Northumbria Research Link

Re-engaging disengaged pupils in physical education: an appreciative inquiry perspective

Abstract

Many children and young people enjoy physical education (PE), yet many do not, and subsequently become disengaged from PE. Previous research that has explored student disengagement from PE has focused on what teachers should do to re-engage their pupils, or has encouraged dis-engaged students to create a curriculum that they perceive to be socially and culturally relevant. While this research is extremely important, it does not highlight enough what teachers bring to the teaching and learning process. An alternative approach to understanding (dis)engagement in PE is to start by asking both teachers and pupils: what is currently working, why is it working, and what could be in the future? This 'appreciative inquiry' (AI) approach is underpinned by the belief that everyone and everything has strengths that can be developed, and that those strengths should be the starting point for change. Consequently, in establishing the use of AI as an important means of understanding and potentially enhancing PE pedagogy, this research sought to understand the successful teaching strategies developed by PE teachers to re-engage disengaged pupils. Importantly, in recognising the value of understanding pupil experiences we also explored and shared the success stories of the 're-engaged' pupils. Finally, in extending the research in this area, we examined the impact that teacher engagement in the AI process had on their professional learning. As the teachers engaged in the AI process, they discussed, listened to (each other and their pupils), reflected and shared their success stories. This, in turn, appears to have encouraged them to re-articulate and re-enact their practice and learning within the context of a more positive future. They designed (and in some cases, co-design with their pupils) meaningful and empowering PE programmes for their 'disengaged' pupils and have subsequently made a commitment to future professional learning and inquiry.

Keywords: Appreciative inquiry; Physical education; Pedagogy; Success; Trust

Introduction

Concerns related to student (dis)engagement in Physical Education (PE) have been well documented (Lyngstad, Hagen & Aune, 2016; Mitchell, Gray & Inchley, 2015). Such concerns are commonly reported in research that illustrates declines in student engagement, and makes explicit links to the idea that PE should address the ills of society associated with physical inactivity (Lewis, 2014; Tassitano et al., 2010). However, looking beyond this focus on PE as a means of improving the physical health of young people, disengagement in PE is concerning because it limits both *what* and *how* young people learn in the school context. Taught well, PE has the capacity to contribute to the development of, not only physical skills, but also social, emotional and cognitive skills (Bailey, 2006). When students engage in learning, they invest behavioural, affective and cognitive effort to the task (Bevans, Fitzpatrick, Sanchez & Forrest, 2010). Furthermore, engaged students can be identified by interrelated expressions of motivation such as, self-determined forms of motivation and mastery motivation (Reeve, Jang, Carrell, Jeon & Barch, 2004). Consequently, they are more likely to experience success in learning because they apply effort to, show interest in, and enjoyment for their learning (Chen & Shen, 2004). By contrast, disengaged students are less likely to experience success as they tend to be more passive, they have little interest in the tasks presented to them, and subsequently, apply less effort to their learning.

Students become disengaged from PE for socio-cultural, environmental, physical and psychological reasons (Sandford, Armour & Duncombe, 2010), for example, feelings of self-consciousness or low perception of competence (Mitchell, Gray & Inchley, 2015). Moreover, the source of their disengagement can derive from experiences that are both external and internal to the school context (Bennie, Peralta, Gibbons, Lubans & Rosenkranz, 2017). Importantly, while the experiences that are external to the school are difficult for teachers to affect, the teacher can at least attempt to have some influence on the ways that pupils experience the PE context. Indeed, research suggests that teachers can create learning environments that have a direct impact on pupil motivation and subsequent engagement in PE (Bevans et al., 2010). For example, when PE teachers create a mastery motivational climate, where success is defined through personal gain, cooperation and effort, then student engagement in PE has been found to increase (Ntoumanis, Pensgaard, Martin & Pipe, 2004). Similarly, when PE teachers create learning environments that nurture student relationships and stimulate their personal interest, then intrinsic motivation, engagement and learning are enhanced (Ryan & Deci, 2006). In other words, engagement may be enhanced when teachers create learning environments that support and develop their students' capacity to become autonomous learners.

Several studies have highlighted the important role that the teacher plays in supporting autonomous learning in PE (Mandigo, Holt, Anderson & Sheppard, 2008; Van den Berghe, Vansteenkiste, Cardon, Kirk, & Haerens, 2012). Van den Berghe et al. (2012) for example, found that teachers who were more flexible with their students, who offered more choice and opportunities for self-initiative, created learning environments that led to greater engagement, enjoyment and more autonomous functioning. Studies that have explicitly examined girls' experiences in PE have drawn similar conclusions, highlighting the importance of learner autonomy, choice and voice (Azzarito, Solomon & Harrison, 2006; Hills & Croston, 2012). Importantly, much of this research has moved beyond simply describing what teachers do (or should do) to motivate and engage pupils in PE; towards illuminating what PE can be for disengaged pupils, considering their lives, experiences and contexts. Mitchell et al. (2015), for example, carried out an investigation to explore the perspectives of disengaged female pupils as they engaged in an intervention to increase their

physical activity levels during PE. They carried out multiple interviews with the girls to build a comprehensive understanding of their 'real-life' experiences. In doing so, they were able to identify both the barriers and the facilitators to participation in PE. In particular, the authors demonstrated that when teachers began to create opportunities for consultation and support, the girls developed more positive perceptions about PE and became more likely to engage in PE.

Activist researchers also move beyond simply describing what teachers should do to re-engage disengaged students by engaging young people in the research process. This is a form of Participatory Action Research (PAR) that involves students, teachers and researchers working together to create a meaningful, interesting and socially safe learning environment (Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010; Oliver, Hamza & McCaughtry, 2009). For example, Oliver et al. (2009) worked with a group of female students to identify their barriers to participating in physical activity during PE, and to negotiate those barriers to increase engagement. They uncovered that the girls perceived that being a 'girly girl' (p. 99) hindered their participation in physical activity during PE and free play. Furthermore, when the girls were given the opportunity to create their own games, ones that they could enjoy and 'enact their subjectivities without outsiders' (p 107), being a 'girly girl' did not seem to matter anymore. Similarly, Enright and O'Sullivan (2010) engaged in PAR to support a group of disadvantaged girls to identify their perceived barriers to engagement in PE. The researchers and the teacher worked with the girls to design and evaluate their own PE curriculum. One of the key findings from this research was that it transformed the traditional, authoritarian relationship that the girls had with their teacher. It also allowed the teachers to connect to their students' lives, which then enabled them to facilitate a curriculum that was more meaningful and socially relevant. It gave the girls a sense of ownership and agency; it was 'their' curriculum, one underpinned by fairness, respect and inclusion.

While this research is extremely important in terms of improving girls' experiences in PE, it can present some challenges for teachers. For many teachers, such teaching approaches represent a pedagogical paradigm shift, one where they relinquish a familiar position of power to become more collaborative, open and responsive (Rudduck, 2007). This can be difficult for some teachers who may not yet possess the necessary knowledge, experience or beliefs to support this approach. It is also important to highlight that, while this research invites the teachers to consider the perspectives of the learners, there is less emphasis on the perspectives and experiences of the teachers. Thus, implicated in this type of research is that the practice of the teacher needs to be changed or 'fixed'. This type of research does not highlight enough what the teachers bring to the teaching and learning process.

An alternative approach to understanding (dis)engagement in PE is to start by asking both teachers and pupils: what is currently working, why is it working, and what could be in the future? This 'appreciative inquiry' (AI) approach (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987) is underpinned by the belief that everyone and everything has strengths that can be developed and that those strengths should be the starting point for change (Enright et al., 2014). Like PAR, AI is based on the belief that learning takes place through shared experience and that the application of findings will inform future practice and inquiry. Consequently, it is an empowering method for conducting research, providing teachers with a deeper understanding of their practice, student experience and offers an optimistic vision of the future (Enright et al. 2014). The optimistic nature of AI is underpinned by five core principles (Whitney & Trostenn-Bloom, 2010):

1. The Constructionist Principle. The language people use creates their reality;
2. The Positive Principle. A positive focus can sustain effective change;
3. The Simultaneity Principle. Change begins when we ask questions;
4. The Poetic Principle. Individuals are not static, they are subject to on-going change and what we choose to focus on determines that change;
5. The Anticipatory Principle. Positive images of the future create positive change.

Cooperrider and Whitney (2001) provide a framework for operationalising the principles of AI, the 4-D Cycle: discover, dream, design and destiny. During the 'discover phase', participants identify, describe and appreciate the best aspects of their practice. In the 'dream phase', participants identify their positive core values and apply them to their ideal future. In the 'design phase' an ideal future is crafted and in the 'destiny phase', their ideal future is enacted. The success of the final phase is not in the creation of an ideal programme, strategy or pedagogy, but in teachers gaining power to act as a result of their engagement in the AI process.

There has been very little application of AI to understand and develop teaching in the PE context. Previous research that has examined teacher learning, like AI, draws attention to the importance of teacher engagement in the learning process, where the teacher and their experiences are central to what, why and how learning takes place (Armour, Quennerstedt, Chambers and Makopoulou, 2015). However, AI adds another dimension to this by focusing on successful experiences, framed by a positive vision of the future. In one of the few studies that has applied AI as a framework to understand teacher learning, Pill (2016) aimed to uncover the elements that sustained teachers' application of the 'games sense approach' in PE. Guided by the 4-D Cycle, Pill (2016) revealed a number of common themes across teachers. For example, their sustained use of the games sense approach was attributed to the fact that they found it to be effective for student learning and engagement. In this study, Pill (2016) demonstrates the collaborative and discovery process that appreciative inquiry facilitates, and in doing so, has generated greater awareness and understanding of the factors that sustain positive change in practice. Importantly, Pill (2016), also highlights the fact that AI does not ignore the negative elements of teaching and learning, these are taken into account as real experiences that can be explored, better understood and transformed. Ultimately, the aim of AI is to co-develop ideas, knowledge and theory that lead towards a more positive future. As Enright et al. (2014) suggest, this may be more likely to impact on teachers in terms of how they think about and enact change. Consequently, in further establishing the use of AI as an important means of understanding and potentially enhancing PE pedagogy, this research sought to understand the successful teaching strategies developed by PE teachers to re-engage disengaged pupils. Importantly, in recognising the value of understanding pupil experiences (Sandford et al., 2010), we also aimed to explore and share the success stories of the 're-engaged' pupils. Finally, in extending the research in this area, we intended to explore the impact that teacher engagement in the appreciative inquiry process had on their professional learning in relation to 're'-engaging 'disengaged' pupils in PE.

Method
As with previous research in this field (Pill, 2016), the present study was informed and guided by interpretivist epistemology. Thus, we aimed to encourage the participants to articulate, understand and share their experiences to gain insight into how they viewed the world. Importantly, the research project was also framed by appreciative inquiry.

Consequently, we engaged in a democratic process that used the positive aspects of the present, to build towards an improved and sustainable positive future (Enright et al., 2014).

Participants and Setting

Teachers and pupils from three state schools situated in a major Scottish city volunteered to participate in the study. Schools Latham High School (Latham HS) and Garside High School (Garside HS) are located within a two-mile radius of each other on the outskirts of the city. The local area scores below the national average for indicators of socio-economic disadvantage. Both schools are of similar size, with a school roll of around 620 pupils and both have four full-time teachers of PE (2 male and 2 female in each school). Baiden High School (Baiden HS) is one of the largest schools in the local authority with 1,100 pupils and 8 full-time teachers of PE in the department (4 males and 4 female). The school is located in the city centre and the student population is very diverse, with the pupils from the least and the most affluent areas of the city.

Two teachers from Latham HS and Garside HS (one male and one female from each school) and one teacher from Baiden HS (female) took part in the first part of the study. All were PE teachers except for Malcolm (Table 1) who was the Curriculum Leader for Health and Wellbeing[1]. This senior position involved leading the Health and Wellbeing curriculum and managing seven members of staff in PE, Sports and Home Economics. All participants were identified as teachers who had a lead role in planning and delivering the PE curriculum for pupils who were considered disengaged from PE.

Table 1. Teacher participants

Insert table 1 here

During initial school visits, conversations with staff members led to the selection of specific classes where they identified that some pupils (a minority in the context of the whole school) were disengaged, but where they also believed that they had made successful attempts to re-engage those pupils. To objectively determine those pupils from the identified classes who were the most disengaged from PE, all pupils in each class completed a questionnaire that measured their motivation for PE. The Behavioural Regulation in Exercise Questionnaire-2 (BREQ-2; Markland & Tobin, 2004) identifies reasons underlying decisions to engage, or not engage, in PE and provides a single measure of autonomous motivation for each pupil. All those pupils that scored below the cohort average were considered as potential participants for the focus group interviews. The researchers then asked the teachers from this group to identify pupils who they felt would make a useful contribution to a focus group discussion. As a result, 26 pupils across all schools were selected to take part in a focus group interview (Table 2).

Table 2. Pupil participants

Insert table 2 here

Permission to carry out the research was obtained from all of the teachers and all the pupils provided informed parent/guardian consent and informed assent to take part in the

study (pseudonyms have been used for the schools and the students). The study was approved by the University Ethics Committee.

Teacher interviews
The primary means of understanding the teachers' experiences was through semi-structured, one-to-one interviews with the lead researcher. Guided by the 4-D Cycle, the teachers were invited to share their success stories for re-engaging their disengaged students. Initially, the term 'success' was loosely framed around the notion of re-engaging disengaged students in PE, although the teachers were also encouraged to articulate what success meant to them in their context. The teachers were then asked to reflect upon and discuss the characteristics of the strategies that contributed to previous successes, and to imagine what PE could be for these students. To support these reflections and discussions, the researcher posed questions such as: why were the strategies successful, what impact did they have on engagement, motivation or learning, and what did you value most about the strategies? Interviews lasted between 50-60 minutes, were recorded using a digital voice recorder and were transcribed verbatim within one week of the date of the interview. Field notes were taken by the researcher immediately after the interview to capture (from the perspective of the researcher) key moments or pertinent themes and ideas that arose from the discussions. The teachers were also presented with the transcript from their interviews which they were invited to read and reflect upon. Their reflections were captured by providing them with a series of reflective questions related to their own learning during the research process. The teachers were asked to record their reflections either by using a voice recorder, or by transcribing their responses.

Pupil focus group interviews
The pupils that were identified as 'disengaged' (or low-motivation) from PE took part in a focus group interview with the second researcher. As with the teacher interviews, the schedule for the pupils was designed to incorporate principles of the 4-D Cycle. The interviews were semi-structured and conversational in style where probing questions were designed to elicit further, in-depth responses. The pupils were invited to share their positive experiences in PE. Further probing questions were asked to help understand why the students deemed these experiences 'positive', for example, what were you doing, what was the task and what did you learn? The pupils were also asked to imagine and explain what PE classes could 'look' like in the future. Each focus group interview took between 50-60 minutes, were recorded using a digital voice recorded and were transcribed verbatim, also within one week of the date of the interview.

Workshops
All of the teachers that were involved in the study were invited to take part in two 'workshops'. The principal teachers from each school also asked if they could attend the workshops, along with other members of the PE department. The purpose of the workshops was to present to the teachers the analysed data from the teacher interviews and pupil focus-groups. This allowed the teachers to engage once more with the 4-D Cycle. In doing so, the researchers and teachers shared the strategies that were used to re-engage their disengaged pupils, attempted to understand the mechanisms that worked to make these strategies successful, and to discuss the impact that the research process has had on their professional learning and ideas for the future. The first workshop began by presenting the analysed teacher and pupil interviews, followed by a group discussion. The second workshop focussed more on the impact that the research process had on their learning and their ideas for the future in relation to engaging their pupils in PE. The discussions from each workshop were recorded using a digital voice recorder and transcribed verbatim.

Data analysis

The data analysis process took place both during and after the period of data collection. Soon after each interview, the audio file and the interview transcripts were shared between the researchers, followed by a meeting to discuss the interview. The purpose of the discussions was twofold. Firstly, to become familiar with the participants' responses and secondly to begin to identify pertinent ideas and themes within each interview and, as the interviews progressed, establish common themes across interviews. In order to identify the ideas and themes, we were guided by the four-step classification process aligned to Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant comparative method of data analysis namely: the classification of themes within each data set; the identification of common themes; the comparison of themes across data sets; and finally, the development of an explanatory theory. Therefore, during the early stages of the data analysis process, the researchers would meet to discuss the key ideas or themes that had emerged from the transcripts, but also possible connections to previous research. This entailed considering the 'text' and developing phrases that explained and summarized key issues in order to identify initial categories (Glaser, 1965). Reference to the field notes taken by the researcher during the interviews further supported this analytical process. Over time, these meetings focused on establishing the main themes and comparing the themes within and across data sets. This involved moving backwards and forwards between transcripts, themes and field notes until all of the key ideas raised by the participants were represented in the final analysis (or the 'explanatory theory').

Results

Our analysis revealed the strategies that the teachers used to re-engage their pupils and the main factors contributing to their success, including: the development of trusting relationships between the teachers and pupils, the importance of positive pupil-pupil relationships, supporting pupil autonomy for learning and ensuring that *all* pupils have opportunities to be successful learning.

The success stories

One of the main ways in which the teachers attempted to re-engage their pupils was by changing the curriculum activities. The teachers at Garside HS, for example, offered 'walking' as an activity during one of their twice-a-week PE lessons if the pupils agreed to bring their PE kit and take part in the second PE lesson. Kim from Latham HS taught a 'Fitness for Football' course where the pupils from a predominately female class had to design and engage in their own fitness programmes to improve their fitness for football. In the same school, Nathan described how he taught his all-boys class using a learner-centred, games-based teaching approach that he related to Teaching Games for Understanding (TGFU: Bunker & Thorpe, 1982). In an attempt to involve all of the pupils in her gymnastics class, Helen from Baiden HS organised a number of different stations within which multiple skills could be performed. The pupils could choose which station to work at and which skill to perform according to their own unique needs, abilities and preferences.

Factors contributing to their success

Trusting relationships: the teachers' perspective

In exploring the 'success stories' in more depth, it became clear that one of the key aims for the teachers was to build trusting relationships with their pupils, and this was largely achieved by considering the way in which they communicated and interacted with their

disengaged pupils. For example, both Helen and Tamara explained how they communicated in a very calm way with her pupils, never raising her voice and always creating time to talk to and get to know their pupils. Here, Tamara describes:

> *I don't really shout and get on...well, I suppose I do get on at people but I don't shout anyway. I'm not a shouting teacher. It doesn't work for me…. I just trying to encourage them and get them onside really, praising the ones who then are taking part (Tamara, Garside HS)*

Reflecting Tamara's comment, being positive towards their pupils and offering praise was cited by all of the teachers as a means by which they enhanced their relationships with the disengaged pupils. However, in addition to this, all of the teachers stated that trusting relationships were developed when they took time to listen to their pupils, both their ideas and their concern.

Trusting relationships: the pupils' perspective

Like the teachers, the pupils also spoke about the importance of developing a trusting relationship with their teacher. However, unlike the teachers, they also referred to trusting relationships with their peers, especially in relation to working with friends, developing confidence and learning in PE. For example, friendship grouping was important for all pupils, and this was often related to working with individuals that they knew, and could therefore trust. The concept of trust from the pupils' perspective was often related to how they might be perceived or judged by others. For example, the girls from Garside HS wanted to work with peers who respected them, their performance and their bodies. Relatedly, the pupils from Baiden HS suggested that being grouped with peers of similar ability level would help to increase their confidence and diminish their fears of failure. Learning and performance were important factors for number of the pupils that were interviewed, particularly the male pupils. For example, the boys from Latham HS and Garside HS reported enjoying PE when they were paired with peers who supported and encouraged their learning and performance.

Trusting your peers was clearly important for the pupils we interviewed, although crucially, it was also important for the pupils to have a positive and trusting relationship with their teacher, a teacher who is positive, who listens and is fair. Reflecting the teachers' responses to some extent, all of the pupils claimed that they liked being praised by the teacher and being listened to by the teacher. For example, one of the pupils from Latham HS said that they had a teacher in PE who they could talk to and trust:

> *Like the PE teachers, you could trust them. I don't know why, just cause they are like young and that, they are more understanding. (Latham HS, female, mixed class)*

The pupils from Garside HS said that it was important to have a teacher who was respectful and who treated all pupils equally - a teacher who does not shout and who does not have favourites. Interestingly, this topic of discussion also raised some negative stories from the Garside HS pupils. The girls, for example, did not always feel like they were treated equally and the boys described teachers that they perceived to be strict and shouted too much.

> *And S1 was better because they (the teachers) were like all nice and calm and that but now it's S2 they are so strict and just shout at you for nothing basically. (Garside HS, male, all-boys focus group)*

Supporting pupil autonomy: the teachers' perspective

It seems clear that nurturing positive and trusting relationships was critical to the pupils' experiences and engagement in PE, with both the pupils and the teachers highlighting the importance of talking and listening to each other. This more reciprocal learning environment was also reflected in the fact that a number of the teachers talked about involving the pupils in negotiations about their learning experiences, and avoided making the pupils feel like they were being forced to do something. This provided many of the pupils with more autonomous learning experiences, where they were directly involved in the design and development of their learning. An example of this was offered by Kim who described how she encouraged the girls in her class to plan their own learning. Not only did Kim suggest that this had a very positive impact on pupil engagement and learning, but she also suggested that this demonstrated the trust that she had for her pupils.

> *So in fitness through football they would plan their own sessions, they would come up with their own ideas, we would give them that knowledge and they would go away and do that themselves and they knew that we trusted them to do it (Kim, Latham HS)*

Nathan also supported pupil autonomy by handing over more responsibility to his learners for their own learning. He did this by adopting an approach similar to TGfU (Bunker & Thorpe, 1982). Using this approach, he encouraged his pupils to make more decisions about what they learned and how they learned through the use of questioning and games play.

Supported autonomy: the pupils' perspective

While the pupils did not talk so extensively and explicitly about feeling autonomous in PE compared to the teachers, all of the pupils described positive experiences where they felt they had some control or choice over their learning. For example, all of the pupils from Garside HS described positive experiences in PE where they felt they had a genuine choice of activity within the curriculum. The pupils from Baiden HS appreciated the flexibility that their PE teacher offered within the curriculum, where they could make a request to move between PE classes, even after they had made their initial choice about which activity to take part in. Rather than focusing on having 'choice' within PE, the mixed group from Latham HS mentioned how they enjoyed the responsibility that their teacher offered them and enjoyed planning their own sessions. For example, in describing a positive experience in PE, one of the girls from the mixed class said:

> *You had to do a warm up and then you got to pick what you wanted to do. So like, in your team, they didn't tell us what to do we had to make it up ourselves.*

Successful learning experiences: the teachers' perspective

All of the teachers explained that they wanted their 'disengaged' pupils to experience more success in their learning. They did this by organising lessons that were less skills-focussed

and more focussed on the broader areas of learning in PE, for example, observing, evaluating, problem-solving and decision-making. Aligned with this was the strategy of creating various roles for learners during the lessons, for example, observer or score-keeper.

The teachers believed that this allowed more of their learners to engage in activities that suited their abilities, needs and interests. An example of this was provided by Nathan who suggested that the TGFU approach that he adopted moved the focus away from simply learning 'skills', to developing pupil understanding. He described how this enabled many of his pupils to understand the game (volleyball) in more depth, which increased their confidence, engagement and their performance. Another strategy that was used by the teachers to ensure learner success was to organise differentiated tasks for different levels of ability. A useful example of this was provided by Helen when she described her gymnastics lessons, where she organised a variety of different learning stations. In this example, Helen wished to create as many individualised opportunities for successful learning as possible, ensuring that all of the pupils in their class felt and were included.

Successful learning experiences: the pupils' perspective

All of the pupils discussed positive experiences in PE in relation to opportunities to be successful, but this was especially the case for the pupils from Latham HS and Baiden HS. They described a number of learning environments (in addition to working with peers that they could trust) that they believed had a positive impact on their learning in PE. For example, the pupils from Latham HS liked PE when there were, no "messing about" by other pupils, when instructions were clear and they could have maximum time on task. The pupils from Baiden HS liked to learn new things and were happy with the range of skills that they were being taught in their gymnastics class. They felt that there was something for everyone and that everyone had opportunities to be successful.

> Its (gymnastics) just better. Cause you've got more skills you can do in gymnastics. Cause you're learning new things. (Baiden HS, female, all-girls class)

Post interview teacher reflections and workshops

Peer grouping

During both workshops, after the findings from the pupil interviews had been shared, the teachers described their attempts to encourage the pupils to develop better relationship with each other. In particular, they recalled more of their success stories since the interviews and reflections, many of which involved deliberate and flexible grouping strategies. During the second workshop, for example, Kim explained that she had recently paid very close attention to the groupings in her class and had created groups (in discussion with her colleagues) based on how the learning environment might make the pupils feel 'safe'.

> So then we had a conversation to work out who will they work well with, who are they going to want to perform with in a safe environment (Kim, Latham HS)

During the first workshop, Nathan highlighted the importance of getting the grouping 'right', noting that friendship grouping might be a good place to start until confidence and trust have developed and then the pupils should be challenged to explore new groupings and develop their social skills.

Autonomy

Over the two workshops, the teachers had detailed discussions about the concept of autonomy, articulating the ways in which it is both understood and enacted. During the first workshop, the teachers had a detailed discussion about the concept of autonomy in the PE, with some of the teachers initially relating it to providing pupils with choice of activity and the practical difficulties surrounding this. However, this discussion soon moved towards a discussion about autonomy, engagement and learning. For example, the principal teacher of Latham HS stated that the main focus for his department is pupil-led learning, far more than activity choice. He was highly aware of the fact that his pupils want choices and does intend to provide them with choices, but just in a different way – a choice of *what* and *how* to learn, rather than simply a choice of activity. In this way, he claimed, pupils would be able to take the credit for their own successes. This conception of autonomy and choice articulated by the principal teacher of Latham HS was reinforced by Kim during the second workshop. During this workshop, she described a 'project-based learning' course that she had developed, where her pupils selected a topic and worked in groups to develop the methods to learn more about that topic. She elaborated further by describing how it had created more time for her to listen to her students, and for her pupils to experience a form of success that mattered to them. Also during the second workshop, Helen from Baiden HS described a similar course that she was developing as a result of her engagement in this research project. She was developing the framework for a 'health and wellbeing' course that the pupils had to design and organise, based on their own interests, needs and learning.

Collaborative and on-going reflection

There was some evidence from the post-interview reflections and the workshops that the teachers had not taken this much time before to consider the variety of reasons why pupils might be disengaged from PE. Furthermore, having the opportunity to discuss the issues with 'others' appeared to enhance their reflections, as evidenced by this excerpt from Helen's post-interview reflection:

> *The opportunity to discuss this and talk through my practice really helped me to take the time to consider and evaluate my own practice. It is too easy to keep trying different things without analysing what has worked and how. It also gave me some ideas of things we could change as a whole department to help disengaged pupils to reengage with the subject* (Helen, Baiden HS, post-interview reflection).

As well as creating time for the teachers to discuss their practice, Tamara highlighted in her post-interview reflection that the researcher encouraged her to reflect on her teaching in a more critical way.

Interestingly, all of the teachers said that, as a consequence of their engagement in this study, they would continue to reflect and discuss key issues with both colleagues and pupils. Malcolm, for example, suggested that the limited time he has in the PE department resulted in strategies that were re-active or a 'quick-fix'. However, his engagement in this study has motivated him to be more pro-active and work collaboratively with his staff to develop ideas to re-engage his disengaged pupils. Similarly, Helen explained that the ideas generated through her engagement in the project have 'dominated' departmental meetings. Working collaboratively beyond the PE department, the principal teacher from Latham HS described how he had shared his experiences of the project with his senior leadership team. Subsequently, they have developed a 'new' curriculum for a group of disengaged

boys within the school (age 11-12). Furthermore, all of the teachers agreed to participate in a 'follow-up' project that has facilitated further inquiry and collaboration.

Discussion

To further establish the use of AI as a means of understanding and potentially enhancing PE pedagogy, this research investigated the successful teaching and learning strategies developed by PE teachers to re-engage disengaged pupils. In doing so, we found that the teachers developed teaching strategies that fostered trust, supported pupil autonomy and aimed to create opportunities for all pupils to experience success. Furthermore, by having opportunities to discuss their practice, listen to each other and their pupils, they appear to have developed a greater awareness and understanding of their own practice. Additionally, we argue that the positive principle that underpinned this investigation, a principle that encouraged the teachers to understand and build on their own success stories, may have contributed to their on-going reflection and inquiry.

Fostering trust, autonomy and success
The development of trust was implicit in all of the strategies that were developed by the teachers. This was achieved by creating time to talk to, listen to and respond to their pupils' views, feelings and ideas. Importantly, this was also evidenced by the pupil discussions about their positive experiences in PE. Many of the pupils felt like they could talk to their teachers about their choices and their learning, and that the teachers would listen and respond to them. This has been shown in previous research that has explored pupil engagement in PE where both pupils and teachers have highlighted the importance, not just of listening, but of listening *and* responding to pupils' views (Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010). Relatedly, the *way* in which the teacher communicated with the pupils was also important. Here, the both the pupils and the teachers discussed during the interviews the importance of the teacher communicating calmly and not making the pupils feel like they were being forced to do something. For the pupils, it was also important that the teacher was respectful towards them. Supporting this view, Lugguetti et al. (2016) suggest that when teachers relate to their pupils in this way, the balance of power shifts and pupils begin to feel more equal. In line with activist approaches to teaching PE, this has the potential to empower pupils to make more meaningful contributions to their own learning and the learning of others. Investing in, and establishing a more equal and empowering relationship is not easy for teachers, it takes time, patience and courage (Rudduck, 2007). However, it is a critical factor for those who wish to engage in voice-oriented initiatives (Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010) and create a more autonomy-supportive learning environment (Van den Berge et al., (2012), both of which are likely to result in greater engagement, enhanced learning and more positive perceptions about PE (Mitchell et al. (2015).

Just as important as fostering positive teacher-pupil relationships was the role of the social interactions and relationships between pupils. During the interviews, the pupils emphasised that enjoyment of, and engagement in PE lessons were often associated with friendship grouping, or groupings that facilitated and supported their learning. These views seemed to be related to feelings of trust and respect, which in turn allowed the pupils to engage in learning tasks with confidence and without fear of being judged or ridiculed. This is similar to the findings of the activist research carried out by Oliver et al. (2009) who found that when the girls participated in physical activity without being judged by 'outsiders', being a "girly girl" did not seem to matter anymore, and they were able to take part in activity that

contradicted their claims about what it meant to be a girl. Although there is evidence from the focus group interviews that grouping was an important issue for the pupils, it was not until the teacher workshops , after the results from the pupil interviews had been presented, that the teachers discussed how they might construct groupings and facilitate positive peer relationships. They discussed that, since taking into account the perspectives of their pupils, they had been more considered and flexible in their selection of groups. However, highlighting the valuable knowledge and experience that the teachers bring to the teaching and learning process, it was also important for them to put the pupils into groups that challenged and extended their social skills. This might involve groupings that encouraged, for example, listening, problem solving and evaluating, importantly, skills that are known to support positive student-student relationships (Marcus, 2016).

For the teachers in this study, the development of skills such as listening, problem-solving and evaluating was also important to ensure that all pupils had opportunities to be successful in learning. One of the strategies that they used to create more learning opportunities for the diverse needs their learners was to adopt pupil-centered teaching approaches. For example, TGfU (Bunker & Thorpe, 1982) was adopted by Nathan to develop the pupils' performance in a broad range of skills, ensuring that all pupils could experience success by enhancing their perceptions of competence in various learning domains. This idea is supported by Moy, Renshaw and Davids (2015) who suggest that pupil-centred teaching strategies by their very nature are more likely to offer individualised learning experiences because of their close alignment to the abilities and needs of each learner. With teaching approaches such as TGfU, learning is not limited to the physical domain (i.e., learning motor skills), but also includes learning in the cognitive and affective domains, thus developing and extending how competence is understood and developed in the PE context. This may be especially important because perception of competence is a critical factor in creating an autonomy-supportive learning environment and increasing autonomous motivation for engagement and learning (Vansteenkiste et al., 2004). Indeed, creating opportunities for individualised and autonomous learning were important aims for all the teachers in this study, where the teachers encouraged their pupils to take responsibility for both *what* they learned and *how* they learned. In Baiden HS and Latham HS, for example, the pupils were given opportunities to design their own curriculum, as well as make choices about how to engage and learn within their curriculum. This enabled the learners to create an environment that they could personally and culturally connect with and, as Kim suggested, resulted in a more meaningful form of success. Importantly, Kim also suggested that this approach provided her with more opportunities to listen and respond to her pupils, and consequently, she was able to foster a more trusting relationship with her pupils. These findings resonate well with the work carried out by Enright and O'Sullivan (2010) who found that the activist approach they used with a group of girls, transformed the relationship between the teacher and the learner. Like Kim, it allowed the teacher to connect with the girls and help them to create a a more meaningful and socially relevant PE experience.

Teacher learning
To a large extent, the teachers involved in this study were already part of a story of change. They had invested time and effort in developing their own practice, and so it was not surprising that they might invest further effort in creating time and space to talk to the researcher, talk to each other and engage in personal reflection. The teachers in this study also all appeared to be highly committed to their pupils and their learning, even though each group of disengaged pupils were said to be a minority within each school. This in itself is

interesting and also counter to previous research suggesting that when PE teachers perceived their pupils to be 'low-motivated', they find it difficult to justify changing their practice as any changes may not be well received by the majority of engaged pupils (Anstrom, 2012). However, like the PE teachers in Pill's (2016) game sense study, the teachers in the present study invested significantly in these pupils, driven by a focus on their motivation, engagement and learning.

While there is evidence to suggest that the teachers were already engaging in some level of reflection and change, the type and level of this reflection may have been enhanced by their engagement in the AI process. It has previously been shown that, when teachers work with external experts, their professional knowledge and skills are extended which, in turn, can lead to changes in their interactions with their pupils (Timperley, Parr & Bertanees, 2009). Demonstrating the Constructionist and the Positive Principles that underpin AI (Whitney & Trostenn-Bloom, 2010), the teachers in the present study were supported by the researcher to articulate, analyse and share their success stories. This appreciative approach, we suggest, has encouraged them to engage in a level of reflection that has led to greater self-awareness and a greater understanding of their own practice and pupil experience. This was evident in the detailed ways in which the teachers were able to articulate the successful aspects of their practice to the researcher during the interviews and to each other during the workshops. For example, during the first workshop the teachers began their conversation about pupil autonomy in PE in relation to offering activity choice. This perspective developed during the discussion, and moved towards a more comprehensive conception of autonomy that referred to the pupil's personal connection to their learning, and personal responsibility for their learning. It appears as though the platform for discussion and debate that the workshop offered the teachers has encouraged them to explore the concept in depth and, for some, may have resulted in a change in the way that this concept is understood. According to the 'Poetic Principle' underpinning AI, we are reminded here that teachers are not static, they are subject to on-going change and what they choose to focus on will determine that change (Whitney & Trostenn-Bloom, 2010).

Creating time to reflect and discuss with others is not easy for teachers, and typically, time for reflecting and planning is overlooked by teachers due to the prioritisation of other responsibilities within the context of an extremely busy workspace (Bennie et al., 2017). Malcolm (Garside HS), for example, was not only responsible for the PE curriculum in his school. In his role as a Curriculum Leader, he was responsible for the whole school Health and Wellbeing curriculum. This meant that the time he had to devote to developments within the PE department was more limited, and he suggested that this could partially explain why there appeared to be some negative comments about PE from the pupils in this school. However, Malcolm said that in the future, he would aim to be more pro-active in creating time to listen to his pupils and to work with his staff to develop ideas that aim to motivate and engage their pupils. In fact, all of the teachers in the study said that they would create more time for professional dialogue with colleagues in and beyond the PE department. Developing communities of practice in this way is important in relation to sustained teacher learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), which may be further enhanced by the positive focus of this project (The Positive Principle). This continued commitment to collaborative learning and professional learning may be because AI is a positive and empowering experience for teachers, giving them ownership over the process and the outcomes of their inquiry.

Conclusions
Very little educational research has been carried out using AI as a theoretical framework to examine teachers' practice. In one of the first of its kind, this study has explored the ways in

which teachers attempted to re-engage disengaged pupils in PE, and importantly, also took into account the experiences of the 'disengaged' pupils. This study was not an 'intervention' to test the effectiveness of a particular method or model, or one that was potentially disconnected from their practice and their current context. Nor was this study an attempt to expose current teaching practice as something to be 'fixed'. On the contrary, we understood the teachers to already be engaging in practices that had the capacity to re-engage disengaged pupils. Furthermore, the teachers were able to develop their knowledge by discussing, listening (to each other and their pupils), reflecting, sharing and theorising. This allowed them to design (and in some cases, co-design with their pupils) programmes and learning environments that were meaningful, empowering and motivating. Viewed as a form of continuing professional development, this model for teacher learning is similar to that proposed by Armour, Quennerstedt, Chambers and Makopoulou (2015). Underpinned by Dewey's (1938) concept of 'education as growth', Armour et al. (2015) conceive learning, not as knowledge to be 'acquired', but as personal growth within a nurturing environment that guides and shapes learning according to individual needs, context and pupils. From this perspective, teacher learning is not merely a cognitive activity, but is an emotional activity, (Day, 1999), where the teachers make an emotional commitment to improving their learning and the learning experiences of their pupils. Importantly, this emotional, personal and meaningful form of learning in-context, is a key factor influencing teachers' compulsion to learn. Furthermore, we suggest that this compulsion to learn is enhanced by the positive focus that AI affords. Learning experiences that build on previous successes are likely to lead to continued engagement in learning because the outcomes are less uncertain, and teacher's self-esteem is enhanced (Thomas, 2007). Whether a positive future for the teachers and their pupils in the present study can be sustained, remains to be seen, and will perhaps require further investigation. Indeed, future research is warranted in this field, especially research that examines teacher change and pupil engagement over a sustained period of time. A more sustained period of time in each school might also enable a greater understanding of each context and the structures that facilitate and constrain, teacher learning, teacher practice, student experience and positive change.

Note

1. The Health and Wellbeing curriculum is one of the core areas of the National Curriculum alongside Literacy and Numeracy. Many schools in this context structure their curriculum according to each core area and subjects such as PE or Maths are logically positioned within each.

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Table 1: Teacher participants

Name (pseudonym)	School	Age	Gender	Teaching experience	Years in school	Position
Kim	Latham HS	28	Female	7	4	PE teacher
Nathan	Latham HS	36	Male	11	3	PE teacher
Malcolm	Garside HS	30	Male	8	6	Curriculum Leader
Tamara	Garside HS	36	Female	10	8	PE teacher
Helen	Baiden HS	23	Female	2	2	PE teacher

Table 2: Pupil participants

School	Mixed Focus Group	Male Focus Group	Female Focus Group
Garside HS		n=5 (13-14 years)	n=5 (13-14 years)
Latham HS	n=6 (2 male, 14-15 years)	n=5 (14-15 years)	
Baiden HS			n=5 (14-15 years)