost, the purpose of extra-curricular activities is to give all boys and girls the chance to experience and enjoy sport and physical activity. Our extra-curricular provision should be enabling for all of our students. Secondly, extra-curricular activities present students with a unique opportunity to work with qualified coaches to improve their skills. It is great for the school, the kids and the coaches. Actually, a year or so ago our football coach used his contacts to get one of our year eight boys into the academy team and he loves it. I want the same for more of our boys and girls. (Liz)

It is against this backdrop that we further explore provision and specifically, the practices of the coaches who are central to the extra-curriculum provision at Hirst View, from an equity perspective.

Extra-curricular physical education as a discrete domain is not bound by the ‘aegis’ (Capel & Whitehead, 2013, p. 18) of National Curriculum Physical Education (NCPE) (that dictates what state schools must do in curricular PE), and so teachers and coaches are afforded comparative autonomy to provide boys and girls with access to a broader and more ‘balanced programme of activities’. Notwithstanding the putative opportunities to oppose and destabilize dominant and limiting stereotypical gendered messages and understandings about participation in physical activity, the particular focus of after school provision at Hirst View reaffirmed traditional forms of gender stereotyping. As indicated above, in the extra-curricular context male and female students had limited access to a ‘few’ ‘separate’ and ‘different’ sports and activities traditionally associated with their gender. Yet both Paul and Liz appear ideologically committed (albeit rhetorically) to challenging the reproduction of gender differences in extra-curricular PE by providing opportunities and experiences outside narrowly defined normative gender boundaries:

We are a very small department and are therefore limited in the amount of clubs we can offer. But I want students to go out there and be as active as possible and if that is boys accessing our netball and dance clubs and girls our football and rugby clubs I would be quite happy for that to happen. (Liz)

For me, if the clubs are available and we have boys who are interested in netball or dance and girls who are interested in football and rugby then why shouldn’t they be able to attend? (Paul)

This openness to challenging gender-based distinctions in provision was not, however, evident in interviews with the coaching staff. When asked about providing girl’s access to his extra-curricular football club, Michael was emphatic in his response:

In principle I am not keen on girls attending the football club. In general, and this is not me being stereotypical, but boys are naturally better at football than girls. When girls have the ball, nine times out of ten they will give it away and do this girly spin. They want to live up to the traditional characteristics that they are female and shouldn’t be good at certain sports. (Michael)

When Michael’s perspective was challenged by pointing to a female student who, as a skilful performer, implicitly defies the ‘masculine stereotypical orthodoxy of males play football better than females’ (Brown & Rich, 2002, p. 91), he responded:

But the boys would still be physically stronger and she wouldn’t be able to cope with their rough and tumble play. It would be interesting to know if she would be bullied if boys became aware of her sexuality. That would be one thing that is very apparent nowadays … but I wouldn’t obviously ask that question. (Michael)

Similar sentiments were echoed by Emily when questioned about the possibility of boys attending the extra-curricular netball club:

I would say no because they would not help the class out in terms of their netball ability. They would more than likely be there to mess about. (Emily)

Michael and Emily clearly perceive boys’/girls’ superior football/netball capabilities as axiomatic. As a corollary of such sex-stereotyped understandings and assumptions of homogeneity, Michael and Emily reproduce and legitimise the exclusivity of football/netball as male and female ‘appropriate’ extra-curricular domains (Azzarito, 2012). In this instance it is not a lack of interest or capacity that precludes boys’ engagement in netball and denies girls the experience in football; rather the most harmful attribute is merely that of being a boy or a girl (Harris, 1993). Thus, the situation at Hirst View can be seen as one in which the content, organisation and staffing of extra-curricular provision are important in relation to the hidden curriculum.

Observations provided important insight into the pedagogical dimension of the hidden curriculum and specifically, how this served to further emphasise particular messages about gender, ability and participation. Specific and differentiated masculine and feminine behaviours and performances were expected and encouraged. For Emily, and Michael in particular, modes of behaving that contrasted with dominant and normative conventions of heterosexuality and femininity/masculinity elicited negativity. Throughout observation of Emily’s extra-curricular netball club it was evident that aggressive and assertive displays were considered inappropriate. Emily lamented those who monopolised possession of the netball and those who were critical of other less ‘able’ peers as “behaving like boys” and on many occasions reminded the girls that “it’s only a game”. Michael also communicated gender-related information about appropriate conduct for boys. Observations of Michael’s extra-curricular football club revealed a number of openly gendered comments including “the last one changed is a big girl”, “well done men” for aggressive game behaviour, and “you are playing like a girl” for those who did not display valorised masculine physicality. The pedagogies are consistent with previous research that has revealed coaches’ use of gendered discourses. The football coaches in Cushion and Jones (2006; 2014) and Adams, Anderson and McCormack (2010), and the frisbee coaches in Crocket (2013) routinely called into question the masculinity of those who failed to demonstrate skilled play. Cushion and Jones (2006) reported that coaches used gendered and aggressive terminology as a specific strategy to improve the players’ performances. Messner and Sabo (1994) point out that gendered discourses expressed through the hidden curriculum can reinforce the display of orthodox gendered behaviour ‘by making conformity to hegemonic heterosexual masculinity desirable and non-conformity something to be feared and disdained’ (p. 108).

Despite the stated desire to extend opportunities for both girls and boys, Liz did not appear to see shortcomings in the experiences being offered through the clubs run by Michael and Emily. Rather, the dominant discourse was one of appreciation; that others are contributing to extra-curricular provision and that the coaches bring valuable sport-specialist knowledge and skills to the programme:

The coaches are a big help to us. I know I keep going on about it but we are a very small team. With more people collectively involved we can deliver more opportunities to students in extra-curricular activities; opportunities that were not there before. We don’t have a netball specialist in the department and our netball coach is providing that opportunity in extra-curricular activities. (Liz)

Paul initially affirms Liz’s positivity. However, he includes a caveat when discussing the nature of coach involvement in extra-curricular physical education, as the following exchange demonstrates:

Interviewer: What do you see as some of the benefits of using coaches in extra-curricular PE?

Paul: Simple, increasing provision and getting more students involved. There are more opportunities in extra-curricular games than there has been in previous years particularly for the girls. I do have concerns though. The boys who attend our coached football club are always the best ten or eleven in the year group. If we are supposed to be getting more students involved then we are clearly not doing this.

Interviewer: Why do you think this is the case?

Paul: With us bringing in a coach I am unsure if he would be willing to spend time with our less able boys. Perhaps we are all guilty of focussing too much on creating successful teams and giving our more able students these opportunities.

One of the other comments made by Liz was that “There are also obvious benefits of encouraging students into clubs but this should not be at the expense of getting more students involved”. Emily, and to a lesser extent Michael are keen to emphasise their support for creating structures for mass participation and inclusive educational experiences (albeit gender ‘appropriate’ experiences). However, both concede an emphasis on recruiting the skilled minority for the agencies of which they are part. Michael communicates, with no equivocation, his perception of the purpose of, and his role in extra-curricular activities:

I know Liz is keen on giving all the boys access to my (extra-curricular) club … brilliant … I am all for this. But everyone has access to football in the curriculum right? So I think it is really important that I try and target the ones with football talent.

Further explaining the importance of ‘targeting those with footballing talent’ Michael justifies his emphasis by recourse to the interests of excellence in sport:

I do believe in providing opportunities for children to get better at what they do and if for instance they are the more physically able or the gifted and talented boys in PE then it is important to point them in the right direction as to other places they can go as well as school PE; places like the local football clubs and academies where they can further the skills that they possess. (Michael).

He recalled: “In the past few years I have been able to get one in at the local academy … I think it is great”. (Michael)

Thus, it was evident that discourses of sporting excellence are at the fore of Michael’s thinking about the extra-curricular context and his role in that. As we discuss below, this was also seen to be reflected in his pedagogical practice.

Emily was more sanguine about providing ‘all’ girls access to her extra-curricular netball club, but acknowledged external pressures pushing her in the direction of identifying and providing for the minority of girls with netball ‘ability’:

My netball club is open to all of the girls. Last week I had over 30 girls attending and I will keep trying to get all of the girls involved. I want to get more girls into netball. Getting girls to participate in my club is one thing but I spend a lot of time focusing on the more able girls. My NGB [National Governing Body] is pushing me in this direction. (Emily)

She continued:

With our job in sport it is never secure. The government can always reduce the funding to netball and so all we can do is to keep churning out the more able children and get them playing for clubs.

Emily’s comments reveal the potential for very real pedagogical tensions to arise amidst partnership-based provision of extra-curricular activities and/or school sport in schools. They also raise questions about what impact those tensions may then have upon the messages communicated in and by the hidden curriculum in this setting. In this regard, observations indicated that Michael and Emily’s pedagogical investment was towards an already competent few, rather than providing opportunities for ‘all’ students to engage, participate and develop their abilities. Indeed, on several instances it was noted that students were routinely segregated into ‘ability’ groups, the judgement for which appeared to be displays of aggression, competition and sporting reputation in Michael’s football club and displays of physical skills and affective markers (behaviour and motivation) in Emily’s netball club. The space in which the ‘less able’ students performed was positioned further from Michael and Emily’s habitual coaching position. This group of students had little opportunity to display evidence of learning and received less frequent and sustained attention, encouragement and instruction from Michael and Emily. This finding is not dissimilar to those of Cushion and Jones (2006) whose research revealed instances of coach partiality and selectivity in youth football and of players being hierarchically organised into subgroups termed ‘the favourites, the peripherals and the rejects’ (Cushion & Jones, 2006, p. 152). The ‘favourites’ characteristically received the majority of coaches’ attention while those labelled ‘rejects’ (and perceived to be limited in football ability) were publicly criticised for making mistakes and comparably, deprived of learning opportunities and interactions with the coaches. As we saw, amidst pedagogical relations and positioning such as this, students have limited opportunities to ameliorate themselves from a designation as low or limited ability. Such research findings also highlight that coaching’s hidden curriculum can serve as a powerful medium through which the norms, values and beliefs of elitism are transmitted and maintained, and via which inequity in physical education and sport is reaffirmed and legitimated.

**Conclusion**

In closing, it is important to acknowledge that the research described here is small scale, undertaken within a single school and with particular physical education staff and coaches. We also highlight that our central focus has been gender, ability and their interrelationship. We have not explored the complexities of other aspects of students’ identity including culture, ethnicity, disability and social class, and the ways in which they intersect with gender and ability. Students have multiple identities and gender and ability are only a few of the factors mediating their experiences in curriculum and extra-curricular contexts. We therefore caution against generalising these findings while at the same time, stressing their prospective significance. Further data on coaches, teachers and students is needed to establish ‘what implicit and explicit messages students pick up about the goals and purpose of extra-curricular activities’ (Theodoulides, 2013, p. 45) and how coaches convey expectations and values in relation to culture, ethnicity, social class and disability amidst their pedagogical practices. Such research has the capacity to provide insight into the messages that students infer from coach’s pedagogic enactment in a context that, in the context of this research, foregrounds performance excellence over participation, and to expose the attendant and differentiating consequences of such learnings for students’ perceptions of their supposed ‘abilities’, appropriate and potential futures and ongoing engagement in contexts of physical activity.

Notwithstanding the limitations to this study, aspects of the practices described at Hirst View are recognised as featuring in provision in schools in England and internationally. Indeed, the number of schools accepting a funded and promoted offer of help (particularly from external agencies in extra-curricular PE) to provide sporting opportunities for students reveal the extent and strength of a belief that the development of partnerships with coaches and clubs can result in a number of positive outcomes. In this research the justificatory rhetoric of developing links with coaches and club based sport was couched in terms of pragmatic justifications related to augmenting the range of expertise in the department, the opportunity to extend provision and thus providing opportunities for a greater proportion of students, and encouraging students into clubs. Although Liz advocated increased involvement of coaches in extra-curricular physical education as an intrinsically good thing for all involved, it was evident from observations and interviews that ‘coached’ extra-curricular provision may essentially constrain the physical activity opportunities of ‘some’ young people. The data presented in this study substantiate Penney and Harris’ assertion that gender and ability messages are ‘implicit in the content, organisation and delivery of extra-curricular PE’ (1997, p. 47). The gendered pattern of organisation in extra-curricular physical education and ideological and stereotypical assumptions concerning masculinity/femininity, heterosexuality, gender-based ability preconceptions and the ‘appropriateness’ of particular team games deprived boys and girls of a number of physical activity experiences. Boys and girls appeared to be perceived by Emily and Michael as essentially discrete and homogeneous groups who have different and ‘complementary (that is defined in opposition to one another)’ (Wright, 1996, p. 61) interests and capabilities. Yet, as Macdonald (2002, p. 210) cogently remarks ‘binaries, polarities and boundaries obscure differences’ within (as well as between) the category ‘boy’/’girl’. This perspective leaves little space for acknowledging individuality and diversity and as such has the potential to denigrate and subjugate the needs of those whose physical activity proclivities are located outside the bounds of heterosexual masculinity/femininity. Accordingly, the gender differentiated organisation of the extra-curricular context not only constrained male and female students from opposing the discursive rules of the gendered hidden curriculum, through for example, participation in football or netball, but discouraged discourages and ultimately suppressed suppresses them from opportunities to explore and reconstruct alternative expressions of physical and gender identity; alternative identities which ‘step outside or cross the traditional gender binary’ (Stidder, Lines, & Keyworth, 2013, p. 79).

The identification and development of the ‘talented few’ was inherent in the coaches’ conception of their purpose and role within extra-curricular physical education. As Cushion and Jones (2014) have noted anticipated returns (e.g. securing players for professional clubs or for representative level selection) needs to be acknowledged as a potentially important determinant of coaches’ different degrees of investment in individual players, and can yield a focus on performance and excellence as opposed to participation and inclusion. As indicated above, we saw a tendency for Michael and Emily to prefer working with and developing the more ‘able’ students. It is salutary to recognise, however, that such actions should not be simplistically viewed as reflections of Michael and Emily’s subjectivities. The multiple and sometimes conflicting conditions shaping Michael and Emily’s perceptions of their role in extra-curricular physical education must also be acknowledged. Emily, for example, was keen to emphasise egalitarian principles by encouraging “all of the girls to get involved” in her netball club, but recognised a number of demands circumscribing her practice and constraining her in the direction of pursuing elite sporting objectives. Nonetheless, in this study, the focus of coaches on the ostensibly talented minority and the concomitant neglect of a disproportionate number of students who were not perceived as physically competent but enjoyed participating in netball/football inadvertently engendered an extra-curricular context in which a number of would-be participants were excluded not only from the pool of talent (e.g. accessing sports clubs and academies), but from further involvement in extra-curricular physical education and sport. A concern here is that the hidden curriculum in coached extra-curricular physical education will communicate implicit ability related messages to students who take up extra-curricular opportunities (e.g. that they are not skilled in football/netball and that sport is for a select few); messages that will shape their sense of capacity, possibility, adequacy and influence their willingness to access and pursue further opportunities for participation in physical education and sport contexts. If, as Smith and colleagues (2007) and government policy (DCMS, 2012) attest, extra-curricular physical education is to be significant in shaping orientations toward lifelong participation in sport and physical activity among young people then this is particularly concerning.

**Notes**

1. Extra-curricular is a term used in the UK context to refer to provision that is in addition to that within standard curriculum time in schools. It encompasses pre-school, lunchtime and after-school activities that are typically optional and/or provided for specific groups of students, such as those selected for school teams.
2. ‘High quality PE and school sport produces young people with the skills, understanding, desire and commitment to continue to improve and achieve in a range of PE, sport and health-enhancing physical activities in line with their abilities’ (DfES/DCMS 2003, p. 3).
3. The PESSYP aimed to ensure that all 5 - 16 years olds had access to two hours of high quality curriculum PE and three hours beyond the curriculum, per week (to be provided by schools, further education institutions, clubs and community providers), and that 16-19 year olds had access to three hours of sport outside of the curriculum (Youth Sport Trust, 2009).

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