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METHODOLOGY

"Crazy Ideas": Student Involvement in Negotiating and Implementing the Physical Education Curriculum in the Irish Senior Cycle

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine senior cycle students' views on their involvement in negotiating and implementing curriculum and how the methodologies they experienced affected their investment in and ownership of the physical education (PE) curriculum. The study was conducted in an urban coeducational comprehensive school. Participants were 24 students, (12 male, 12 female), aged 15 to 16 years, the physical education teacher, and the teacher-researcher. Throughout the study, participants negotiated and discussed their PE experiences and selected, implemented, and participated in activities and a student-designed curriculum unit. The teacher-researcher adopted several research instruments and procedures to gather data from participants, which he then analyzed and used for discussion. Student involvement in negotiating the PE curriculum in the Irish senior cycle positively impacted participants. Increased dialogue and collegiality allowed students and teachers to redesign their PE curriculum, making it more relevant to their lives. Opportunities for decision making and responsibility increased students' ownership, investment, and participation in

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PE. Opportunities for effectively eliciting student voice and student involvement in negotiation requires teachers and students to experience a shift from traditionally perceived roles to more collegiate, innovative, facilitative, and constructive roles in PE. Involvement in selecting, critiquing, and negotiating activities evoked a spirit of inquiry, critical thinking, problem solving, self-reliance, initiative, and enterprise within the students. In particular, it heightened respect and cooperation among teachers and students, who learned to value each other's perspectives and the considerations that needed to be acknowledged in selecting, negotiating, and implementing activities.

The findings suggest that curricula constructed by and with students as opposed to for them may increase their investment and ownership and evoke responsibility rather than disengagement and alienation. If the vision of senior cycle education indeed "sees the learner at the centre of the educational experience" (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2009, p. 10), student voice and involvement in negotiating the curriculum has a fundamental role to play not only in physical education, but also in all senior cycle subjects.

Listening to students may provide valuable perspectives and new insights into the complexities of teaching and learning that then may be applied to improving the quality of physical education (PE) in schools (Dyson, 2006). Carlson (1995) found that "lack of personal meaning" (p. 470) was a main reason for student alienation, suggesting that "all students would like to be given more control and more choice" (p. 470) as to the activities in which they participate as part of their PE classes. In particular, "less competitive activities were seen by participants as more enjoyable and less stressful than the traditional sports based curriculum" (p. 470). Carlson highlighted that "if physical education class makes sense to students (i.e., if the subject is perceived as having positive value for them personally), they take a non-alienation path" (p. 474). By engaging with students and listening to their voices, Carlson elicited the problems these students had that were otherwise being overlooked.

Brooker and McDonald (1999) investigated how student voice has been positioned in curriculum innovation. They observed that "school subjects clearly place teachers at the centre" (p. 90), alienating the voice of the student. They suggested that "student voice could have informed the development of the subject in ways that other stakeholders could not" (p. 92), providing further argument of

the need for teachers to listen and gain students' perceptions of the curriculum to make it more meaningful, developmentally appropriate, and worthwhile.

Student Voice in Physical Education in an Irish Context

Student voice in PE in an Irish context is a relatively new departure, particularly in the senior cycle. Enright (2010) provided a new approach to student voice through methodologies that helped disengaged girls reimagine and invest in a PE program that "placed themselves at the centre and challenged former physical education curricular boundaries" (p. 203). Her findings called for a more radical approach to facilitating and promoting student voice in PE:

> Adult allies (teachers and researchers, and teachers as researchers) who support student voice work need to be open to the shift in roles, responsibilities and identities propelled by a real commitment to hearing students. (p. 184)

Unless teachers adapt and embrace such shifts in roles, responsibilities, and identities, the less likely they are to experience change in the way in which they, as adults and teachers, listen to students and implement PE programs in the future.

Negotiating the Curriculum: Investment and Ownership

Negotiating the curriculum means "deliberately planning to invite students to contribute to, and modify, the educational programme, so that they will have real investment both in the learning journey and in the outcomes" (Boomer, Lester, Onore, & Cook, 1992, p. 14). Negotiation may promote successful learning that requires the teacher to value difference, scope, variety, diversity, inclusivity, and change through understanding the heterogeneity of the class, approaching learning as an active process, and valuing students' knowledge and interests (Glasby & MacDonald, 2004). Students' experiences of a negotiated curriculum broadened their notions of the possibilities for learning in PE and the contribution PE could make to their lives (McMahon, 2007). This led to increased investment and commitment to the content due to increased ownership of students' learning.

Enright (2010) based her study "on the premise that students are the primary stakeholders in their physical education experiences

and should be recognized as co-constructers of knowledge, and of action" (p. 205).

Implementing a Negotiated Physical Education Curriculum

In pedagogical encounters, teachers matter, their beliefs and viewpoints matter, and their understanding of their students and the environment in which they teach is pivotal to learning (Tannehill, 2011). The *Overview of Senior Cycle Education* (National Council for Curriculum Assessment [NCCA], 2009) stated that the "vision of senior cycle education sees the learner at the centre of the educational experience" (p. 10). The *Physical Education Draft Curriculum Framework* (NCAA, 2011) aims to "encourage learners' confident, enjoyable and informed participation in physical activity while in senior cycle and in their future lives" (p. 10). The proposed framework requires dissemination of these visions and aims to guide the teachers who will be responsible for implementing the new framework in schools. This is easier said than done. Halbert and MacPhail (2010) observed that "principals' and teachers' positive dispositions towards the introduction of new and revised physical education syllabuses is undermined by an apparent uncertainty surrounding them" (p. 34). MacPhail (2007) emphasized the need for contextualization when implementing a PE curriculum: "It is necessary for those operating in the recontextualising field to understand teacher and school conditions that strengthen or weaken the efficient and effective implementation of syllabus" (p. 58). If a successful PE curriculum is to be implemented, it requires not only student involvement and negotiation but also professional development and a shift in beliefs and values of the school, the students, and its staff that is carefully monitored and evaluated. If schools are for and about students, the way forward in how educators (teachers, parents, curriculum makers, coaches, etc.) work is clear. Educators need to adopt a student-centered negotiated approach to teaching and learning in PE (Glasby & MacDonald, 2004). By investigating student involvement in negotiating and implementing a PE curriculum in the Irish senior cycle, this study may provide answers to the research questions outlined that may serve to inform how future PE curricula should be designed.

Prior to this study, the teacher-researcher advocated student voice and student involvement in negotiating the PE curriculum and wanted to conduct a study that involved students in a meaningful and invested way. Student involvement in curriculum construction

in PE has been limited, and research has focused more on students' views of the curriculum rather than on how students contributed to its construction (Brooker & McDonald, 1999). Researchers need to find ways for teachers to access student voice so this knowledge better informs research and teaching practice (Dyson, 2006).

Recent advocates of student involvement in negotiating and implementing PE curricula have based their research on the Irish PE context. McMahon (2007) investigated student involvement in negotiating the PE curriculum within the context of the Irish primary school, observing that "unequal power relationships between students and teachers rendered students voiceless in their PE class, with little or no opportunities to contribute to, or influence, curriculum construction" (p. 131). Students' experiences of a negotiated curriculum broadened their notions of the possibilities for learning in PE and the potential contribution PE could make to their lives. Enright (2010) found that "because the curriculum [designed and implemented in their study] respected the girls' agency and 'differing identities' by allowing them opportunities to actively engage in curriculum-making, they respected it and were invested in making it work" (p. 146). The teacher-researcher wanted to investigate whether student involvement in negotiating and implementing the PE curriculum in the Irish senior cycle could have similar outcomes.

Further research in curriculum negotiation in PE is necessary to substantiate claims of increased ownership and investment of students in PE curriculum (McMahon, 2007). By conducting this study, the teacher-researcher hoped he could substantiate or challenge such claims, providing valuable recommendations for further research in student involvement in negotiating and implementing curricula and, specifically, the PE curriculum in the Irish senior cycle. He hoped that evidence also may surface that would have implications for the education of prospective teachers as change agents in soliciting and using student voice in program design.

The aim of this study was to examine senior cycle students' views on their involvement in a process of curriculum negotiation and implementation and how the methodologies they experienced affected their investment in and ownership of the PE curriculum. Four research questions guided the study:

1. What methodologies are most successful in facilitating student voice in explicating their ideas about PE and engaging them in curriculum design?

2. How does increased involvement in curriculum decision making impact students' engagement with PE and physical activity?

3. What environment and activities are most successful in involving students in active participation in PE and physical activity?

4. What happens when we engage with students to challenge formal PE curricular boundaries?

Methods

The study was conducted in an urban coeducational comprehensive school. Twenty-four students (12 male, 12 female), aged 15 to 16, the PE teacher, and the teacher-researcher participated. Participants negotiated and discussed their PE experiences and selected, implemented, and participated in activities and a student-designed curriculum unit. The teacher-researcher adopted several research instruments and procedures to gather data from participants, which he then analyzed and used for discussion. Each phase of curriculum design through gaining student voice is outlined in Table 1 and is described in the procedures.

Table 1
Phases of Curriculum Design, Procedures, and Instruments for Data Collection

Phase of curriculum design	Procedures	Instruments for data collection
Initiation stage	Class consultation	Surveys
Taster sessions	Student-led post-lesson reflection, class consultation, and negotiation in selecting alternative activities	Focus group interviews
Negotiation and selection of cycling unit	Student involvement in negotiating and selecting curriculum unit for participation	Focus group interviews
Implementation of curriculum unit	Student-led participation in 4-week cycling unit in physical education classes	Teacher-researcher journal and post-lesson appraisals
Reflection on the processes and experiences during the engagement period	Class consultation	Focus group interviews

One-on-One Interview

Reason (1998) defined participatory action research (PAR) as a qualitative research perspective that sees people "co-creating their reality through participation; through their experience; their imagination and intuition, their thinking and their action" (p. 262). Using PAR to spearhead the approach of negotiating and implementing a PE curriculum, the teacher-researcher set about implementing the research methods into the context of the study. To increase triangulation and gain honest and purposeful data from subjects, the teacher-researcher employed methodologies that attempted to address and uncover participants' feelings and thoughts.

Data Analysis

The Miles and Huberman (1994) framework was used for data analysis, which involves reducing data, displaying and drawing data, and verifying conclusions based on the literature and data analyzed. This framework was used for the surveys, focus group interviews and one-on-one interview, and the teacher-researcher journal. Data reduction is the process of selecting, abstracting, and transforming data that appear in field notes or transcripts. Data display involves displaying results in "an organized, compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action" (p. 11). Drawing and verifying conclusions from displayed data and confirming their strength involve using specific tactics such as "forming patterns, looking at contrasts, clarifying relationships, and building a coherent understanding (p. 286). Triangulation was used to "increase scope, depth and consistency in methodological proceedings" (Flick, 2005, p. 227.). This was done by adopting measuring instruments that attempted to address and uncover the participants' feelings and thoughts throughout the study such as surveys, focus group interviews, one-on-one interviews, a teacher-researcher journal, and post-lesson appraisals alongside taster sessions and continuous class consultation and negotiation. The teacher-researcher and faculty supervisor viewed and read the displayed data, discussing and analyzing themes and patterns that were coherent and those that required further clarification.

Surveys

Surveys enable a significant amount of data to be collected and the relationships between data to be identified, and they are considered reliable data gathering tools that enable efficient analysis

with low error rates (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003). A survey was given to students at the beginning of the study to serve as an introduction to the study and as a means of gauging their perceptions toward the idea of student voice and their PE program. The survey contained a list of high order and low order questions that students were asked to answer by ticking their preference or by writing an answer in their own words (e.g., Would you like to be entrusted with greater responsibility and involvement in negotiating and planning the content in your PE classes? Would you be willing to participate with peers in establishing a group that would be responsible for planning and implementing various class activities?). Students also were asked to rank in numerical order the following aspects of their PE classes they felt should be negotiated: what activities they did, the order in which they did them, and allowing them to plan and lead activities and take responsibility in classes. They also were asked to rank the aspects they felt were the most important in negotiating and planning a PE program: that they participated in an activity they enjoyed or that everybody in the class participated in an activity they all enjoyed.

The surveys were compiled and analyzed individually and collectively using the Miles and Huberman (1994) framework. Data reduction involved organizing and assembling the initial survey results. Data display involved representing the results through graphs using Microsoft Excel. Drawing and verifying conclusions then occurred by transferring to Microsoft Word, where it was further analyzed so themes and patterns could be identified, which led to key findings and conclusions.

Focus Group Interviews

Interviewing is helpful for teachers to learn about students' perceptions of their programs (Graham, 1995). In this study, the teacher-researcher wanted to explore and interpret students' PE classes through the students' eyes. The teacher-researcher invited students to participate in focus group interviews of six participants at the beginning of the study and after the implemented cycling program. Those who wished to participate in the interviews then were selected randomly from this group. The focus group interviews intended for students to discuss their attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of PE in the junior and senior cycle and the study, prompting them to reflect and critique their experiences of PE in the school and during the study. The teacher-researcher saw these questions as relevant

and accessible to the students and chose to engage students in specific areas of reflection and thought. Table 2 lists these interview questions.

Table 2
Focus Group 1 Questions

1. What do you think of the physical education program in your school? Does the physical education program truly reflect student differences in abilities and attitudes? (Positives & Negatives)
2. Is physical education the same so far this year as last year? In what way? (Junior Cycle vs. Senior Cycle)
3. How does PE compare to other subjects? (Pupils Interests, Status of Subject)
4. Is there an effort to listen/pay attention to your voice/interests/abilities? What are you learning?
5. What frustrates you in PE classes?
6. What gives you the most enjoyment from PE classes?
7. "School subjects clearly place teachers at the centre" (Brooker & McDonald 1999). Respond to this statement.
8. "Listening to students can provide valuable perspectives and new insights into the complexities of teaching and learning that can then be applied to improving the quality of physical education in our schools" (Dyson, 2006). Respond to this statement.
9. What are your initial reactions to the proposals of you, the pupils, negotiating and implementing a PE curriculum with your teacher?
10. Is enough of an effort being made to listen to your voice? How can this be improved? What needs to be addressed from both sides?
11. What are your responses to the taster classes? (Positive & Negative)
12. Can you see/feel a change in your involvement in PE classes and the way the lessons are being presented to you?
13. Where would you like to see PE classes go from here? Back to the school's curriculum? A new curriculum?
14. What role do you see yourself playing in PE classes? What role would you like to play in PE classes?

The first focus group interviews occurred outside of PE classes during the school day in an appointed room and were conducted by the teacher-researcher, who invited students to discuss and answer questions pertaining to their PE experiences in school (e.g., What do you think of the program in your school? How does PE compare to other subjects? What frustrates you in class? Is enough of an effort being made to listen to your voice?). For the second focus group interviews, pupils reflected on their overall experiences during the study and after the cycling unit. These interviews occurred outside

of PE classes during the school day in an appointed room and were conducted by the second author, a faculty member with experience in facilitating focus group interviews, who engaged pupils to reflect on their classroom experiences in areas such as what significant changes they had observed in class, what activities and practices were successful in engaging them in participation, whether they had felt they had challenged the formal PE program, and whether their involvement in a process of curriculum negotiation had affected their investment and ownership of PE classes. Table 3 lists these interview questions.

Table 3
Focus Group 2 Questions

1. What have been the significant changes that you have observed or experienced in PE lessons? Have there been many?
2. Throughout the study, you met regularly as a class with the teacher-researcher to discuss lessons and activities. Describe the negotiation processes that you went through with the teacher-researcher. Was it successful? Was it helpful? Where could it have been improved? What was omitted?
3. What practices were most successful in giving you, the student, the opportunity to voice your ideas about physical education and physical activity as well as in the process of negotiation. Meetings? Feedback Sheets? Discussion?
4. Reflect on the activities you have negotiated and participated in (Frisbee, outdoor adventure, cooperative games, tag rugby, cycling). What did you enjoy/dislike about these activities? What did you learn about yourself and your peers?
5. Did the "taster sessions" approach to lessons work? Were you happy with the chosen cycling unit prior to its implementation? Do you feel that it was negotiated appropriately?
6. In what way do you feel that as students you challenged formal PE curricular boundaries in the school with the cycling program?
7. How did your increased involvement in decision making impact your engagement with physical education and physical activity? Were you involved more? Did you have to change the way you approached physical education?
8. Could you see/feel a change in your involvement in PE classes and the way the lessons were being presented to you?
9. Have students' views (you and your peers) of your involvement in a process of curriculum negotiation affected your investment and ownership of the PE curriculum? Has it improved? Deteriorated?
10. Where would you like to see PE classes go from here? Back to the school's curriculum? The adopted curriculum? A new curriculum?
11. Can the approach used by the teacher-researcher and the class be sustained going forward? What role do you see yourself playing in PE classes? What role would you like to play in PE classes in the future?

The focus group interviews were recorded using a dictaphone. Data reduction occurred through transcribing the recorded interviews by typing and then saving them as documents on Microsoft Word. Data display was provided using instant visual access to the transcribed data on Microsoft Excel. These data then were segmented and reassembled to facilitate more conceptual and theoretical thinking, highlighting key findings, themes, and patterns that students and the interviewer identified, which were then used for discussion. In doing so, the researchers were able to draw and verify conclusions to complete the analysis.

One-on-One Interview

The PE teacher participated in a one-on-one interview at the end of the study to give her interpretation of the experience, prompting her to look at the changes she observed in the PE experience during the study: what was different about the approach, how the students responded to it, and how the approach and students' responses challenged the teacher to rethink the way in which she approached classes and engaged with students in PE.

Teacher-Researcher Journal and Post-Lesson Appraisals

The teacher-researcher maintained a journal throughout the research process and the implementation of the cycling curriculum. In this journal, he reflected on the progression of the study and notable changes and events that were occurring inside and outside of the PE classes with the students. Further scope for reflection in the journal was provided by students' post-lesson appraisals during the implemented cycling unit.

The teacher-researcher used students' post-lesson appraisals to reflect on and describe students' negotiated experiences at the end of each lesson in the cycling curriculum. This created a record of students' thoughts on what they experienced during the lesson. Each student was given a small colored card on which to write. Pupils were invited to give at least one positive and one negative they experienced or identified in the lesson. In addition, they were asked to provide feedback on where they thought the curriculum content should move in the next lesson. The teacher-researcher reflected on these narrations and commented on them in his journal. After each lesson, the teacher-researcher reflected on the lesson noting the students' individual and group reactions to tasks and activities that he observed and felt were worthwhile and meaningful to the study.

The teacher-researcher journal and post-lesson appraisals were collated and typed using Microsoft Word. This allowed the data to be visually analyzed for key findings, themes, and patterns. The data were segmented and reassembled and analytically compared to the literature and other data collected to draw and verify conclusions as the final part of the Miles and Huberman (1994) framework.

Procedures

Taster Sessions

Similar to the process that Enright (2010) adopted, the class participated in selected taster sessions with a view to participate in one as a full unit. As with Enright's process, the purpose of these taster sessions was to "extend students' knowledge base, give them a greater frame of reference to make decisions relating to their physical education experiences and shake up their perceptions of what physical education was and could be" (p. 134). Students were presented with alternative activities that were not part of their school's PE program such as tag rugby, Frisbee, cycling, outdoor adventure, cooperative games, Zumba, lacrosse, yoga, and water games. From the list of options, students chose as a group in which activities they would like to participate as tasters before the day of the lesson. Once they selected the activity, the teacher-researcher or the PE teacher assigned roles and responsibilities and led the lessons. The taster session lessons were one-off 80-min lessons where students participated in a different activity in each lesson over 5 weeks instead of following their traditional PE program.

The students' experiences in the taster sessions led to the reflections and discussion that occurred in the continuous class consultation and negotiation (CCCN) meetings. By reflecting and providing feedback on the taster sessions, students and the teacher-researcher were able to critically evaluate the elements that appealed most to them and that led to disengagement or off-task behavior. These then served as prerequisite considerations when negotiating and implementing the next taster activity in PE lessons, which eventually led to choosing and implementing the cycling unit.

Continuous Class Consultation and Negotiation (CCCN)

The consultation process occurred in conjunction with the taster sessions. First, students were introduced to the teacher-researcher. After establishing rules, routines, and expectations, students, the PE

teacher, and the teacher-researcher consulted on how they would approach the first PE class. Initially, the teacher-researcher organized the time and place of the meetings, which occurred during students' school lunchtimes. Students were invited to attend, and attendance was not compulsory. However, all students attended the meetings. After the first meeting and lesson, responsibility was passed over to the pupils who continued to organize the meetings during lunchtime, usually once a week. These meeting provided the participants with a platform to express their thoughts, attitudes, and ideas openly in an effort to improve and modify the next PE experience.

After each lesson, pupils reflected on and discussed their reactions to the lessons in these meetings. They also discussed the results of the survey they had completed and how these data could be interpreted and used going forward, particularly topics that emerged as potential lesson activities. Students and teachers proposed activities based on this list, providing rationale and reasons why the class should engage in an activity. Everyone then was invited to argue for or against this activity. They also were required to reason with the teacher-researcher and their peers as to the challenges and limitations that they faced regarding some activities.

After the debate and discussion, students were invited to vote on which activity they wished to pursue. Students agreed on a "majority rules" decision. Once the votes were counted, the teacher-researcher made a final check to ensure that the class, as a whole, was happy and willing to participate in the activity.

After deciding on an activity, pupils discussed what roles and responsibilities they would have in the lesson. Pupils were happy for the most part for the teacher-researcher to lead the lessons and select the content of the activity, provided it was fun and enjoyable. However, they also were made aware of the need for learning outcomes and accepted this as a prerequisite to each lesson. Pupils then would volunteer or be selected to perform roles and responsibilities. These ranged from calling the role to leading warm-ups and activities, selecting teams, and helping with equipment. Roles and responsibilities were rotated for each lesson to ensure every student experienced leadership and followership in the lessons.

This CCCN process continued throughout the study until pupils decided what activity they wanted to pursue in their PE classes as a full unit. Once students had decided on which activity they were going to learn in their lesson, cycling, and which roles and responsibilities they had, they participated and engaged in the lesson.

Selection of Cycling Unit

Students, the PE teacher, and the teacher-researcher consulted and negotiated for 2 weeks the activity they wished to pursue as a unit in their timetable. Participants gave ideas and suggestions, and students discussed pursuing these activities and how they would make the activities feasible, realistic, and enjoyable to everybody and facilitate learning experiences. After negotiation and consultation, students, the teacher, and the teacher-researcher decided on cycling as an activity that was possible to implement and in which everybody was happy to participate. Students voted on the activity and found a way to implement it effectively alongside the teacher-researcher.

Implementation

The Cycling Program was implemented on Tuesday, January 9, 2012, and continued every Monday morning for 4 weeks during students' PE classes. Cycling Pursuits Ireland provided the bicycles and additional equipment for participation and taught the lessons assisted by the students, the teacher-researcher, the PE teacher. Limerick County Sports Partnership funded the lesson. The lessons lasted 80 min and were delivered inside and outside the school grounds. The lessons focused on basic cycling safety and maneuvering, advanced cycling maneuvering, maneuvering obstacles, demonstrating road signals, and finally cycling on public roads safely. Student feedback was taken after each lesson using the post-lesson appraisals. In lessons, students were given safety demonstrations in relation to cycling. They participated in cycling drills and activities with a focus on improving their confidence and efficiency in cycling. After three lessons, students were taken outside the school and around the local area using designated cycle lanes, demonstrating the key skills and awareness while cycling on public roads. The unit ended after the four lessons so the teacher-researcher could analyze and evaluate the impact of the negotiated curriculum unit on the students' PE experiences.

Results

Results were arranged with the purpose of answering the research questions that guided the study, comparing and contrasting data in the context of what is already known from the existing research literature. With this in mind, the results are presented under the headings of the research questions.

What methodologies are most successful in facilitating the students' voices in explicating their ideas about PE, and engaging them in curriculum design?

Dialogue and collegiality, PAR, guidance in decision making, and teacher-student relationships emerged from the data as key methodologies that were successful in facilitating students explicating their ideas about PE and engaging them in curriculum design.

Dialogue and collegiality. Similar to Fielding's (2003) findings, students and the PE teacher identified a lack of time and space prior to the study where they engaged with one another "as equals, as genuine partners in the shared undertaking of making meaning of their work together" (p. 309). The introduction of CCCN allowed students greater opportunities to regularly explicate their ideas about PE and their experiences. Rita, a student, said it was not "a waste of time" as she had preconceived, but rather "really good," giving them "a bigger say," as Eric, a student, described it. Structures and process allowed for student participation in decision making, and opportunities were provided for students to construct knowledge and meaning (Beane & Apple, 1999).

The extent to which dialogue and collegiality was created emphasizes Fielding's (2003) belief that "students and teachers need each other, need to work as active partners in the process if it is to be either worthwhile or successful" (p. 307). Without the teacher-researcher, the PE teacher and the students' engagement in constructive dialogue could not have been realized.

Participatory action research (PAR) pedagogy. Moving PE classes toward a student-led curriculum using PAR pedagogy was not an easy process. It took time for students and teachers to ascertain their new roles and responsibilities. Gradually, with PAR pedagogy, students' voices, ideas, and talents became more prominent in PE. This led to a shift in roles that Enright (2010) observed in her study where the student became "expert and co-constructor of the research agenda" and "active constructor of knowledge and curriculum" (p. 201), where students such as Jill "got a say about what they wanted to say" and where students' ideas "weren't dismissed." PAR helped students understand the considerations and procedures they had to acknowledge and engage with to make it happen, giving them the opportunity to "lead the way toward innovative solutions" (Mitra, 2004).

Guidance in decision making. Although students appreciated the level of responsibility and decision making they were being giv-

en, they acknowledged the guidance they were receiving from the teachers. Students were comfortable in seeking guidance and help in explicating their ideas of PE and curricular design. Steve, a student, felt the "structure wouldn't be able to hold if you didn't have the teachers doing what they do." Students stressed the importance of guidance in decision making and argued for a collaborative approach to decision making involving students and teachers (McMahon, 2007).

Young people, when provided with guidance, encouragement, and support, can and will rise to the challenge and take ownership of their learning, and doing so may be a positive, energizing, and exciting experience for teacher and student (Enright, 2010). Participants had to ensure that the designed curriculum was reasonable, realistic, and achievable and that, in the words of PE teacher, "students were sensible in what they wanted to do." Rather than deter them from the potential curriculum design options students could negotiate, design, and implement, it served to provide a cogent pattern of decision making that led to the eventual cycling unit.

"Never really felt like a teacher": Teacher–student relationship. The PE teacher and students acknowledged the relationship they developed with the teacher-researcher was instrumental in the success of this study. The teacher-researcher was a change agent in the eyes of the students, and Eric observed that students were "more comfortable around him." Mutual respect largely develops from the pupils seeing through actions that the teacher is competent and that he or she cares about students' progress by planning and conducting effective lessons and conducting tasks with commitment (Kyriacou, 2007). Jill saw the teacher-researcher as "more of a friend," but she also acknowledged that the students "respected him because he was doing things [they] wanted to do and [they] enjoyed doing." In managing his role as the facilitator and co-researcher alongside students, the teacher-researcher "never really felt like a teacher," as Eric said. This allowed pupils to take on more prominent roles and responsibilities in the lessons.

How does increased involvement in curriculum decision making impact students' engagement with PE and physical activity?

The students and the PE teacher acknowledged that participation and investment had increased. Through their reflections on the negotiation and implementation process and their participation in PE

lessons, students identified an increase in their own and their peers' levels of enjoyment, involvement, investment, and ownership of the PE curriculum and the overall classroom experience. They alluded to this in the focus group interviews:

- "We got to choose what we wanted to do instead of being forced...you'd kind of learn more things as well; the cycling was interesting it was different" (Derek).
- "You'd be more eager to play" (Brenda).
- "Especially if it's your idea you're happy to go to PE then" (Rita).
- "Everyone was giving full attention as well. There was no one falling behind; not giving up" (Eric).
- "Not dreading going to PE...You just try more" (Jill).
- "You'd enjoy it more. I don't think there was anyone that had to be given out to" (Steve).

The PE teacher observed changes in students' readiness and participation, where students "were eager at the start and the finish to keep going," something she "wouldn't normally expect to have" in PE activities. They appreciated opportunities to be involved in the decision-making process and alluded to feelings of increased ownership of and investment in their PE classes (McMahon, 2007).

Through involvement in curriculum decision making, participants could identify "real investment both in the learning journey and in the outcomes" (Boomer et al., 1992, p. 14). Eric summed it up: "It made us feel more part of the PE." The teacher-researcher observed in his journal that "pupils felt positively about physical education" after the experience.

What type of environment and activities are most successful in involving pupils in active participation in PE and physical activity?

A key pattern emerging from the data was that environments that evoked responsibility and shared ownership through noncompetitiveness as a result of the taster sessions and the novel nature of activities led to positive curriculum experiences.

Responsibility and shared ownership. Students were able to identify an increase in their responsibility and shared ownership of

the PE curriculum. In the beginning, Alex didn't expect his "interests to be met," and other students noted a lack of meaning and cooperation as factors that contributed to giving them the least enjoyment in PE classes. Classes moved away from student alienation, similar to Carlson's (1995) alienation–nonalienation model. Giving students greater responsibility in classes led to active participation, culminating in full participation during the cycling unit, "the first time this has happened since [the teacher-researcher has been] working with the class."

Noncompetitive activities. With this age group, most participants saw less competitive activities as more enjoyable and less stressful than the more traditional sports-based curriculum (Carlson, 1995). With a more standards-centered approach, students' participation and pleasure orientations changed dramatically. Students saw the cooperative activities in the outdoor adventure lesson as giving the class the most enjoyment, as students were actively engaging in physical activity, leading to Brenda declare it "the best PE that [they'd] had." The PE teacher was "amazed at how well they cooperated" and the "big buzz" that was created in the same lesson.

Students' behavior and feedback throughout the cycling unit demonstrated an increase in enjoyment, involvement, investment, and ownership of PE with "everyone giving full attention; no one falling behind; not giving up" (Eric). The teacher-researcher said, "Pupils felt positively about physical education."

Taster sessions and novel activities. The taster sessions and the curriculum decision meetings invited students to think about learning "in ways that they may not have done previously, and in ways some of them may not have been thrilled about in the beginning" (Enright, 2010, p. 201). These helped students critically evaluate the activities in which they engaged, helping them to identify novel noncompetitive activities as more enjoyable and participatory. Students' engagement in constructive feedback of the taster sessions and the cycling was powerful in guiding students and the teachers toward answering Kinchin and O'Sullivan's (2003) call to "better understand the types of learning experiences desired by youth" to "sustain their interest in physical education" (p. 258).

Relevant curriculum experiences. Similar to Ennis's (2000) observations, the main constraint to "student engagement [was] the curriculum itself" (p. 128). Through listening to what students wanted from PE classes and negotiating, students and teachers were able to design a unit that students such as Derek "wanted to do instead of being forced."

Design of the cycling unit was primarily the students' idea. They saw it as relevant to their lives, an activity in which they were all willing to engage as a class. Even though Clare "didn't want to do cycling at all," she was still "willing to try." Because the experience was more relevant to the class, the resistance to participation and engagement was minimal.

What happens when we engage with students to challenge formal PE curricular boundaries?

Awareness and elicitation of student voice and experiences. Without student involvement, the cycling unit would not have been realized. Similar to the findings of Brooker and McDonald (1999), student voice had the potential to inform the development of the subject "in ways that other stakeholders could not" (p. 92). Student voice informed and challenged curricular boundaries that followed through into the negotiated curriculum where the teacher-researcher acknowledged that "without pupils telling" him about what they enjoyed and disliked about the initial cycling lesson, he would not have known based on his observations. The validity of student voices and the purpose in which students used them to adapt their PE curriculum and lessons emphasizes that "students should be treated with respect by teachers and that their opinions should be valued" (Gorard & Huat, 2011, p. 688).

Awareness of obtaining "smaller" voices. The issue of capturing a wide representation of student voice remains difficult (Brooker & McDonald, 1999). Engaging with students provided scope for negotiating and implementing the PE curriculum and presented the teacher-researcher with the opportunity to seek out and engage the "smaller" voices in the class. Trying to gain the voice of all students is not easy and not always possible, but students, when given the opportunity to have a say, may push toward working together, toward the interests of the entire group.

Awareness of the teacher's voice. Context considerations are crucial to curricular success because the context in which students live shapes their interests, abilities, and attitudes (Beane & Apple, 1995). By engaging in negotiation and discussion, the teacher-researcher and teacher gained valuable insight into the students' thoughts and attitudes toward issues. So too did students develop an appreciation for considerations from the teacher's perspective. One of the PE teacher's concerns about seeking student voice was whether she could "deliver what they want." Students were able

to identify when opportunities were possible and times when they were, perhaps best described by the PE teacher, "crazy ideas." Students grew to appreciate what was possible and understood what the teachers could not follow through on using reasoning and discussion.

Shift in roles. Although the teacher-researcher initiated the process of negotiation and guided students in decision making, students experienced a shift in roles by becoming co-constructors of the research agenda. Students themselves decided the path of the curriculum and the activities in which they would participate. Students such as Derek learned "more things" moving from a role as passive recipients of learning to active constructors of knowledge and curriculum. For students to continue to grow as autonomous decision makers, they need to be provided with more opportunities for decision making in subsequent units of instruction (McMahon, 2007). The teacher-researcher observed the shift in student roles, stating they were "in an experienced position to negotiate and implement physical activities inside and outside of the school" after the experience.

The PE curricular experiences the students designed placed them at the center and challenged formal curricular boundaries (Enright, 2010). Unless a shift in roles had occurred, this would not have been the case. Students and teachers changed the way they looked at PE from each other's perspectives. Because students were able to openly discuss, negotiate, and challenge the formal curricular boundaries in the school, participants were able to bring about change and improvement in a meaningful form.

Discussion

Impact of Student Involvement in Negotiating the Curriculum

Student involvement in negotiating the PE curriculum in the Irish senior cycle positively impacted participants in several manifestations. Increased dialogue and collegiality allowed students and teachers to redesign their PE curriculum, making it more relevant to the students' lives. The radical collegiality that participants adopted in approaching curriculum design led to the realization of fresh curricular possibilities that allowed students to engage and participate in PE in an unprecedented manner.

Through a PE PAR pedagogy, the teacher-researcher listened and worked to understand who the students were and what, where, and how he may facilitate their active engagement in PE and deepen

their learning (Glasby &MacDonald, 2004). The students in roles as researchers, co-constructors of the research agenda, and active constructors of the knowledge and curriculum, directed the devised PE program toward the realization of a cycling unit.

Opportunities for decision making and responsibility increased students' ownership, investment, and participation in PE. Carefully and moderately guided in decision making, students engaged purposefully toward innovative tailoring of the PE curriculum and away from traditional curriculum design. In observing the students engaging in the study, the PE teacher was presented with a new approach to working with students of that age group.

Student Voice in Physical Education

Without the elicitation of student voice, the negotiation and implementation of activities and the cycling unit would not have been realized. The concept of student voice initially was difficult for the class to accept and engage with. Students gradually recognized the sincerity and extent to which their voice was being listened to and appreciated. Students wanted to be involved in negotiation and curriculum design. It required teachers and students to engage in PE not only in the classroom, but also outside it. Student voice was evoked in a constructive and collaborative manner, and students were able to use their voices purposefully toward improving their experiences and relationships with each other and the teacher.

Evoking student voice was not without opposition. It elicited ideas of PE and curriculum design from conflicting viewpoints. Although the majority of students gradually became involved, "smaller" voices resisted. In acknowledging and identifying "smaller" voices, the teacher-researcher and teacher made efforts to address them, which led to resolutions. As students began to recognize that the teachers were willing to let them negotiate and take responsibility, student voice became prominent and constructive.

Student involvement in selecting, critiquing, and negotiating activities evoked a spirit of inquiry, critical thinking, problem solving, self-reliance, initiative, and enterprise. In particular, it heightened respect and cooperation among teachers and students, characterized by valuing each other's perspectives and the considerations they needed to acknowledge in selecting, negotiating, and implementing activities.

Teacher–Student Relationship in Negotiation

Teaching and learning is about relationships; every element in the learning experience is built around it. Although students appreciated the opportunities to be autonomous and exercise their own volition, they acknowledged the importance of the teacher in facilitating student learning and decision making (McMahon, 2007). If teachers and students are to act and be perceived by each other as change agents, they need to adapt and reimagine their relationship for a shift in roles and constructive negotiation to occur. To similarly reimagine the PE curriculum with students of a similar age group in the Irish senior cycle, teachers must reflect on the relationship and interactions they have with their students. Furthermore, students need to have the confidence and maturity to engage with teachers purposefully and objectively.

Implications

The findings and discussion serve to strengthen the case for student involvement in negotiating the curriculum, particularly with students of this age group. They also endorse the role of students as stakeholders in the design of PE curricula through eliciting student voice. Negotiating the curriculum allowed students to make more choices on what they saw as relevant PE experiences, informing teachers in the process.

If the vision of senior cycle education indeed "sees the learner at the centre of the educational experience" (NCCA, 2009, p. 10), student voice and involvement in negotiating the curriculum has a fundamental role not only in PE, but also in all senior cycle subjects. Participants in this research demonstrated an ability to accomplish many of the aims and objectives of traditional curricula despite engaging in new and colorful content. In providing students with the opportunity to select activities based on their meaning and relevance, the scope for delivering curricula and achieving outcomes may be broadened and contextualized. The findings suggest that curricula constructed by and with students as opposed to for them may increase their investment and ownership and evoke responsibility rather than disengagement and alienation.

The Physical Education Draft Curriculum Framework (NCAA, 2011) aims to "encourage learners' confident, enjoyable and informed participation in physical activity while in senior cycle and in their future lives" (p. 10) with students at the center of the experience. If this is the case, students must be encouraged to speak about

PE to inform peers and teachers of how they may invest and participate in informed physical activity in new ways.

Future teacher education needs to consider the potential that student involvement in constructing an intended curriculum may have for their investment and learning. As the participants in this study demonstrated, PE teachers, teachers, and pre-service teachers have the potential to become change agents in curriculum design, engaging with students and stakeholders in co-constructing relevant and meaningful curriculum and learning experiences.

Teachers, students, schools, and curriculum makers need to acknowledge the findings and implications student voice and student involvement in negotiating the curriculum had in this study. As curriculum design moves forward, in PE and across all subjects, student involvement in the design and implementation of meaningful curricula is critical.

The following are key implications for students, teachers, and researchers for involvement in negotiation:

1. Increased awareness of student voice and what it may offer to teachers in terms of a pedagogical approach to curriculum design.

2. Increased dialogue and collegiality between students, teachers, and curriculum makers.

3. Continued professional development of PE teachers to facilitate PAR and a shift in roles.

4. Continued consultation with senior cycle students prior to implementing new PE syllabi and integrating student involvement and negotiation into the new syllabus and framework.

5. Facilitate opportunities for negotiation of PE curriculum in the senior cycle.

6. Encourage local innovation and tailoring of PE curriculum in the senior cycle, particularly in transition-year programs.

Conclusion

This study highlighted the potential student voice and involvement in negotiation has to offer to curricular and educational experiences. Future research needs to investigate how student voice and involvement in negotiating curriculum may be better actualized and implemented effectively.

PE teachers, teachers, and pre-service teachers need to be made more aware of student voice and how to engage with it purposefully and meaningfully. The implications of this study invite research of a similar nature in other subjects to whether teachers are effectively promoting and endorsing the *Overview of Senior Cycle Education* (NCCA, 2009) in their subject areas.

Teachers may feel that chaos may result from allowing students to make decisions, particularly as a negotiated curriculum eventuates in several learning pathways in the one class (Glasby & MacDonald, 2004). PAR often is a precarious process creating "an in-between space of possibility and uncertainty" (Enright, 2010, p. 202). This uncertainty is where much of the promise and the problems associated with supporting PE PAR pedagogy lies (Enright, 2010). A concern of the PE teacher during the study was, "did [students] just have crazy ideas or were they sensible in what they wanted to do?" Her concerns were valid and justified. In the end, her concerns were unwarranted. The commitment, purpose, and enterprise the class increasingly demonstrated in this study vindicated the trust and responsibility that was presented to them by the PE teacher and the teacher-researcher. PE teachers, teachers, and pre-service teachers need to have the mettle and faith to engage with students in radical collegiality in an effort to put students, their interests, and their growth at the center of educational and curricular experiences.

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