

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This research investigates student involvement in negotiating and implementing the physical education curriculum in the Irish senior cycle. This chapter presents a rationale for the study, the aims and objectives of the study, the research questions, an outline of the methodology used and definition of terms.

1.2 Rationale for Study

Prior to this study, this researcher advocated the concept of student voice and student involvement in negotiating the physical education curriculum and wanted to conduct a study which involved students in a meaningful and invested way. A lack of student involvement in curriculum construction is particularly the case in PE, where research has focused more on students' views of the curriculum rather than how students contributed to its construction (Brooker and MacDonald, 1999). Researchers need to find ways for teachers to access student voice, so this knowledge can better inform both research and teaching practice (Dyson, 2006). A review of relevant literature intimated a clear need to investigate the topic further in an effort to promote, advance and modify the concept as well as the methodologies that have already shown to improve students' investment and attitudes towards physical education in schools through processes of negotiation and collegial communication in an Irish context.

Some of the more recent advocates of student involvement in negotiation and implementation of physical education curricula have based their research around the context of Irish physical education settings (McMahon, 2007; Enright 2010). McMahon (2007) investigated student involvement in negotiating the physical education curriculum within the context of the Irish Primary School physical education curriculum. She found 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" (McMahon, p.131, 2007). Students' experiences of a negotiated curriculum broadened their notions of the possibilities for learning in physical education and the potential contribution physical education could make to their lives (McMahon, 2007). Enright found that "because the curriculum [designed and

implemented in her 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 (Enright, p. 146, 2010). The researcher wanted to investigate whether student involvement in negotiating and implementing the physical education in the Irish senior cycle would have similar outcomes.

Further research in curriculum negotiation in physical education is necessary to substantiate claims of increased ownership and investment of students in physical education curriculum (McMahon, 2007). It was hoped that by conducting this study, such claims could be substantiated or challenged, providing valuable recommendations for further research in student involvement in negotiating and implementing physical education curricula and, specifically, the physical education curriculum in the Irish senior cycle. It was hoped that evidence might also surface that would have implications for the education of prospective teachers as change agents in soliciting and using student voice in programme design.

1.3 Aims

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 physical education curriculum.

1.4 Research Questions

Four research questions have guided the study:

1. What methodologies are most successful in facilitating student voice in explicating their ideas about physical education, and engaging them in curriculum design?
2. How does increased involvement in curriculum decision making impact students' engagement with physical education and physical activity?

3. What type of environment and activities are most successful in involving pupils in active participation in physical education and physical activity?
4. What happens when we engage with students to challenge formal physical education curricular boundaries?

1.5 Overview of Chapters

1.5.1 Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter explores the source material pertaining to this study. It investigates the concept of student voice from a broad perspective and, then, in a physical education context, providing a rationale for its advocacy in a school setting. It examines the hypothesis of curriculum design and what a meaningful and successful physical education curriculum should incorporate and consider based on the values and beliefs of its stakeholder. It synthesizes the literature reviewed and summarises considerations for future directions in investigating student involvement in negotiating and implementing a physical education curriculum.

1.5.2 Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter outlines the qualitative methods through which the researcher shaped the study. It provides a context within which the study was based and profiles the participants involved. It then recounts the methodological procedures through which the study advanced and evolved. It presents and rationalises the data collection instruments. It explains the process through which the accumulated data was collected and analysed in order to gain objective findings for further discussion.

1.5.3 Chapter 4: Research Findings

This chapter presents the key research findings of the study in relation to student involvement in negotiating and implementing the physical education curriculum in the

Irish Senior Cycle. It provides a breakdown of the main research findings into different themes and topics which have been identified through the data analysis process.

1.5.4 Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter discusses the research interpreting, comparing and contrasting it to what we already know as reported in the existing literature review. The main findings are extended with qualitative expansion and ideas.

1.5.5 Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

This section summarises the main findings, highlights areas where more work is needed and suggests avenues for future development of this work. It also draws an overall conclusion from the study based on analysis, findings and discussion.

1.6 Glossary of Terms

Curriculum

A curriculum is a set of objectives and outcomes that describe what students are to achieve in a particular subject matter and the activities planned to achieve those outcomes (Siedentop and Tannehill, 2000).

Continuous Class Consultation and Negotiation

CCCN was the procedure in which participants in this study engaged in regular dialogue and discussion in order to reflect on classroom experiences and negotiate and implement the physical education curriculum inside and outside of class.

Negotiating the Curriculum

“Negotiating the curriculum means deliberately planning to invite students to contribute to, and to modify, the educational program, so that they will have real investment both in the learning journey and in the outcomes” (Boomer, 1992, p.14).

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

PAR represents “an epistemology that assumes knowledge is rooted in social relations and most powerful when produced collaboratively through action” (Fine et al, 2001, p. 173). It is a qualitative research method that sees people “co-creating their reality through participation; through their experience; their imagination and intuition, their thinking and their action” (Reason, 1998, p. 262).

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to explore the source material pertaining to this study and provide a context which has inspired and advocated the purpose and approach to examining how student involvement in negotiating and implementing a physical education curriculum in the Irish senior cycle can affect and promote their ownership and investment in the subject.

Firstly, it explores the concept of student voice from a broad perspective and, then, in a physical education context, providing a rationale for its advocacy in a school setting. Secondly, it examines the hypothesis of curriculum design and what a meaningful and successful physical education curriculum should incorporate and consider based on the values and beliefs of its stakeholders. These will be substantiated with examples of studies and findings relevant to the study.

Finally, the chapter will synthesize the literature reviewed and summarise considerations for future directions in investigating student involvement in negotiating and implementing a physical education curriculum and ways in which the study will involve these.

2.2 Student Voice

2.2.1 Its Meaning and Characteristics

The term “student voice” encompasses many interpretations and meanings. In recent years, the term “student voice” has been discussed in the school reform literature as a potential avenue for improving student outcomes and facilitating school change (Fielding 1999; Mitra 2003; Rudduck & Flutter 2000). This can range in levels of collaboration and involvement. Mitra (2004) differentiate between these levels as follows:

At the most basic level, young people share their opinions of problems and potential solutions through student councils or in focus groups associated with school strategic planning. At a

more sophisticated level, young people share their 'voice' by collaborating with adults to actually improve education outcomes, including helping to 'improve teaching, curriculum and teacher-student relationships and leading to changes in student assessment and teacher training'. (p. 24)

In essence, new definitions of "student voice" involve young people in constructive partnership with adults allowing them to influence what happens to them at school, and become cooperatively involved in their own learning in school and curriculum improvement through evoking meaningful personal ownership and responsibility.

2.2.2 Eliciting Student Voice – Collaboration and Shared Ownership

It is one thing to understand the meaning of student voice. It is another thing to decide how to teach and how to organise students to ensure that student voice is being exercised. There is widespread agreement among all young people that students should be treated with respect by teachers and that their opinions should be valued (Gorard and Huat, 2011). Denying that respect, where it occurs, is an error of context by teachers because respect is a threshold or universal principle (Gorard and Huat, 2011). Researchers need to discover better ways for teachers to access student voice, so this knowledge can better inform their practice (Dyson, 2006). Mitra (2004) illustrates three ways in which curriculum makers, schools and teachers can use "student voice" in educational reform, highlighting three specific approaches: adults listening to students through interviews and surveys; students engaging in collaboration with adults; and leadership initiatives in which youth sought to make changes in their schools and communities. Mitra emphasises that "if increasing student voice truly means sharing the ownership of school decision making with students, then youth must do more than speak their minds about problems; they must have the opportunity to lead the way toward innovative solutions" (Mitra, 2004, p. 724). Essentially, it is up to the schools and adults to provide students with these opportunities which allow them to engage more prominently in such roles whereby they are actively involved in the negotiation and implementation of the curriculums they are subject to.

2.2.3 Critiquing Student Voice – Dialogue and Collegiality

Fielding's *Transformative Approaches to Student Voice* (2003) explores the theoretical underpinnings of radical approaches to student voice, examining issues that need to be addressed in order to move towards more constructive and transformative methodologies in the future. Similar to Mitra (2004) he identifies areas of incongruity in the way in which we, the adults, advocate and implement "student voice" in schools. He states that "there are no spaces, physical or metaphorical, where staff and students meet one another as equals, as genuine partners in the shared undertaking of making meaning of their work together" (Fielding, 2003, p. 309). Too much contemporary student voice work invites failure and disillusionment, either because its methodologies and contextual circumstances reinforce subjugation, or because its valorization pays too little attention to the extent to which young people are already incorporated by the practices of what is cool or customary (Fielding, 2003). In order to maximise the potential which student voice has to offer to learning experiences and curricula, we need to consider more closely the mind-set of what it is being experienced through the eyes of the teacher and, also, through the eyes of the student. In effect, it requires the intermingling and interdependence of both. It requires an explicitly intended and joyfully felt mutuality, a 'radical collegiality' (Fielding, 1999). Students as well as teachers demand respect and appreciate autonomy in their approach to learning. The students are the ones who will learn (or not) and so control of this learning, assisted by teachers, is fundamental to them (Gorard and Huat, 2011).

Fielding (2003) identified two categories in which to explore and critique approaches to student voice: 1) deconstructing presumptions of the present; and 2) the necessity of dialogue. He encourages a shift towards increased dialogue and cooperation between teachers and pupils which involves pupils taking on a more active role as researchers and implementers. Until and unless such spaces emerge transformation will remain rhetorical rather than real (Fielding, 2003). Ultimately, unless we revise and transform the way in which we evoke and exercise student voice, we are unlikely to see any radical change in the future to schooling systems.

2.2.4 Student Voice in Physical Education

Recent studies into student voice in different countries and education systems in a physical education context have illustrated both the lack of attention given to students' voices as well as the benefits of promoting and allowing student involvement in the

shaping of such environments. 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). In America, Carlson (1995) set about listening to the voices of alienated students and learned the reasons they gave for their feelings of alienation. Carlson (1995) found that “lack of personal meaning” (p. 470) was one of the main reasons for evoking student alienation. The survey she conducted also suggested that “all students would like to be given more control and more choice” (1995, p. 470) as to the types of activities they participated in as part of their physical education classes. The lack of personal meaning and student voice was leading to disengagement amongst the pupils surveyed. In particular, “less competitive activities were seen by most participants as more enjoyable and less stressful than the more traditional sports based curriculum” (Carlson, 1995, p. 470), highlighting 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), which in turn could lead to improved levels of participation and engagement. By engaging with these pupils and listening to their voices, Carlson was able to elicit the problems these students had that were otherwise being overlooked.

Brooker and McDonald (1999) investigated how student “voice” has been positioned in curriculum innovation, drawing on an evaluation of physical education in senior secondary schools in Australia. This study involved both teachers and students perceptions of physical education and the design of the curriculum. They found that “School subjects clearly place teachers at the centre” (1999, p. 90), alienating the voice of the student. They stated that “student voice could have informed the development of the subject in ways that other stakeholders could not” (1999, p. 92) providing further argument for the need for teachers and adults to listen to students and gain their perceptions of the curriculum as they perceive it in order to make it more meaningful, developmentally appropriate and worthwhile to the students.

2.2.5 Student Voice in Physical Education in an Irish Context

“Student Voice” in Physical Education in an Irish context is a relatively new departure, particularly in the senior cycle. Enright (2010) provides us with a new approach to “student voice” through a variety of methodologies which helped a group of disengaged girls re-imagine and invest in a physical education program which “placed themselves at the centre and challenged former physical education curricular boundaries” (2010, p.

203). Her findings highlighted the calls of Fielding (2003) and Mitra (2004) for a more radical approach to facilitating and promoting student voice in physical education stating that:

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.

(Enright, 2010, p. 201)

Examples of these shifts in roles included: Teacher as director to teacher as facilitator/guide; researcher as expert to student as expert and co-constructor of the research agenda; and student as passive recipient of learning to student as active constructor of knowledge and curriculum (Enright 2010). Unless we are willing to adapt and embrace such shifts in roles, responsibilities and identities, the less likely we are to experience change in the way in which we, as adults and teachers, listen to students and implement physical education programs in the future.

2.2.6 Embracing Innovative Methodologies

Central to Enright's studies was a fresh approach to the methodologies used to engage students and gain their insights. One such approach was providing students with "taster sessions" in order for them to experience a variety of new physical activities in which they could engage and participate. From these they could then set about designing a physical education program which stimulated and engaged them. The taster sessions and the curriculum decision sessions 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). As part of my research, I will be investigating if this and a number of new methodologies can work in the context of my study in a similar manner. Enright advocates the need to explore new methodologies and innovative approaches to challenge the current position and perceptions of physical education among students through gaining their viewpoint and insights and working with them:

Physical Education teachers need to have the courage and conviction to explore with their students the nature of curriculum content and the strategies for delivering content that would

engage students more meaningfully in physical education and physical activity outside of school, as well as developing awareness and advocacy for their voice in their educational experiences.

(Enright, 2010, p. 206)

We, as physical educators and teachers, need to radically embrace and engage with our students in new ways cooperatively in order to challenge disengagement with the curriculum in order to develop one that fosters responsibility, ownership and meaning onto those who engage with it.

2.3 Curriculum

2.3.1 Intended and Observed Characteristics

A curriculum is a set of objectives and outcomes that describes what students are to achieve in a particular subject matter and the activities planned to achieve those outcomes (Siedentop and Tannehill, 2000). Lund and Tannehill (2005) define new standards-based curriculum as “a curriculum that is developed looking at the standards, identifying the skills, knowledge and dispositions that students should demonstrate to meet these standards, and then identifying activities that will allow students to reach the outcomes stated in the standards” (p. 319). In a coherent curriculum, topics flow smoothly from one to the next with current knowledge serving as a foundation for the understanding of new, more complex information. In a coherent curriculum, students understand why the content is useful, interesting, and immediately relevant in their lives (Ennis, 2003). Through this research I will be investigating if pupils and the teacher can work together to create such a curriculum. Educational change has seen the education curriculum move away from internal teacher initiated and student context based learning to external standardisation and assessment orientation (Callan, 1998). While this has helped develop a curriculum that provides pupils with greater options and experiences that can be evaluated, it also means that schools are experiencing an “overburdened curriculum context [which is] counterproductive in improving the range and quality of learning in the school” (Callan, 1998, p.31)

2.3.2 Traditional Physical Education Curriculum Design

Successful physical education requires a meaningful, relevant curriculum articulated across grade levels, effective teaching, and organizational structures that allow for meaningful engagement (Siedentop and Tannehill, 2000). So, is “meaningful engagement” occurring out of designed and implemented physical education curricula? At the end of the last millennium, Ward and Doutis (1999) observed that “there are few studies that have reported on the implementation and evaluation of curriculum in physical education” (p. 393, 1999). Traditional physical education curricula have tended to counteract meaningful engagement by basing their design on the multi activity model centered on “traditional team sports that reward size and power” (Cothran, 2010, p. 54) as well as “a great deal of competition and public display of skill” (p. 54). Ennis (2000) states that “one of the major constraints to student engagement is the curriculum itself (2000, p. 128). MacPhail, Kirk and Kinchin (2004) state that students’ experiences of physical education are “clearly hampered under the current model for curricular design in the majority of school physical education programs” (p. 120). Such orientated curricula have led to student disengagement with physical education, warranting further research and investigation. Although curricula have been implemented, the lack of evaluation and review that has taken place means that the success of many physical education curricula has never been measured.

2.3.3 Standards Based Curriculum Design

A standards based curriculum design is defined by Lund and Tannehill (2010) as “A curriculum that is developed by looking at the standards (district, state or national); identifying the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that students should demonstrate to meet these standards; and identifying activities that will allow students to reach goals stated in the standards” (2010, p. 7).

More recently, there have been calls to move away from traditional curriculum designs and disseminate and implement main theme curriculum models in physical education (Oslin, Mitchell & Griffin, 2006; MacPhail, Kirk and Kinchin, 2004; Martinek and Hellison, 1997; Kinchin & O’ Sullivan 2003). Lund and Tannehill (2010) suggest a multimodel curriculum approach to physical education. This involves implementing “a set of well-selected main theme curricula” (Lund and Tannehill, 2010, p. 156) such as *Sports Education*, *Social and Personal Responsibility* and *Teaching Games for Understanding*. The curriculum models focus on specific, relevant, and challenging

outcomes that allocate more time for learners to be engaged with learning and that strive toward relevant and challenging outcomes (Lund & Tannehill. 2010). However, such curriculum models have yet to be implemented as part of the physical education curricula in the Irish secondary school physical education junior and senior cycles.

2.3.4 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, 1992, p. 14). This involves the teacher and student working together towards the design and implementation of a curriculum that reflects the beliefs and values of those who engage with it.

Negotiation can promote ‘successful learning’, 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 and McDonald, 2004). McMahan (2007) investigated student involvement in negotiating the physical education curriculum within the context of an Irish Primary School. She found 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” (McMahan, p.131, 2007). Unless an effort is made to cater for all parties equally in curriculum negotiation, the learning experience is unlikely to flourish and develop. Students’ experiences of a negotiated curriculum broadened their notions of the possibilities for learning in physical education and the potential contribution physical education could make to their lives (McMahan, 2007). This in turn lead to increased investment and commitment to the content due to increased ownership of students’ learning.

Enright (2010) based her study partly on curriculum negotiation with disengaged senior cycle girls “on the premise that students are the primary stakeholders in their physical education experiences and should be recognized as co-constructors of knowledge, and of action” (2010, p. 205) and focused on “the nature of the curriculum the girls collectively construct and their responses to the curriculum negotiation process, specifically, how does increased involvement in curricular decision-making impact on the girls’ engagement with their PE curriculum?” (2010, p. 205). She identified three phases of curriculum negotiation that took place: naming inequities;

broadening horizons; and change agency (Enright, 2010). The findings and response of the girls to the negotiation processes underlined the potential student involvement can have in negotiating the physical education curriculum. Because the curriculum 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 (Enright, 2010).

2.4 Challenges and Limitations for Teachers and Students

While research advocates the use of negotiation in curriculum design, there are a number of considerations that need to be made about whether or not to negotiate as well as how to do so. Teachers and students face a variety of obstacles and challenges when attempting to negotiate a curriculum.

Context considerations are crucial to curricular success because the context in which students live shapes their interests, abilities, and attitudes (Beane 1995). The context of the learning environment, the students' and the teachers' values and beliefs need to be considered. To work in negotiated ways with students can take significant time, particularly if a teacher's decision is to adopt a negotiated approach (Glasby and McDonald, 2004). A major consideration, particularly from an Irish perspective, is can a teacher make time for negotiation with several classes in planning units of work, given the demands they are already under? Parting power can also lead to confusion and misdirection. 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 and McDonald, 2004).

From a student perspective, the process can also be challenging. With perhaps thousands of hours schooling behind them in which they have 'practised' being compliant, 'being told' and being managed, to have to share in this responsibility can be unwelcome (Glasby and McDonald, 2004). In order to better understand how positive and constructive curriculum negotiation looks and works we need to consider and record the problems and issues that come up during the process from the students' perspectives.

The concept of change may also be difficult for students to accept. Kinchin and O' Sullivan (2003), who investigated incidences of student support for and resistance to a curricular innovation in high school physical education, found that "such change in

content and instructional climate early in the unit seemed to compound their unrest and heighten their resistance” (p.256). Introducing extensive change to the classroom climate, regardless of its innovativeness and potential can still lead to disengagement. Kinchin and O’Sullivan (2003) called for further research to “better understand the types of learning experiences desired by youth which might reduce and perhaps overcome their resistance while at the same time recapture and sustain their interest in physical education (p. 258). This study attempts to do so in an Irish Senior Cycle context.

2.5 Implementing a Negotiated Physical Education Curriculum

What is clear in all 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). Given the traditional design of curricular physical education, the implementation of such curricula lacks informed and collaborative negotiation with students as stakeholders. Curtner-Smith (1999) set about evaluating teachers’ approaches to implementing a new curriculum with their students in America. He found that the introduction of a new curriculum “did not result in a transformation of the values and beliefs which guided teachers’ practices” (Curtner-Smith, 1999, p. 92). Instead, teachers “adapted the new curriculum so that it was congruent with their existing perspectives and ideologies” (1999, p. 92). This led to disengagement among the students. These findings highlight the need to involve students’ perspectives in the curriculum making process to better inform how a new curriculum should be delivered as well as teachers relinquishing power and control for the betterment of the learning experience. Otherwise, the dissemination and implementation of the curriculum is superficial and lacks meaning and ownership for the pupils involved.

Physical education practices need to adopt a student centered negotiated approach to teaching and learning (Glasby and McDonald, 2004). The NCCA (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment) in its *Overview of Senior Cycle Education* (2009) states 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* (2011) aims to “encourage learners’ confident, enjoyable and informed participation in physical activity while in senior cycle and in their future lives” (p. 10, 2011). The implementation of the proposed framework as part of the senior cycle requires dissemination of these visions and aims among the teachers who will be

responsible for implementing the new framework in schools. This is easier said than done. Halbert and MacPhail (2010) surveyed principals and physical education teachers across Ireland in order to seek greater insight into their perceptions of their implemented curricula and the proposed senior cycle physical education syllabus. They observed that “a principals’ and teachers’ positive disposition towards the introduction of new and revised physical education syllabuses is undermined by an apparent uncertainty surrounding them.” (Halbert and MacPhail, 2010, p. 34) and that “a change in the culture and organisation of schools and changes in teaching and learning practice are interlinked, and that to undertake one without the other results in superficial change.” (2010, p. 38). MacPhail (2007) emphasises the need for contextualisation when implementing a physical education curriculum, stating that “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” (2007, p. 58). If a successful physical education curriculum is to be implemented, then it requires not only a level of student involvement and negotiation but also professional development and a shift in beliefs and values of the school, the students and its staff which is carefully monitored and evaluated.

2.6 Conclusion

If schools are for and about students, then the way forward in how educators (teachers, parents, curriculum writer, coaches, etc.) work is clear. Physical education processes need to adopt a student centred negotiated approach to teaching and learning (Glasby and McDonald, 2004, p. 143). The purpose of this literature review was to explore, question and critique student involvement in negotiating and implementing a physical education curriculum in the Irish senior cycle based on previous research examples and contemporary beliefs. Based on the literature and evidence presented there is a clear need to investigate the topic further in an effort to promote, advance and modify the concept as well as the methodologies that have already shown to improve students’ investment and attitudes towards physical education in schools through processes of negotiation and collegial communication.

While, much research has been conducted which substantiates and promotes student voice in curriculum negotiation and design, the lack of autonomy given to pupils continues to exist in the context of the Irish primary and secondary education systems and is played out on a national basis. It is interesting to note that some of the more recent advocates of student involvement in negotiation and implementation of

physical education curricula have based their research in the current context of Irish physical education curricula (McMahon, 2007; Enright 2010). While there is a small and emerging literature base on student engagement in physical education curriculum negotiation, we still do not know much about the benefits or challenges associated with this kind of work and how physical educators might be supported in facilitating students' active and authentic participation in curriculum construction, and ultimately if and how a negotiated curriculum might work to create more personally meaningful and socially relevant physical education experiences for students" (Enright, 2010). Further research in curriculum negotiation in physical education is necessary to substantiate claims of increased ownership and investment of students in physical education curriculum. [...] Additionally, there is a need for research to consider ways in which students can reflect, discuss and critique their physical education experiences and subsequently examine the impact this has on the curriculum negotiation process as well as on the students themselves (McMahon, 2007). Both studies not only highlight the need for a change in approach of curriculum negotiation using student voice in an Irish context, but in an international context also.

Timkin and Watson (20010, p. 139) argue that "little real or substantive improvement will occur in teaching, in student learning, and specifically in the moral fiber of our lives and the lives of students (and others), without a drastic reconceptualization of our purpose as educators, and specifically as educators". If curriculum makers are to have any hope of successfully designing and implementing successful and student centred physical education curricula, they need to investigate and explore if such curricula and accompanying models can be successfully implemented on a preliminary and evaluated basis, before disseminating and implementing them in a national context. By investigating student involvement in negotiating and implementing a physical education curriculum in the Irish senior cycle we can provide more answers to the research questions outlined which can serve to inform us on how future physical education curricula should be designed.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the qualitative methods through which the researcher shaped the study based on the context and participants, the experiences constructed, the processes of data collection and analysis, and the challenges and limitations that were encountered throughout. It provides a context within which the study was based and the participants involved. It then recounts the methodological procedures through which the study advanced and evolved. It presents and rationalises the data collection instruments. It also explains the process through which the accumulated data was collected and analysed in order to gain objective findings for further discussion.

3.2 Context

This section provides the context within which the study was completed under the following headings: the school; the students; the physical education teacher; and the physical education curriculum. All participants are given pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

3.2.1 School

The study was conducted in an urban co-educational comprehensive school on the outskirts of Limerick City. The school consisted of approximately 1000 pupils and 65 staff members. The school was governed by the Jesuit religious order and a Board of Management comprised of teachers, parents and members of the local community. Most pupils were from the local catchment area reflecting middle and upper class families as opposed to low income families. Although the school was comprehensive, pupil enrolment was based on detailed selection criteria as the demand was more than what the school could accommodate. Entry criteria included the primary school attended, whether the pupil lived in the local catchment area and whether the pupil had family members who previously attended the school. The school engaged with junior and senior cycle subjects and curricula alongside many extra-curricular activities.

3.2.2 Students

The study was centred on “De Chardin”, a senior cycle transition year class. The class was composed of 24 students, (12 male/12 female), ranging from 15 to 16 years of age. Students were of mixed ability, with a number of pupils who possessed physical and learning disabilities. All students were involved collaboratively in the negotiation and implementation processes of the study and were active participants in the “taster lessons” and implemented curriculum.

3.2.3 The Physical Education Teacher

The cooperating physical education teacher had been teaching the subject in the school for more than ten years. She was enthusiastic and passionate about physical education and interested in the initial study proposal. She was willing to allow other leaders to teach the lessons and actively observed and participated in the running of them. Prior to the study, she identified the disengaged disposition of students in her classes and their conflicting attitudes towards physical education while also recognising her obligation to deliver the school’s physical education program. She was aware of the challenges and limitations which she faced as a physical education teacher in the school but was committed to addressing them. She saw the potential that the study had in offering for student investment and engagement in physical education and was critically and constructively involved in the negotiation and implementation processes with the students and teacher-researcher throughout.

3.2.4 The School Physical Education Curriculum

As there is no mandatory physical education syllabus in the Irish Senior Cycle at present, the school designed and implemented its own curriculum. The Transition Year program is based on a 30 week cycle, with six blocks of activities lasting five weeks each. Classes took place on Monday mornings, once a week, and were 80 minutes in length. Activities outlined in the Transition Year program included tennis, swimming, basketball, Frisbee and athletics as well as an options program which was constantly modified and adapted to cater for additional activities which could be accommodated within the timetable such as alternative dance, tennis, racquetball and yoga. Participation in physical education was compulsory and the program was guided by specific implemented rules, routines and expectations.

3.3 Research Design

3.3.1 Critical Lenses and Triangulation

This study focused on investigating how student involvement in negotiating and implementing a physical education curriculum in the Irish senior cycle can affect their ownership and investment in the subject. In my short but eventful experiences as a pre-service teacher I have come to appreciate the potential and promise students can bring to their own learning as well as shaping the world that both they and I share. When setting about to investigate the topic I wanted to ensure that I was being realistic and objective in my research approach. This required careful consideration of the methodologies and manner in which I set about gaining insights and data from the various participants and stakeholders.

Brookfield (1995) identified four reflective lenses which can serve teachers in becoming critically reflective in their practices: our autobiographies as learners and teachers; our students' eyes; our colleagues' experiences and the theoretical literature. Viewing what we do through these different lenses alerts us to our distorted or incomplete assumptions that need further investigation (Brookfield, 1995). Although my role first and foremost was that of a teacher-researcher I used these lenses as a starting point to invite the participants to provide their own unique perspectives and thoughts to gain a comprehensive appreciation of their overall experience.

Triangulation is a "word used to name the combination of different methods, study groups, local and temporal settings and different theoretical perspectives in dealing with a phenomenon" (Flick, 2005, p. 226) that can aid to "increase scope, depth and consistency in methodological proceedings" (p. 227.) In order to increase triangulation and gain honest and purposeful data from all the subjects in the study, a variety of methodologies which attempted to address and uncover what the participants felt and thought were employed.

3.3.2 Qualitative Framework

Qualitative research is "orientated towards analysing concrete cases in their temporal and local particularity and starting from people's expressions and activities in their local contexts" (Flick, 2005, p. 13). In adopting a qualitative research approach I intended to seek out, understand and analyse the different perspectives that could be obtained through the unique "lenses" of the participants within the context of the school

environment. The methods employed in this study were surveys, focus group interviews, student narratives and teacher researcher field notes.

3.3.3 Descriptive Study

Descriptive studies obtain data on a group of individuals without comparing them to another group (Riegelman, 2005). This study was conducted on a specific group of participants in a specific context. This means that this study does not allow for inferences to be drawn about associations, casual or otherwise. However, it does suggest hypotheses which can be related to historical controls such as other contemporary groups or groups from an earlier period.

3.3.4 Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Reason (1998) defines 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” (1998, p. 262). The features of PAR (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000) offered an aligning platform to engage with the diversity of participants in the research process:

1. PAR involves a spiral of self-reflective cycles of planning, acting and reflecting
2. PAR is a social process
3. PAR is participatory
4. PAR is practical and collaborative
5. PAR is emancipatory
6. PAR is critical
7. PAR is recursive (reflexive, dialectical)

PAR aims to transform both theory and practice (pp. 595-600)

Using PAR to spearhead the approach of negotiating and implementing a physical education curriculum, collecting data in the process, I set about transcending the research methods into the context of the study.

3.4 Measurement Procedures

PAR is not a methodology but rather an orientation that can guide and shape methodological practices (Enright, 2010). While the processes of negotiation and implementation provided a methodological blueprint for the practical progression of the study, methods for data collection were needed to track the thoughts and actions of the participants' throughout the engagement process in order to purposefully critique and analyse the study. The following section details how and when each data collection method was used in the study.

3.4.1 Survey

Surveys enable a significant amount of data to be collected, the relationships between data to be identified, and are considered reliable data gathering tools that enable efficient analysis with low error rates (Wilkinson and Birmingham, 2003). A Survey (Appendix B) was given to students at the beginning of the study to serve as an introduction to the study and a means of gauging their perceptions towards the idea of student voice and their physical education program. The survey contained a list of high order and low order questions which students were asked to answer either by ticking their preference or writing an answer in their own words.

3.4.2 Focus Group Interviews

Focus group interviews were used to “gather descriptive data in the subjects' own words so that the researcher can develop insights into how subjects interpret some piece of the world” (Bogdan and Biklen, 1995, p. 96). Interviewing is an especially helpful way for teachers to learn about students' perceptions of their programs (Graham, 1995). In this study it was the world of the teacher and students' physical education classes that we wanted to explore and interpret through their own eyes. Students were selected by the teacher-researcher to participate in focus group interviews of six participants at the end of the taster sessions and again after an implemented cycling program. The focus group interviews intended for students to discuss their attitudes, perceptions and experiences of physical education in both the junior and senior cycle and the study. The first focus group interviews took place outside of physical education classes during the school day in an appointed room and were conducted by the teacher-researcher. The second sets of focus group interviews

again took place outside of physical education classes during the school day in an appointed room and were conducted by a faculty member with experience in facilitating focus group interviews.

For the first set of two interviews, a list of open ended questions (Appendix C) was adapted from similar questions posed by Brooker and McDonald (1999) to their students. These questions prompted students to reflect and critique their experiences of physical education in the school. The teacher-researcher saw these questions as relevant and accessible to the students. These helped guide the interviews and engage students in specific areas of reflection and thought. For the second set of two focus group interviews pupils reflected on their overall experiences during the study.

3.4.3 One on One Interview

The physical education teacher participated in a one on one interview with the study supervisor, a faculty member with experience in conducting interviews, at the end of the study to give her interpretation of the experience. The interview took place outside of the school and physical education classes in the supervisor's office in the University of Limerick. The questions used to guide discussion (Appendix D) in the interview were based on those selected for the focus group interviews. The one on one interview intended for the teacher to discuss her attitudes, perceptions and experiences of physical education in both the junior and senior cycle as well the study from the perspective of the teacher.

3.4.4 Teacher-Researcher Journal

Pavlovich (2007) sees reflection as a key element of journal writing, helping the writer "to stand outside the experience, to see it more objectively, and to become detached from the emotional outcomes" (p. 284). Moon (1999) sees the learning journal as "essentially a vehicle for reflection" (p.4). A journal was maintained and updated by the researcher-teacher, throughout the CCCN process and the implementation of the cycling curriculum. In order to analyse students' responses to their negotiated experiences, post lesson appraisals were used to reflect and describe their experiences at the end of each lesson in the cycling curriculum. This journal was typed up using Microsoft Word. This created a "permanent record of thoughts and experience and a safe outlet for personal concerns" (Spalding & Wilson, 2002, p. 1397) on what

they felt and experienced during the lesson. Each student was given a small coloured card to write on. 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 we should move with the curriculum content in the next lesson. The 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 different tasks and activities which he observed and felt were worthwhile and meaningful to the study.

3.5 Procedures Implementing Study

In order to sequentially collect the data, the following procedures were implemented during the study.

3.5.1 Taster Sessions

Similar to the process adopted by Enright (2010), the class participated in a number of student selected taster sessions of different activities with a view to perhaps participate in them in a full unit as part of their physical education program. As with Enright, 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” (Enright, 2010, p. 134).

Once they selected the activity in which they would be participating, the roles and responsibilities were assigned and either the teacher-researcher or the physical education teacher led the lessons.

The students’ experiences in these lessons led to the reflections and discussion that took place in the CCCN meetings. By reflecting and providing feedback on the taster sessions in which they had participated, students and the teacher-researcher were able to critically evaluate the elements which appealed most to them as well as the elements which led to disengagement or off task behaviour. These then served as prerequisite considerations when negotiating and implementing the next taster activity in physical education lessons

3.5.2 Continuous Class Consultation and Negotiation (CCCN)

The consultation process took place in conjunction with the taster sessions. Firstly, students were introduced to the teacher-researcher. After establishing a number of rules, routines and expectations, we set about consulting how we would approach the first physical education class. Students indicated that they would like to have a greater voice in their physical education program. They then agreed on the activity they would like to pursue first. Initially, the teacher-researcher was responsible for organising the time and place of the meetings. After the first meeting and lesson, this was passed over to the pupils who continued to organise the meetings during lunch time, usually once a week. These meetings provided the participants with a platform to express their thoughts, attitudes and ideas openly in an effort to improve and modify the physical education 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 they could be interpreted and used going forward, particularly the list of topics that emerged as potential lesson activities. These meetings and the activity negotiation process involved three clear negotiation phases overseen by the teacher-researcher: advocacy, selection, and roles and responsibilities.

- 1) *Advocacy*: Students and teachers proposed different activities based on this list, providing rationale and reasons why the class should engage in a chosen activity. Everyone was then invited to argue for or against this activity. They were also required to reason with the teacher-researcher and their peers as to the challenges and limitations that were faced regarding some activities. This helped narrow down the activity selection process.
- 2) *Selection*: After the debating and discussion was complete, students were invited to vote on which activity they wished to pursue. Students agreed on a “majority rules” decision. Once the votes were counted, a final check was made by the teacher/researcher to ensure that the class, as a whole, were all happy and willing to participate in the activity.
- 3) *Roles and Responsibilities*: Once the activity was decided 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 selecting the content of

the activity, providing it was fun and enjoyable. However, they were also made aware of the need for learning outcomes and accepted this as a prerequisite to each lesson. Pupils would then volunteer or be selected to perform roles and responsibilities. These ranged from calling the role to leading warm ups, activities, selecting teams and helping with equipment. Roles and responsibilities were rotated for each lesson to ensure every student was given a chance to experience both leadership and followership in the lessons.

This CCCN process continued throughout the study up until pupils decided what activity they wanted to pursue in their physical education classes. Once students had decided on which activity they were going to learn in their lesson and which roles and responsibilities they had, they participated and engaged in the lesson.

3.5.3 Negotiating and Planning the Curriculum

As a result of the taster sessions and CCCN, students selected cycling as the activity they wished to pursue as a unit in their physical education curriculum. Once the students, physical education teacher and teacher-researcher knew the activity, they set about designing a curriculum with a set of objectives and outcomes that reflected what students wanted to achieve in cycling and the activities planned to achieve those outcomes. The teacher-researcher based the negotiation and planning on four questions suggested by Boomer, Lester, Onore and Cook (1992) to guide us through the planning and selection process.

- 1) *What do we know already?* A few students had some experience of cycling in the junior cycle as part of a school wide event. All of the class agreed that they did not have appropriate content knowledge and technical mastery in cycling. The majority of pupils had access to bicycles but not helmets. There was a grit track in the school where students could participate in cycling activities. There were a number of designated cycle lanes surrounding the school which the participants could use.
- 2) *What do we want, and need, to find out?* We needed to get every pupil in the class a bicycle and helmet before we could

begin the program. We needed to plan developmentally appropriate cycling activities and address all safety considerations. We needed to find out if we could expand the program outside of the classroom and into the local community. We wanted to find out if student involvement in negotiation and implementing the curriculum can affect their investment and ownership of their physical education classes.

- 3) *How will we go about finding out?* Students took responsibility for allocating bicycles and safety helmets. They agreed that the teacher-researcher take responsibility for developing relevant and meaningful lesson activities. The teacher-researcher took responsibility to explore avenues to pursue use of the local community to provide more scope and perspective to the program. While participants were engaged in these tasks, CCCN and planning continued in class meetings at available times in the students' timetables as opposed to lunchtime. Students de-briefed and reflected on the lessons after they happened which provided feedback for analysis.

- 4) *How will we know, and show, that that we've found out when we've finished?* Pupils reflected on their overall experience through CCCN. The teacher-researcher and physical education teacher also followed this process. Pupils created an advocacy poster based on their experiences over the study and their participation in negotiation and implementation of the curriculum.

3.5.4 External Consultation

Although learners are the primary benefactors of a curriculum, it is crucial that we recognise that others can inform our decisions and provide us with a broader and perhaps clearer perspective of life in a given school, and the implications this has for curriculum development (Lund and Tannehill, 2010). Prior to implementation of the cycling program, the teacher-researcher took it upon himself to explore the possibility

of expanding the physical education program beyond the classroom and “utilize the community resources of those that have an interest in the physical activity patterns of young people (Lund and Tannehill, 2010, p. 396). This led to Phelim Macken, Coordinator of the County Limerick Sports Partnership. The main aim of the Partnership is to increase participation in sport; to ensure that local resources are used to best effect as mechanism to co-ordinate the efforts of all key influencers to further develop sporting opportunities for local communities; and a vital link between the needs of local people, the work of other sports organisations/officers and national agencies and state agencies (CLLSP, 2012).

Phelim was impressed by the ownership, investment and work that had been achieved so far by the participants in the study. He was able to offer greater scope and vision as to how the negotiated curriculum could be sustained and expanded beyond the classroom. Phelim made contact with a cycling pursuits company based in the region who offered cycling instruction and various events to groups and schools. With Phelim, we contacted the company and negotiated a deal which completely transformed the program, making it more constructive and accessible for the participants.

In addition to this the teacher-researcher contacted the Road Safety Authority and provided them with an overview of the cycling program. They responded positively supplying us with additional resources such as posters, cycling booklets and high-vis armbands. This helped promote and develop greater awareness of road safety among the participants in relation to the cycling unit.

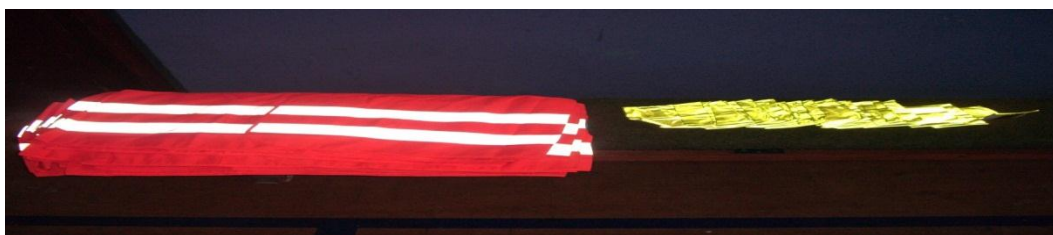


Figure 3.1 Resources received from Road Safety Authority

3.5.5 Implementation

The Cycling Program was implemented on Tuesday 9th January 2010, and continued every Monday morning for three weeks. Cycling Pursuits Ireland provided the bicycles and additional equipment for participation and taught the lessons assisted by the students, the teacher-researcher, the physical education teacher and Phelim Macken. Initially the lessons were delivered inside the school grounds.



Figure 3.2 Students participating in a cycling lesson



Figure 3.3 Students preparing to cycle outside of the school

By the end, students were brought cycling outside of the school and around the surrounding area.



Figure 3.4 Students cycling out of the school



Figure 3.5 Students cycling in the local area

3.6 Data Analysis

Glesne states that “Data analysis involves organizing what you have seen, heard, and read so that you can make sense of what you have learned” (p. 130). Data analysis of the results used the Miles and Huberman Framework (1994) which involves data reduction, data display and drawing and verifying conclusions based on the literature and data analysed. This framework was used for the surveys, focus group interviews and one-on-one interview and teacher-researcher journal. Data reduction refers to the process of selecting, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written up field notes or transcripts (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Data display involves displaying results in “an organized, compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action” (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 11). Drawing and verifying conclusions from displayed data and confirming their strength involves using a series of specific tactics such as “forming patterns, looking at contrasts, clarifying relationships, and building a coherent understanding (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 286). Triangulation was used to “increase scope, depth and consistency in methodological proceedings” (Flick, 2005, p. 227.). The teacher researcher and faculty supervisor viewed and read the displayed data, discussing and analysing themes and patterns that were coherent and those which required further clarification. The following section outlines how the different data collection instruments used in the study were individually analysed and juxtaposed using this framework.

3.6.1 Survey

The surveys were compiled and analysed both individually and collectively using the Miles and Huberman Framework (1994). Data reduction involved organising and assembling the initial survey results. Data display involved representing the results through graphs using Microsoft Excel. Drawing and verifying conclusions then took place by transferring to Microsoft Word where it was further analyzed so themes and patterns could be identified which led to key findings and conclusions on the data gathered.

3.6.2 Focus Group Interviews

The focus group interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone. Data reduction took place 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. This data was then segmented and reassembled to facilitate more conceptual and theoretical thinking, highlighting key findings, themes and patterns that were identified by students and the interviewer which were then used for discussion. In doing so, the researchers were able to draw and verify conclusions to complete the analysis.

3.6.3 One on One Interview

The one on one interview was recorded using a Dictaphone. Data Reduction (Miles and Huberman, 1994) was provided through transcribing the interviews by typing and saving it as a document on Microsoft Word. Data display was allowed through instant visual access to the transcribed data on Microsoft Word. This data was then analyzed to facilitate more conceptual and theoretical thinking, highlighting themes and patterns that were identified by the teacher and the interviewer which were then used for discussion in order to draw and verify conclusions with the other data collected.

3.6.4 Teacher-Researcher Journal

The teacher researcher journal was typed up using Microsoft Word. This allowed the data to be visually analyzed for key findings, themes and patterns using the Miles and Huberman (1994) framework of data reduction and data display. The data was segmented and reassembled and analytically compared to the literature and other data collected drawing and verifying conclusions as the final part of the Miles and Huberman framework (1994).

3.7 Challenges & Limitations

The outlined methodology was set to be objective, sequential and trustworthy, providing triangulation in the process. While the processes of curriculum negotiation and implementation and the collection of data and analysis were completed, there were still challenges and limitations which were faced during the study.

3.7.1 Engagement Period

The engagement period of the study was intended to be initiated in September 2011 and completed by December. Instead it was initiated in September 2011 and completed in February 2012. This was due to a variety of considerations which were part and parcel of school life. De Chardin was involved in a variety of curricular and extra-curricular activities inside and outside the school as part of their transition year program. It often meant that timetabled lessons were cancelled or amalgamated with others. This limited opportunities for all the participants to work together collaboratively for sustained and sequenced periods. Prolonged engagement and persistent observation are according to Lincoln and Guba (1985) “critical in attending to credibility” (p. 304). When a large amount of time is spent with your research participants, they less readily feign behaviour, or feel the need to do so, moreover, they are more likely to be frank and comprehensive about what they tell you (Glesne, 1999). In order to achieve greater scope and insight from the participants and provide a constructive and sequenced methodology to collecting data, the timeline of the study was constantly adapted based on how it was developing and in which direction it was going. This led to confusion and uncertainty at times as well as the teacher-researcher committing extra time outside of the lessons and meetings to engage with different issues. The lack of cohesion and progression meant that the engagement period had to be extended to complete the study in a conclusive manner.

3.7.2 Researcher Bias

Prior to this study, this teacher-researcher strongly supported student voice and wanted to conduct a study which involved students in a meaningful and invested way. In ways, his perceptions and visions of student voice were framed prior to the study. This meant that the early methodology was designed using my previous experiences, not those of De Chardin and the physical education teacher. In working with students,

whether we are teachers, teacher-researchers, or researchers, we will inevitably find ourselves talking about them and, perhaps less frequently, on behalf of them or for them (Fielding, 2004). At times this led to bias as the teacher-researcher was guiding the other participants in a particular direction, which they often felt compelled to follow. This meant that some decisions were not negotiated appropriately. Enright (2010) points out, “most research is conducted “on” as opposed to “with” students (p. 206). The teacher-researcher constantly had to review the decisions the participants made to ensure that they were negotiated appropriately with the students’ voices considered.

In an effort to curb this bias, the teacher-researcher frequently consulted the supervisor in order to ensure that he was approaching tasks in a clear and objective manner. In an effort to gather the final thoughts of participants effectively, the supervisor conducted the final focus group interviews and one on one interview on behalf of the teacher-researcher. This helped remove any bias that could have been misconstrued in the interviews.

3.7.3 Relinquishing Power

If we are open to listening to students’ voices then the teacher can move from director of instruction to the facilitator of learning activities (Dyson, 2006). Often the teacher-researcher and physical education teacher were unwilling to relinquish control of the learning activities. This was due to the potential of off task behavior and poor student engagement if they were left to direct lessons and make decisions on their own. There were times in the lessons and study when the teacher-researcher and physical education teacher could have allowed the students more autonomy in the learning environment. This potentially limited the experience of the participants. Knowing when to do so was constantly on the mind of the teacher throughout the study and required critical reflection and discussion with the physical education teacher and the students.

3.7.4 Hearing Every Voice

The issue of capturing a breadth of representation in student voice remains difficult (Brooker and McDonald, 1999). This was evident from the observations of the teacher-researcher. When collecting data and observing students, those who were confident in negotiating and speaking played prominent roles in the decision making process. Often, this meant that the voices of other less outspoken students were neglected or

never given a chance to surface. It took a while for many students to have the confidence to use their voice in the negotiation and implementation process. The teacher-researcher, physical education teacher and De Chardin needed to constantly review whether they were allowing every participant the chance to express their voice and opinion on certain things.

3.8 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to outline the qualitative methods through which the researcher shaped the study based on the context and participants, the procedures, the processes of data collection and analysis, and the challenges and limitations that were encountered throughout. While the methodology presented represents a progression from initiation to negotiation and, finally, implementation it was not always as clear cut or sequenced as it appears. The challenges and limitations encountered meant that the methodology was continuously altered to shape the experience that was constantly evolving in an effort to establish continuity and triangulation with the participants and the teacher-researcher. It required the researcher and participants to be flexible and adaptable throughout to ensure that the study was purposeful. The methodological approach and the subsequent analysis of the data collected helped shape the results and findings that are presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Research Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents findings of the study that examined student involvement in negotiating and implementing the physical education curriculum in the Irish Senior Cycle. It provides a breakdown of the research findings in a sequential manner based on the data gathered and analysed from the data collection instruments at the beginning, middle and end of the study (ie; the survey, focus group interviews, one-on-one interview and teacher-researcher journal).

4.2 Students' Views of Responsibility and Negotiation in Physical Education

Emerging from the survey data taken at the beginning of the study was the level of responsibility students felt they should have in negotiating their physical education curriculum. All students surveyed wanted to be entrusted with greater responsibility and involvement in negotiating and planning the content of their physical education classes. Of the 19 students who participated in the survey 16 indicated a willingness to participate with peers in establishing a group which would be responsible for planning and implementing various class activities.

When asked to numerically rank what aspect of physical education classes students felt should be negotiated 79% identified negotiating the activities and tasks they do in class as their first preference. Other priorities were also noted with 16% suggesting that allowing students themselves to plan and lead activities and take responsibility for the classes was most important and 5% indicated a preference for choosing the order in which they got to do activities. The majority of students wanted a greater say in selecting and ordering the activities and tasks that they participated in.

4.3 Place and Purpose of Physical education in Students' School Lives

Focus group interview data provided a view of these young peoples' views on physical education in comparison to other subjects in the school. Students noted indifference to

the purpose and role of physical education. They saw it as offering a break from other subjects, an opportunity to exercise, and socialise:

“It gives you a break from the learning” (Sara)

*“It kind of raises awareness of physical activity; when we have PE on a Monday morning it wakes you up really effectively and you’re ready for the rest of the day.”
(Con)*

“You go to classroom subjects day in, day out, so it’s nice to get out and exercise outside.” (Jill)

“PE is somewhere where everyone should try to improve their skills. It’s not like an actual real team” (Eric)

“You get to interact with other classes when you do it.” (Rita)

While students enjoyed physical education, they didn’t view it as important in the overall curriculum:

“It wouldn’t be very important” (Jill)

“It would be my favourite subject but I wouldn’t really see it as important as English or Maths” (Eric)

“PE would still be important but it isn’t an exam subject so I kind of have to put more effort into the others because they are exam subjects” (Con)

Overall, students saw examinable subjects as being more important than physical education, requiring more attention and effort.

During her one-on-one interview, the physical education teacher shared her view that physical education has an important purpose and position in the students’ lives in the school. She considers it an outlet to develop students’ awareness and investment in physical activity and well-being after secondary school, particularly in the senior cycle:

“It’s always been an important activity. [...] We’re thinking about them after school where they’re going, whether its college or work and trying to make sure that they have some ideals like a sport for life or an activity that they can do.” (Physical Education Teacher)

4.4 Students' Pleasure Orientations in Physical Education

During the initial focus group interviews, when asked what gives you the most enjoyment from physical education classes, students' answers varied from full class participation, competition, cooperation and fun content, reflecting the diverse nature of the classroom environment. Students identified novel, collaborative and non-competitive activities as giving them the most enjoyment in physical education classes:

"When everyone has a good attitude, like if everyone is having fun then it's kind of like contagious, everyone does have fun then" (Leanne)

"Hockey, because a lot of the girls are better than the boys at hockey but because the boys are so competitive they'll try and get into it as well" (Con)

"If you're winning" (Alex)

"When nobody gets competitive at it" (Rita)

"Like, when we're all getting on as a team. Everyone is doing everything" (Kathleen)

"When we get to do fun things" (Jill)

Later in the interview, when asked what gives you the least enjoyment in physical education, students highlighted a number of frustrations they experienced in their classes. Many of the frustrations were the opposite to what students identified as enjoyable features of physical education. These included the intensity of the exercise, exclusion, competitiveness and lack of cooperation.

"When people are excluding people" (Brenda)

"When not all the class are taking part" (Con)

"People that don't try at all, stand there talking like" (Alex)

"When the teachers are giving out because they think we're not participating." (Sarah)

Issues of gender bias in activities were also raised. Male and female participants in the initial interview attempted to justify what led to gender dominance in certain activities:

"Half the girls will be standing talking to each other and they'll all have their backs turned and then the other half like getting in there but it's the other half that really annoys everyone." (Con)

"It's just that when it's the boys, just say with soccer or the tag rugby, they think that "Oh it's a guy's sport so we'll keep it to ourselves"" (Brenda)

"They won't pass and then when they get caught: "Oh ye're not doing anything" and they kind of blame you for their failure!" (Leanne)

In competitive activities the girls felt that they were being excluded as a result of their ability and gender and were being blamed by the boys for the lack of team success accomplishment.

4.5 Views of the Physical Education Curriculum

4.5.1 Students' Views

During the initial focus group interviews, students shared different perspectives of the physical education curriculum they had experienced in the school during junior cycle and transition year. Students identified the program as rigidly structured and routine:

"I think it reflects attitudes very well because it's strict. I mean they make you wear gear and make you wear right shoes and everything. If you don't come with the right attitude they give you detention and stuff so it's a good way to have it" (Steve)

"There's nothing unique. We don't have anything different it's just typical its soccer and hockey" (Brenda)

"It's kind of the same like we do the same things all the time" (Jill)

While students felt that their curriculum was limited, they still acknowledged the scope and variety it offered in comparison to other schools in terms of activities and facilities:

"We've a bigger variety of what we do" (Rita)

"We have better facilities" (Jill)

Students identified that there was little or no change in the activities offered to them in junior and senior cycle curricula:

"The activities we were doing. We started all again, like basketball and hockey" (Sara).

"The same as we did last year. We'd just get straight into games" (Jill)

The curriculum lacked relevancy to the students. While students were aware of the structured physical education curriculum that was in place in their school and what it had to offer, they found it boring and unexciting:

“It’s really boring” (Brenda)

4.5.2 Physical Education Teacher’s View

The physical education teacher’s views, shared during the one-on-one interview revealed that she felt the physical education curriculum presented to students was adequate and encompassing of students’ abilities. She was able to break down the curriculum into sequenced and progressive components, explaining and rationalising each one:

“I always think that they have a comprehensive program; [...] in first year we do an introductory to activities so we’ll do basketball, most of them will have played basketball before but still we’re hitting it as introduction cases. They do basketball, hockey, gymnastics, foundation, and they do rugby and Gaelic. [...] In fifth and sixth year we try to open it out. They get a piece of paper and they pick five options and their first one is the one they really want to do. Like, for instance, we had yoga with a yoga teacher, then a zumba teacher and we had a judo guy. All these people are from the local area so students could go and join their clubs if they liked. So there’s a link that they could actually go out and join that particular class. The transition year students get to do it on a more limited level” (Physical Education Teacher)

While the teacher was happy with the curriculum implemented she was also aware of the challenges and limitations faced in its design due to issues such as administration and choice:

“From a timetabling point of view, and I don’t know how long we’re going to be able to maintain this, we have requirements that are there on a list and they’re very high up there on that list. With the school getting bigger and transition year numbers going down I don’t know if they’re going to keep that up there. There could be three classes on at the same time and on a Friday afternoon. That

really makes it difficult because you can't rotate; they're on a different line of activities so both of us could need to be inside. I can feel a little bit of pressure coming this year with the building, the students' numbers are going up and the teacher numbers are dropping so for as long as they can maintain those requirements that they've given to us the better but there's a bit of pressure there at the moment." (Physical Education Teacher)

Worth noting is that none of these challenges and limitations were identified by students. They identified issues that were related to their experiences and participation whereas the teacher identified issues related to administration and organisation.

4.6 Student Voice Pre-Taster Sessions and Negotiation

4.6.1 Student's Views

Research findings from the initial focus group interviews suggested a lack of attention paid to students' voices when it came to physical education in the school. Findings indicated that students were excluded from the decision making process. While students acknowledged their voice was occasionally sought by teachers, such instances were passive, may not have been heard and limited to activities that were already part of the curriculum:

"If one of the teachers is out they'll give you a choice between hockey, football or basketball and you get to decide what goes into that you can get to pick what you want to go do – to pick your favourite" (Con)

Students felt obliged to follow the curriculum and that already existed regardless of whether or not they found it meaningful. Their voice was insignificant to the design of the curriculum:

"There is obviously the syllabus and you have to follow that but they give you a choice of what you want to do first, second, third in the weeks." (Leanne)

"Well you can't really say "I don't want to do that", they'd be like "You have to"" (Jill)

“You can’t expect your interests to be met because there are other people doing it as well.” (Alex)

“It’s like saying that you don’t like doing algebra in maths – it still has to be done! You have to do it as part of PE. It’s the same thing” (Jack)

Students recognized the teacher as the figure of authority in their classes. They acknowledged that the physical education teachers were busy people and saw the teacher as responsible for creating the learning experience and activities:

“Without a teacher there would be no control in the class. Even though we’re at the centre it’s still good that there is someone to make sure that its going well.” (Eric)

“The structure wouldn’t be able to hold if you didn’t have the teachers doing what they do. They are important.” (Steve)

“Two out of the three main PE teachers have classes every single day and they have to correct homework and do all that as well.” (Leanne)

Steve and Eric’s comments indicate that students recognized the importance of the teacher in their physical education classes and were happy to comply with the teacher implemented lessons without negotiation.

4.6.2 Physical Education Teacher’s View

The physical education teacher, in her one-on-one interview, acknowledged a lack of communication between teachers and students in terms of students’ feelings about different activities. She put this down to a lack of available time, issues with students grumbling about things and the lack of genuine, substantive issues students would have.

“I suppose I don’t listen to them enough really I would think. Is it because we’re all rushing all the time? Where I would hear most of their ideas or the things they didn’t like or the things they did like is when they’re in the showers and I’m in getting them all organised. You hear a lot in that space. Some of it you don’t really want to hear but then other parts you do. So really, how they communicate with us; there isn’t really a lot of space and time for that to happen. [...] We think we’re doing it by our options but, maybe, there isn’t enough opportunity for them.” (Physical Education Teacher)

The teacher did appreciate students' input in other aspects of school life and felt that it provided her with genuine thought and appreciation for what they were saying. However, her main concern was that even if she afforded the students the opportunity to speak out about what they were involved in, would she be in a position to adapt or engage differently with what students' were voicing:

"You have to realise that they're all really kind and that if there is something not right they find a very nice way of letting you know and of saying it. I mean you could ask them all the questions in the world about what they'd like to do but to asking them and then not delivering that's where I feel that if we're going to create that time we have to be able to deliver what they want." (Physical Education Teacher)

The teacher did not want to place herself in a position where she would not be able to meet the requests of students' voices. She did not identify the opportunity to negotiate with students in order to make the curriculum more meaningful and relevant as a possibility.

4.7 Views of the Taster Sessions

Students responded positively to the "Taster Sessions" they participated in and experienced, noting the novel nature of the activities, increased level of collaboration and non-competitive disposition of tasks in the taster lessons was inviting. Students found many of the activities worthwhile, meaningful and enjoyable due to their novel and non-competitive nature and also due to the level of responsibility they were given:

"Well, we never did stuff like we did with him, like team exercises and the cycling and the tag rugby tournament. We never did that before in the three years here." (Pat)

"You feel more independent because we can make our own choices and they're been listened to. [...] Last week with outdoor adventure it was so different. I really wanted to see what it was like so I got more involved in it and it was just so good and there was a change in the involvement" (Leanne)

"With the team games we all got on really well it was fun" (Sara)

Like on Monday everyone was laughing. Everyone was smiling. After class, everyone was like "Oh that was the best PE that we'd had" (Brenda)

"You feel more involved in it. Last year teachers wouldn't look at you they'd just tell you what to do and watch you play. You kind of feel more in charge and a bit more responsibility to take." (Eric)

"You'd be looking forward to it because you'd be like "Oh, I want to try that!" And if you like it, you get to do it again in a few weeks. It's nicer to have more activities than three. It just gets boring after a while" (Jill)

While they enjoyed many of the taster lessons, students were equally critical of those activities they thought were successful and those that were not. This demonstrated their ability to purposefully evaluate their experiences in classes. They were able to identify shortcomings of some activities such as tag rugby and Frisbee as well as areas for improvement:

"Well, like, the first week when we did Frisbee. We already did that in PE and I wasn't really that interested in it. And tag rugby, everyone just wasn't involved in it." (Leanne)

"There's still in Tag Rugby a problem getting some girls working"

"The Tag Rugby, it didn't work well that time so it was good to try it out first rather than go straight into it"

"Tag Rugby didn't really work so we knew that we shouldn't keep going with that" (Con)

The physical education teacher also responded positively to the taster sessions. She felt that it allowed students and her to get to know each other and the teacher-researcher better, stating in her one-on-one interview:

"I suppose the taster idea; with the transition years it worked well because it gave them an idea and I think they got to know the teacher-researcher through that. I think that worked in two ways and they realised that he's very fair and they realised that very quickly. I didn't know that group very well and I thought we learned a lot about them from watching." (Physical Education Teacher)

The physical education teacher also alluded to the novel, collaborative and non-competitive design of the activities. She observed that many of the taster activities engaged pupils to participate and cooperate in class:

“I was amazed at how well they cooperated and obviously it was because of the talking that had happened beforehand. They did actually get stuck in. In particular, a student found some of the activities quite difficult because he wasn’t able to balance from one foot to the other. They actually got a way around putting him at the front or manoeuvring him. [...]There was a big buzz after that.”
(Physical Education Teacher)

4.8 Preconceptions of Negotiation and Consultation

During the final focus group interviews some students admitted to being initially sceptical of the teacher-researcher’s proposal to negotiate the physical education programme collaboratively. They did not believe that such a process would be truly collaborative or inclusive:

“We didn’t think that we were actually going to be able to do it” (Brenda)

“I thought that we were going to be told again what to do.” (Jill)

“I thought it was going to be a waste of time. That any ideas we said you’d just go “No, we can’t do that.” And then we’d just go back to doing normal boring stuff.” (Rita)

The physical education teacher indicated that she shared a similar view of uncertainty at the beginning:

“Were they at that level where they could? Did they just have crazy ideas or were they sensible in what they wanted to do?” (Teacher)

4.9 Students’ Views of the Negotiation and Consultation Process

Both focus group interviews and the one-on-one interview revealed that students responded positively to the negotiation and consultation process. Students identified greater opportunities for decision making and responsibility in the negotiation as well

as providing them with an opportunity to have their voices heard. They saw it as meaningful and worthwhile:

"It was very good. You showed us that you were going to give us a say and do the things we wanted to do" (Con)

"It showed us that you were dedicated, that you wanted something different, that you wanted us to have a say in what we were doing and you wanted to make it a more enjoyable experience." (Brenda)

"Everyone got a say about what they wanted to say" (Jill)

The negotiation and consultation process evoked responsibility among the class. They could see that their voice was being recognized. They saw their input as acknowledged, meaningful and worthwhile:

"Ya it was really good because you left us kind of feel in charge" (Eric)

"Our ideas weren't dismissed. You actually said that it's possible and you'd think about it." (Kathleen)

"We got to say what we thought of the last PE class, whether we enjoyed it or not, what would we change about it and what we'd do for the next one? We organised the warm ups and stuff.[...] "We were all just trying to find something to do and we got there. And when we got there we knew what to do." (Jill)

Students could feel their voices being heard, acknowledging how much they appreciated the openness and fairness of the teacher-researcher in the process.

"He said, like, if you don't want to do that then "OK". He was very particular with everything we done. Like he actually went through with what he was talking about. He didn't say "Oh, we'll probably try to do cycling and we'll try make it happen". He actually saw it through and we actually did it, which is good." (Brenda)

"He always wanted a positive and a negative feedback." (Laura)

"I think that when we did something we didn't like he changed the whole thing. He did something different." (Leanne)

"He'd always make sure that we were happy with what we were doing he never pressured us into anything we didn't want to do. [...] We knew him, I suppose, a bit better so we were more comfortable around him. You wouldn't be that embarrassed if

you made a mistake because he'd know you so well that he wouldn't be just like one of the other PE teachers giving out or something. He'd be patient like" (Eric)

Despite students' involvement in the negotiation and consultation process they were still uncertain as to just how successful the cycling unit they chose was going to be as a result of the CCCN. Pupils openly critiqued the designed unit prior to its implementation:

"I think the process of getting the bikes is too hard" (Maria)

"I have no bike so I can't do it" (Liam)

"I think it's a bit of an arse bringing the bikes as I live half an hour away" (Laura)

"I have no bike or helmet and I don't have money to buy them" (Joan)

Furthermore, a number of pupils in the class were sceptical of the proposed cycling unit, openly criticising the choice of cycling as the activity:

"I'm not particularly looking forward to it. I don't like cycling" (Karen)

"Not too happy about it" (Joseph)

"I don't want to do cycling at all I'm dreading it. I would rather do something else but I am willing to try" (Clare)

These voices caused the teacher-researcher to reflect critically on the CCCN process, asking whether or not it had actually allowed students to use their voice in the curriculum design. He noted in his journal that:

"The responses of these four pupils rings alarm bells to me in terms of the methodology and perceptions I have had up to this point. Have I truly been listening to these pupils before I planned the program with the majority of the class? Were they given an opportunity to express their thoughts prior during negotiation in some form? Were they too shy or felt under pressure to speak up?" (Teacher-Researcher)

4.10 Responses to the Implementation of the Negotiated Curriculum

The following section outlines the participants' responses to the implementation of the negotiated curriculum. In order to look at the findings more closely, the section is presented sequentially lesson by lesson using the teacher-researcher journal and final focus group interviews as the main data sources.

4.10.1 Lesson 1

The teacher-researcher observed an immediate response to the negotiated curriculum early in its implementation phase as shown through attendance, participation, enjoyment and responsibility:

Pupils appeared to be very excited about the lesson. Even more encouraging was that all pupils present brought in their gear for the class and actively participated. This is the first time this has happened since I have been working with the class. [...] Pupils who would have previously been less involved and willing in class were participating very well. One girl in particular, Katie, really seemed to be enjoying herself. A major factor in this was that everyone was participating. Pupils took encouragement from each other and were not afraid of making mistakes. By the end of the lesson all pupils were cycling safely and competently on the grit track. Pupils helped Liam tidy away the bicycles and equipment. Liam was impressed with the level of cooperation and discipline of the group.” (Teacher-Researcher)

Focus group interviews demonstrated that most students responded positively to the cycling lessons early on. They found the first lesson engaging, enjoyable and challenging:

“It was really fun, something different” (Jill)

“Everyone was involved, especially at the end with the staying up in the box” (Alex)

“Good Drills” (Paddy)

“I’d like to learn more tricks” (Eric)

“It was better than just playing basketball or football in PE” (Sara)

Alongside the positive feedback, pupils openly critiqued the first lesson. Again this reflected their ability to purposefully evaluate their experiences. They identified a number of areas for improvement in advance of the next lessons such as engagement, pace and content:

“Lesson got boring after a while, maybe more stuff and move at a faster pace next week” (Eric)

“The only bad thing was that it was kind of repetitive at times” (Laura)

“We didn’t get enough time because we were waiting for our turn” (Leanne)

“It was too cold to be standing around waiting in turn, it put a downer on the lesson” (Con)

“Too basic for a sixteen year old PE class” (Paddy)

The students’ ability to critically reflect on the lesson provided the teacher-researcher with valuable insights into how the students experienced and evaluated the lesson, as noted in his journal:

“For the first time I really gained insights of the pupils’ critical analysis of the lesson. Jo-Ann and I thought that the lesson was very well organised and that pupils were constantly engaged. For the first time pupils were giving their honest opinion about what they thought was negative and could be improved upon. [...] As an observing teacher, I was unable to identify many of the observations made by the pupils. They wanted the class to be more active with more drills and activities and opportunities to master them. While I could see the need for Liam to start the unit at a basic level and pace to gauge pupils’ ability, the pupils responded well to these challenges and were ready for more advanced activities. Knowing this allows me to inform Liam on where we can go in the next lesson with activities and drills. Without pupils telling me this, this would not have been the case.” (Teacher-Researcher)

4.10.2 Lesson 2

The second lesson saw the trend of positive feedback from the students continue. Students identified that the content was more challenging and engaging than the initial lesson. This was made possible as a result of their feedback in the initial lesson. Students were learning more about themselves and the topic:

"Had a good time. No Negatives. It was challenging but fun." (Leanne)

"It was good to learn how to take ramps and go under the limbo poles" (Sara)

"Lived on the edge" (Craig)

"Learned new skills and tricks" (Eric)

"It was fun and you found that you could do stuff that you really didn't think you could do" (Alan)

"Faster paced this week and we did more." (Steve)

Students' positive responses were also observed by the teacher-researcher and who made the following notes on a major improvement in the behaviour of Joseph, one of the less involved students in the lesson:

"One of the most encouraging signs of just how much the study has helped create ownership and meaning to the students' experience of physical education occurred before the class had even started. Joe, who has a prosthetic leg, has always played a passive and limited role in many of the taster sessions, lessons and meetings. Up to now, his post lesson feedback has been slightly negative. However, when I arrived out to the grit track this morning Joe was first out with his own bike which he had cycled into school with in the morning! It was something that the physical education teacher picked up on also." (Teacher-Researcher)

The teacher-researcher also observed student learning taking place through their participation and engagement in the lesson:

What is really interesting to note is how pupils are identifying the learning almost independently of the instructors and the teachers. Rather than us probing them for the cues and teaching points they are aware of the learning that is taking place. This was something

that was missing in some of the taster sessions and in their physical education lessons up to now. (Teacher-Researcher)

Students continued to critique and evaluated the lessons purposefully, as well as suggesting ways to improve the activities in which they participated in in order to make them more challenging and enjoyable:

"Was a bit dangerous" (Steve)

"Too much waiting" (Derek)

"Can't wait to go out on the road next week" (Laura)

"Try and have some good routes picked out for next week, so we can experiment with all parts of cycling; roundabouts, turning left/right, ramps, tunnels, junctions, traffic etc;" (Brenda)

The teacher-researcher observed in his journal that students' investment in the curriculum was becoming more prominent:

"Pupils have really taken to the cycling experience. Many want to continue to pursue it as an activity in class and outside of it. Both male and female students have expressed their interest as a group to go to the BMX track in Dublin at some point in the future. This was something that was offered to them to consider, not something that was forced upon them; and it is something that they want to do. Hopefully we can do this. Again, the lesson was an extremely positive and constructive experience." (Teacher-Researcher)

4.10.3 Lesson 3

Students continued to rise to and engage with the implemented curriculum, particularly in the final lesson. Students identified experiencing developments of knowledge, pleasure, fitness and skill in the lesson:

"Good to learn about the roads" (Leanne)

"I liked the activity better than the team orientated ones" (Alex)

"Cycling on the road was way better than around the cones" (Jill)

“Cycling was good for fitness” (Kathleen)

Students’ critique of the final lesson was notably less critical:

“My legs were gone!” (Maria)

“It was fun but I didn’t really like cycling on the road” (Alex)

“Too tired!!” (Laura)

The teacher-researcher saw student’s feedback as a representation of the improvements that had been made to the lessons:

“It is easy to view this (Student’s feedback) as negative feedback. However, I think it reflects the quality of the experience and the opportunities students were given that they were able to compare and contrast different elements of the unit. Not every student enjoyed cycling on the road. Then again, not every student wanted to be confined to the yard.” (Teacher-Researcher)

4.11 Changes in Students’ Involvement, Investment and Ownership

Through their reflections on the entire negotiation and implementation process and their participation in physical education lessons students identified an increase in their own and their peers’ levels of enjoyment, involvement, investment and ownership of the physical education curriculum as well as the overall classroom experience:

“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)

In her one-on-one interview, the physical education teacher also acknowledged changes in students' attitudes and engagement in terms of readiness and participation, particularly in the cycling unit:

"They were very quick to get changed on the days the instructor was coming in. That was the first thing, I suppose, that ticked the box. Towards the end of the classes I'd be keeping an eye on the watch to make sure they'd have enough time to have their shower and their break. But one of the girls said "Just one more time!" I wouldn't normally expect to have that in an activity. They were eager at the start and also at the finish to keep going." (Physical Education Teacher)

The teacher-researcher in his personal journal identified from his observations a similar pattern of changes that took place, particularly in their ability to use their voice constructively:

"It is clear from the feedback and my observations that students enjoyed the cycling program. It challenged many of them in different ways and at different levels. Pupils felt positively about physical education. They also demonstrated confidence and maturity in expressing their ideas and opinions on what their negotiated curriculum should look like." (Teacher-Researcher)

4.12 Challenging Curricular Boundaries

At the end of the student selected cycling unit, students reflected on their experiences and observations over the study's engagement period. Through the focus group interviews, students shared how they could see the change in their physical education classes. Furthermore, students acknowledged and appreciated that their voices and input had been recognised through the negotiation and implementation process:

"It was really good because you left us kind of feel in charge but at the same time you still made sure that there was no messing so it's like we can take charge, but once there's a teacher there to make sure that there's no messers. It made us feel more part of the PE. You get a bigger say." (Eric)

"We're thinking more about what we can do." (Con)

“Well we never did stuff like we did with him, like team exercises and the cycling and the tag rugby tournament. We never did that before in the three years here.” (Sean)

“We’ve started a change, like, because they saw how well we got on they might give us more opportunities.” (Jill)

“There’s a change in people’s attitudes as well. Like everyone is more positive about going back to class after mid-term and yesterday we were looking forward to it. Like, what are we going to do this week?” (Brenda)

Students could see how they had challenged the formal physical education curriculum in the school and the difference their input made to challenging and revising it.

4.13 Student Involvement in Negotiating the Curriculum in the Future

Participants were hopeful and willing to continue the process of student involvement in negotiation and implementation in some form going forward in the school’s Senior Cycle. In an effort to modify the school’s senior cycle physical education curriculum, students wished to continue their involvement in the negotiation process in which they had been engaged with the physical education teachers.

“I’d say try and tell the physical education teacher that we would like to do different things and stuff. We might approach JoAnn nicely and see if we can expand our program [...] what we’re pretty much doing here, that’s what we all really want to say to the teachers. Like, we should be able to say to them that we don’t like this. We want to do something else.” (Leanne)

“Just more students taking charge; what we did like taking the roll, doing the stretches, leading jogs and stuff like that. Just to see people taking more charge I think would be better. [...] And now like, we’re thinking more now. Like, “Oh maybe you can say this to you and you might take this on board.” We’re thinking more about what we can do.” (Eric)

“But the way you’re doing it, it does work and as long as everyone keeps giving it, it always will work because the class will kind of carry itself along.” (Con)

The physical education teacher displayed a more grounded vision of student involvement in negotiating and implementing the curriculum. While she supported the

potential role of student involvement, she did so in the short term and within the current senior cycle physical education curriculum and specifically with De Chardin:

“I suppose what I’d really like is that when they get hit with their next set of options that they will be quite inventive. And then where we might go is that option with that group. Maybe get them to help organise this. And all that would be administration but it would be a step. This is where you are and for them to see can we facilitate it. They’ll realise fairly quickly if you can’t. So where I was thinking was: Ok, this group; we have them here so let’s expose what we’re doing. So it’ll be more organised so we can get them involved. [...] Absolutely. see how it works out. There are a number of characters in that group that would go for it. What I would like is that the ones who maybe wouldn’t automatically be seen as organisers, to get them to come forward and do it. Having small groups organise different things.” (Physical Education Teacher)

Nevertheless, the teacher acknowledged openness to change and reform in the way the curriculum was designed and being implemented.

Similar to the physical education teacher, the teacher-researcher firmly believed that De Chardin students’ involvement would play a more relevant and leading role in the future negotiation and implementation of the physical education curriculum. He felt that it was up to the students, more than the teacher to ensure that this happened:

“The responsibility has been placed in the hands of the pupils to see that this happens. They are now in an experienced position to negotiate and implement physical activities inside and outside of the school.” (Teacher-Researcher)

4.14 Teacher-Researcher Style

Consistently emerging from the focus group interviews was the manner and style in which the teacher-researcher engaged with participants throughout the research process. Students identified the teacher as being considerate, enthusiastic, organised and motivated. The open, innovative and personal style with which the teacher-

researcher engaged in the process allowed students to feel more comfortable and involved:

“Well like you’ve taken us out at lunch and asked us what we want to do. That was new.” (Con)

“He’d evaluate what’s wrong or how good was the program and tell us. He wanted to make sure that we all wanted to do it.” (Brenda)

“He was enthusiastic. [...] I think that when we did something we didn’t like he changed the whole thing. He did something different.” (Leanne)

“Like, he always knew what he was doing and stuff. He was always thinking of things for us to do and there was never just “showing up on the day” and going “OK.” (Sara)

“Yes, he’d always make sure that we were happy with what we were doing he never pressured us into anything we didn’t want to do.” (Eric)

Students saw the teacher-researcher as being less authoritative and didactic in his classroom approach and teacher-student interactions. He was more willing to allow students take responsibility and control, which in turn led to their engagement in negotiation, implementation and participation:

“He never really felt like a teacher. [...] We knew him, I suppose, a bit better so we were more comfortable around him. He never took too much charge he left us have a big say in what we did. He didn’t just sit back and watch the whole time. He actually played with us. [...] That’s why it never felt like he was bossing us around. He made people individuals inside the group in charge with stuff to do so he just, kind of, watched. [...] You have some PE teachers and they might be a good PE teacher but they could be mean or something. But he was both. He was really nice but he was a really good PE teacher like he knew what he was talking about.” (Eric)

“He was more of a friend. We got on so well with him. [...] Like, everything we did with him. We liked him so much that we respected him. We respected him because he was doing things we wanted to do and we enjoyed doing. He was so nice to us all the time. [...] It was like; he’s putting so much into it that we’re going to enjoy it more.” (Jill)

“Yes, the teacher-researcher was calling us to take on roles like doing the warm up or there was always someone leading the group it wasn’t actually him.” (Steve)

The physical education teacher also acknowledged the adapted approach used by the teacher-researcher in delivering the lessons. In particular she identified his organisational skills and ability to communicate with the students effectively as a major determinant in the research process:

“I suppose that communication thing; he took time at the start of classes and during the week to talk to them. He’d say “OK, we’re going upstairs” and initially they hesitated “What are we going up there for?” and then one week they just went up. And I said “Where’s the teacher-researcher?” “He’s gone up already”. So they knew this was part of what was happening and they accepted that and probably thought “this is great we’re getting to voice an opinion here” which gives them a bit of ownership. [...] One of the things the students said was “We found out rather quickly that he meant it”, if he couldn’t come through with it he’d let us know what he tried to do. He really is trying. [...] Even the resources the teacher researcher got from the Road Safety Authority. You’d be thinking we should be doing more of that! [...] To me that was the teacher-researcher in our school. Somebody else could have done that and the student would have been “Oh I can’t believe that”. But it wasn’t, the reaction was not like that and he went off and he worked so well. [...]. His commitment, his personality and his organisation; when he comes in he’s ready to go.” (Physical Education Teacher)

At the end of the research process in his personal journal, the teacher-researcher acknowledged a change in his approach to teaching physical education and seeking, listening to and responding to student voice:

“Working with the participants in this study has taught me many valuable lessons on how I engage with senior cycle students in a physical education context. Every student has something to offer to any given experience. Through their participation, students can recognise and appreciate their peers’ individuality and work with it to enhance the experience in affiliation. In future I need to be more aware of students’ voices in the classroom and work with these voices to ensure what is being taught and experienced is relevant and accessible to the students.” (Teacher-Researcher)

While students' voices and involvement were the key patrons in negotiating and implementing the physical education curriculum that increased their investment and participation, the contribution of the teacher-researcher was also acknowledged by the other participants.

4.15 Conclusion

The research findings suggest that the methodologies in which the participants engaged in were successful in facilitating the students in explicating their ideas about physical education and physical activity. Students successfully negotiated, designed and implemented a physical education curriculum. Students' increased involvement in negotiating and implementing the physical education curriculum in the Irish senior cycle in turn increased and developed students' investment and ownership of physical education and physical activity.

Chapter 5

Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses and analyses the research based on the four research questions that guided the study. It interprets compares and contrasts the data in the context of what is already known from the existing research literature. The main findings are extended with qualitative expansion and ideas which are advanced later in the conclusion and recommendations chapter.

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

5.2.1 Dialogue and Collegiality

Similar to the findings of Fielding (2003), students and the physical education 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). Through the introduction of continuous class consultation and negotiation (CCCN), students were given greater opportunities to regularly explicate their ideas about physical education and their experiences. CCCN provided students with the opportunity to voice their opinions on the content of the classes with the teacher researcher and the physical education teacher, providing critical and constructive feedback. This allowed them to work together towards curricular negotiation and implementation of a cycling unit. It was not "*a waste of time*" as Rita had preconceived but rather, as Eric describes it, "*really good*", giving them "*a bigger say*". Structures and process allowed for student participation in decision making and opportunities were provided for students to actively construct knowledge and meaning (Beane and Apple, 1999).

The "necessity of dialogue", advocated by Fielding (2003), was evident in the focus group interviews which presented students with a further opportunity to reflect and voice their ideas and experiences of physical education in an unprecedented

manner. Students acknowledged that their voices and ideas were being heard. As has been previously suggested, interviewing is an especially helpful way for teachers to learn about students' perceptions of their programs (Graham, 1995). The physical education teacher could see how "that communication thing" was facilitating students "to voice an opinion". By providing a variety of opportunities for purposeful dialogue students and teachers were able to address the frustrations and difficulties they experienced in physical education to move closer towards Fielding's (1999) vision of "radical collegiality". The extent to which dialogue and collegiality was created emphasises Fielding's belief that "students and teachers need each education, correcting them in the process. Students and teachers need each other, need to work as active partners in the process if it is to be either worthwhile or successful" (Fielding, 2003, p. 307). Without the teacher-researcher, the physical education teacher and the students' collective engagement in constructive dialogue this could not have been realised.

5.2.2 Participatory Action Research (PAR) Pedagogy

In the PAR process all participants engaged in and helped other students to explicate, plan, act and reflect on their ideas of physical education and curriculum design. Students rejected their limited involvement in decision making in physical education prior to the negotiation process. The initial survey findings indicated that students wanted to be entrusted with greater responsibility and involvement in negotiating and planning the content of their physical education classes. Moving physical education classes towards 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, using PAR pedagogy, students' voices, ideas and talents became more prominent in physical education. This led to a similar shift in roles as Enright (2010) alluded to in her study where the student became "expert and co-creator of the research agenda" and "active constructor of knowledge and curriculum" (p. 201); where students like Jill "*got a say about what they wanted to say*" and students' ideas, such as Kathleen's, "*weren't dismissed*".

Like Enright (2010), the opportunity to name and challenge the inequities around and barriers to their physical education and physical activity participation, and the opportunity to effect real change was ultimately received excitedly and respectfully by the student researchers in the current study. Students explicated their ideas of physical education and engaged in curriculum design implementing the cycling unit in

an objective and invested manner epitomized their comments in the final focus group interview:

“We got to say what we thought of the last PE class, whether we enjoyed it or not, what would we change about it and what we’d do for the next one? We organised the warm ups and stuff.[...] We were all just trying to find something to do and we got there. And when we got there we knew what to do.” (Jill)

PAR not only helped students towards the realization of how they could re-design and enhance their physical education curriculum and learning experiences. It helped them understand the considerations and procedures they had to acknowledge and engage with in order to make it happen giving them the opportunity to “lead the way toward innovative solutions” (Mitra, 2004, p. 724).

5.2.3 Guidance in Decision Making

Mitra (2004) highlights the role of students collaborating with adults in eliciting student voice “to improve education outcomes” (p. 24). In the focus group interviews students acknowledged the role of the teacher-researcher and the physical education teacher in shaping their physical education classes. While students appreciated opportunities to be autonomous and exercise their own violation they acknowledged the importance of the teacher in facilitating student learning and student decision making (McMahon, 2007).

While students appreciated the level of responsibility and decision making they were being given, they also acknowledge the guidance they were receiving from the teachers. As a result, students were comfortable in seeking guidance and help in amplifying their ideas of physical education and curricular design. Steve felt the *“structure wouldn’t be able to hold if you didn’t have the teachers doing what they do”*. Eric acknowledged that although students themselves were at the centre of the decision making, negotiation and implementation of the lessons, *“it’s still good that there is someone to make sure that it is going well”*. The importance of guidance in decision making was stressed by students who 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 can be

a positive, energizing and exciting experience for both teacher and student (Enright, 2010). The teacher-researcher and the physical education teacher had to ensure that the designed curriculum was reasonable, realistic and achievable and that, in the words of physical education teacher in the one-on-one interview, “*students were sensible in what they wanted to do*”. In providing guidance, students were made aware of what was possible in the curriculum design process and what was not. 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 which led to the eventual cycling unit.

5.2.4 “Never Really Felt Like a Teacher” – Teacher Student Relationship

Physical education teachers need to have the mettle and belief to explore with their students the nature of curriculum content and the strategies for delivering said content in ways that engage students more meaningfully in physical education inside and outside of school. In addition, teachers need to help students develop awareness and advocacy for their voice in their educational experiences (Enright, 2010). In order for the shift in roles to occur which allowed students to actively engage in sharing their ideas of physical education and engaging in curriculum design, the teacher-researcher acknowledged in his journal that he had changed in his approach to teaching physical education to this age group by inviting and student voice. Brooker and McDonald (1999) observed in their study that “power relationships between evaluators and students through the intermediary action of teachers remain a serious issue” (p. 93). This was not the case in this instance.

What is clear in all pedagogical encounters, teachers’ matter, their beliefs and viewpoints matter, and the understanding of their students and the environment in which they teach is pivotal to learning (Tannehill, 2011). The physical education teacher and students acknowledged the relationship that developed with the teacher-researcher was instrumental in the success of this study. The teacher was something of 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 by or through [the teacher’s] actions that you are a competent teacher, and that you care about their progress by planning and conducting effective lessons and carrying out various tasks with commitment (Kyriacou, 2007). While students such as Jill also saw the teacher-researcher as

“more of a friend”, she also acknowledged that they *“respected him because he was doing things [they] wanted to do and [they] enjoyed doing”*.

The physical education teacher stated in her one-on-one interview that students *“found out rather quickly”* that the teacher-researcher was committed to engaging with students collaboratively in a democratic and liberal way. Although the teacher was actively involved in helping students clarify their views on physical education and engage them in curriculum design, Eric never felt that *“he [the teacher-researcher] was bossing [them] around”*. Students acknowledged the collegiality of the relationship with the teacher-researcher. Despite the potential implications the structure of the relationship could have had on discipline and off task behaviour, there was little or no student-teacher confrontation, illustrated by Steve’s observation that he couldn’t think of anyone *“that had to be given out to”*. Instead the open, innovative, and personal style the teacher used to engage with students cemented the teacher-student relationship and allowed students to feel more comfortable and involved in explicating their ideas of physical education and engaging in curriculum design.

While students’ voices and involvement were the key patrons in negotiating and implementing the physical education curriculum that increased their investment and participation, the contribution of the teacher-researcher throughout the process undoubtedly helped students accomplish this meaningfully. In managing his role as the facilitator and co-researcher alongside students the teacher-researcher, as Eric puts it, *“never really felt like a teacher”*. This allowed pupils to take on more prominent roles and responsibilities in the lessons.

5.3 How does increased involvement in curriculum decision making impact students’ engagement with physical education and physical activity?

5.3.1 Increased Participation and Investment

Students’ investment in physical education and physical activity increased as a result of their involvement in negotiating curriculum design. 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). There was an acknowledgement [by the students and the physical education teacher] that

participation and investment had increased. Students such as Brenda noted she was *“more eager to play”* and also stated that everyone *“is more positive”*. The physical education teacher observed changes in students in terms of their 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 physical education activities.

Through involvement in curriculum decision making participants could identify *“real investment both in the learning journey and in the outcomes”* (Boomer, 1992, p. 14). Eric sums it up by saying *“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.

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

5.4.1 Responsibility and Shared Ownership

Similar to McMahon (2007), students displayed *“a positive orientation towards a teaching and learning approach where they had more responsibility for their learning”* (p.130). As a result of the procedures adopted in the study, students were able to identify an increase in their levels of responsibility and shared ownership of the physical education curriculum. Prior to the study, students acknowledged the lack of attention given to their voices. The survey results suggest that all students would like to be given more control and more choice (Carlson, 1995). Students like Alex didn’t expect his *“interests to be met”* while other students noted a lack of meaning and cooperation as factors which contributed to giving them the least enjoyment in physical education classes; *“when people are excluding people”* as noted by Brenda.

By adopting an approach of negotiation which allocated students roles and responsibilities, engaged them in discussion with the teacher-researcher allowed them to select and critique the activities in which they participated in, students were able to identify a change in the learning environments which in turn heightened their sense of ownership. Leanne felt *“more independent”* in lessons while Eric felt he was *“more in charge”* and had *“a bit more responsibility to take”*. Classes moved away from a setting where student alienation occurred, similar to Carlson’s Alienation-Non Alienation Model (1995). Giving students greater responsibility in classes led to active participation,

culminating in full class participation during the cycling unit, *“the first time this has happened since [the teacher-researcher had been] working with the class.”*

5.4.2 Non-Competitive Activities

In the initial focus group interviews students identified collaborative and non-competitive activities as giving them the most enjoyment in physical education classes; *“when [they’re] all getting on as a team; everyone is doing everything”* according to Kathleen. During the taster sessions and the cycling unit, students negotiated a move away from competitive activities such as soccer, hockey and basketball which they had been repeatedly subject to in the previous curriculum, or as Jill called them, *“the same things all the time”*.

With this age group, less competitive activities were seen by most participants as more enjoyable and less stressful than the more traditional sports based curriculum (Carlson, 1995). In moving away from the traditional physical education curriculum towards a more standards centred curricular approach participation and pleasure orientations changed dramatically. In particular the cooperative activities in the outdoor adventure lesson were seen by students as giving the class the most enjoyment as every student was actively engaging in physical activity leading to Brenda declaring it, *“the best PE that [they’d] had”*. The physical education teacher was *“amazed at how well they cooperated”* and the *“big buzz”* that was created in the same lesson.

Students’ preference towards non-competitive activities was compounded by their selection, negotiation and implementation of the cycling unit. Students behaviour and feedback throughout the cycling unit demonstrated an increase in their levels of enjoyment, involvement, investment and ownership of physical education with *“everyone giving full attention; no one falling behind; not giving up”* (Eric). In the words of the teacher researcher, *“pupils felt positively about physical education”*.

5.4.3 Taster Sessions and Novel Activities

Taster sessions inspired by Enright’s methodologies (2010) provided students and teachers with innovative experiences of physical education classes as did the opportunity to critique and evaluate these experiences before engaging in negotiation and implementation of the curriculum. Alternative physical activities, based on

participants' suggestions were used to broaden the participants' frame of reference on potential content that could be included in physical education (Enright, 2010). As a result, students found many of the activities worthwhile meaningful and enjoyable due to their novel nature. The taster sessions provided students like Leanne with "*something different*". Jill appreciated the wider scope, "*more activities than three*", that the taster sessions offered to the class.

The variety of activities experienced helped Brenda realise that the teacher-researcher "*actually went through with what he was talking about*", actively engaging them in making it work. This led students to select cycling for their chosen unit, an activity students had not previously engaged with in their physical education setting. Alan found cycling for the first time in physical education "*was fun and you found that you could do stuff that you really didn't think you could do*". Students' increased participation highlighted MacPhail's calls to contextualise the physical education syllabus and curriculum in order to provide activities in which students wanted and were allowed to participate based on "teacher and school conditions that strengthen or weaken the efficient and effective implementation of syllabus" (MacPhail, 2007, p. 58).

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). Not only did the taster sessions and negotiated cycling unit increase students' active participation and involvement, it helped students critically evaluate the activities in which they engaged in, helping them to identify novel non-competitive activities as more enjoyable and participatory. Con knew from the taster lesson of Tag Rugby that the class "*shouldn't keep going with that*" but that "*it was good to try it out first rather than go straight into it*" as a unit. Students engaging in constructive feedback of the taster sessions and the cycling was powerful in guiding students and the teachers towards answering Kinchin and O Sullivan's (2003) calls to "better understand the types of learning experiences desired by youth" (p. 258) in an effort to "sustain their interest in physical education" (p.258).

5.4.4 Relevant Curriculum Experiences

In a coherent curriculum, students understand why the content is useful, interesting, and immediately relevant in in their lives (Ennis, 2003). Prior to the study, students curriculum experiences, although structured, organised and routine, lacked meaning

and relevance. Similar to Ennis's observations the main constraint to "student engagement [was] the curriculum itself" (2000, p. 128)." Feedback and discussion with the students highlighted the inequities that existed in the senior cycle physical education curriculum as delivered in this setting. Through listening to what students wanted from their physical education classes and engaging them in negotiation, students and teachers were able to design a unit that students like Derek "*wanted to do instead of being forced*".

Design of the cycling unit was primarily the students' idea. It was something they saw as relevant to their lives and an activity they were all willing to engage as a class. Even though students like Clare "*didn't want to do cycling at all*", she was still "*willing to try*". Because the experience was more relevant and accessible to the class, the resistance to participation and engagement was minimal. Students who were not overly enthusiastic about participating in the unit were still willing to take part and go along with the group decision.

5.5 What happens when we engage with students to challenge formal physical education curricular boundaries?

5.5.1 Awareness and Elicitation of Student Voice and Experiences

Students in this study actively engaged in the negotiation and implementation of a new and innovative physical education curriculum. Without student involvement, the cycling unit would not have been realised. 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).

One of the obvious implications to the surface from a student perspective research is the need for teachers to understand how all their students (of all abilities, genders and races) feel about their physical education program (Dyson, 2006). Although the planned physical education curriculum was described by the physical education teacher as "*comprehensive*" and appeared to be well structured in a routine way, and was acknowledged by students such as Rita, Jill and Steve as offering "a bigger variety" and "better facilities" than other schools and "*a good way to have it*" respectively, the findings suggest that the curriculum lacked relevancy and meaning. Students didn't perceive physical education as a "real" subject. Maths, English, and Gaeilge (Irish) are seen as "real learning" and are what students refer to as "*school*" or

“work” (McMahon, 2007). The physical education teacher admitted that there wasn’t “really a lot of space and time” for discussion and negotiation with students and something they had had not purposefully pursued. As with the observations of MacPhail, Kirk and Kinchin (2004), students’ experiences of physical education were “hampered under the current model for curricular design”.

By engaging with students in discussion and negotiation through CCCN, focus group interviews and teacher-researcher journal notes, inequities were identified in the choice of activities in which the class enjoyed and wanted to participate. In addition, effective pedagogy used to deliver the lessons were openly identified as can be seen from Jill who suggested they got “*to say what [they] thought of PE classes*”. An effort was made to address all teacher – student discussion of the inequities or, at the very least, engage in argument and reason with them. Even during the implementation of the student designed and approved cycling unit, the teacher-researcher was presented with valuable insight into how students experienced and evaluated the lesson. The teacher-researcher identified in his personal journal that students “*wanted the class to be more active with more drills and activities and opportunities to master them*” and that they “*were ready for more advanced activities*”. This was interesting as it seems contrary to what pre-service teachers often think about students waiting only to play games.

The extent to which student voice informed and challenged curricular boundaries 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 own observations. The validity of students’ voices and the purposeful manner in which they used them to adapt their physical education curriculum and lessons with the teacher-researcher and physical education teacher emphasises that “students should be treated with respect by teachers and that their opinions should be valued (Gorard and Huat, 2011, p. 688).

5.5.2 Awareness of Obtaining “Smaller” Voices

The issue of capturing a wide representation of student voice remains difficult (Brooker and McDonald, 1999). Not only did engaging with students provide scope for the negotiation and implementation of the physical education curriculum, it provided the teacher-researcher with the opportunity to seek out and engage the “smaller” voices in

the class. It is important to note that not every student willingly agreed to engage with the cycling unit. A number of students were sceptical and critical of the activity. This caused the teacher-researcher to reflect critically on the methodologies chosen and adopted for the study and asking the question, "*Have I truly been listening to these pupils?*" The case of Joseph provides the most telling example of the challenges faced in eliciting every student's voice. Joseph made it clear that he was "*not too happy*" about the cycling unit. As this study progressed, the teacher-researcher identified Joseph as playing "*a passive and limited role in many of the taster sessions, lessons and meetings*" with his post lesson feedback, "*slightly negative*". However, Joseph's dissatisfaction did not stop him from participating and on the second day of the cycling lesson, the teacher-researcher noted, "*Joseph was first out with his own bike which he had cycled into school with in the morning*". This provided an interesting contradiction worth further examination. Although his voice was heard, was it acted on? Or, was his voice heard, acknowledged but indirectly overlooked in favour of moving toward group consensus? In the final analysis, while Joseph suggested not wanting to participate in cycling his willingness to take part and go along with the group decision may have pushed him into actually enjoying the experience in ways, similar to participants in Enright's study, that he "may not have done previously, and in ways [he was not] thrilled about in the beginning" (Enright, 2010, p. 201). This example demonstrates to the teacher-researcher that trying to gain the voice of all students is not easy and, at times, not always possible but that students given the opportunity to have a say may push toward more cooperatively working together toward the interests of the entire group.

5.5.3 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, 1995). By engaging in negotiation and discussion not only did the teacher-researcher and teacher gain valuable insight into the students' thoughts and attitudes towards a variety of issues, but so too did students develop an appreciation for considerations from the teacher's perspective. One of the physical education teacher's concerns about seeking student voice was whether or not she could act upon it, or as she put it, "*to deliver what they want*". Leanne acknowledged that the physical education teachers, "*have classes every single day and they have to correct homework and do all that as well*". Students were aware that the teacher-researcher could not guarantee students were given

everything they wanted. However what he did guarantee, according to Brenda, “*he actually went through with*”. Students were able to identify when opportunities were possible and other times when they were, perhaps best described by the physical education teacher, “*crazy ideas*”. Students grew to appreciate what was actually possible and understand what the teachers couldn’t follow through on through reasoning and discussion.

5.5.4 Shift in Roles

Enright (2010) in her study identified the following shift in “roles, responsibilities and identities propelled by a real commitment to hearing students” (p. 201): Teacher as director to teacher as facilitator/guide; researcher as expert to student as expert and co-creator of the research agenda; and student as passive recipient of learning to student as active constructor of knowledge and curriculum.

Students acknowledged that the teacher-researcher facilitated and guided the CCCN rather than directed it. Eric acknowledged that the teacher-researcher “*left [them] feel in charge*” and he “*never really felt like a teacher*”. Steve could see for himself that the teacher-researcher was “*calling on [them] to take on roles*” in classes so that it “*wasn’t actually him*” leading the class all the time. The physical education teacher noted the approach of the teacher-researcher in classes gave students the opportunity to speak and take control helped give them “*a bit of ownership*”.

While the teacher-researcher initiated the process of negotiation and helped guide students in decision making, students experienced a shift in roles by becoming co-constructors of the research agenda. Students themselves were deciding the path the curriculum took and the activities in which they would participate. Students provided the ideas which were negotiated and implemented. Con observed how students becoming constructors of the research agenda was successful stating, “*the class will kind of carry itself along*” in the process.

Students moved from a role as passive recipients of learning to active constructors of knowledge and curriculum. Students such as Derek felt that students learned “*more things*” as they became constructors of knowledge and curriculum. In order for students to continue to grow as autonomous decision makers, it was recommended that they be provided with increased opportunities for decision-making in subsequent units of instruction (McMahon, 2007). The teacher-researcher observed

the shift in student role that occurred and wanted students to continue to engage in negotiation of the curriculum in the future stating that they were *“in an experienced position to negotiate and implement physical activities inside and outside of the school”* after the experience. Unless a shift in roles had occurred, this would not have been the case. Efforts were made to extend students’ frame of reference to enable them to make more informed choices regarding the content and structure of curricular experiences (Enright, 2010).

5.4.5 Fresh Curricular Possibilities

The physical education curricular experiences the students designed placed them at the centre and challenged formal curricular boundaries (Enright, 2010). The research process opened up a new world of opportunities for the participants in relation to physical education in their school’s senior cycle. Students wished to continue the process in which they had been engaged with their physical education teachers in the future in an effort to modify the school’s senior cycle curriculum. Students like Eric were *“thinking more about what they [could] do”* in the future to sustain the level of negotiation and students involvement in curricular design. The physical education teacher was willing to *“expose what [students were] doing”* and develop it into future engagements with the school’s senior cycle physical education curriculum. She felt it important that the teachers could *“get them more involved”* in negotiating the current school curriculum. While the physical education teacher provided a short term and more grounded vision of how to sustain negotiation going forward with the students in the current curriculum, the potential for change in curricular design and possibilities for teachers and students was made openly possible. Students and teachers changed the way they looked at physical education from each other’s perspectives. By engaging students to openly discuss, negotiate and challenge the formal curricular boundaries in the school, participants were able to bring about change and improvement in a less ground-breaking but immediate and meaningful form.

5.5 Conclusion

The procedures and processes which participants identified, adopted and engaged through collaborative involvement in negotiating the physical education curriculum facilitated De Chardin towards positive engagement and participation in physical

education and curriculum design. It opened up opportunities for students to reflect and critique their experiences of physical education in the school as well as engaging them in considering the curricular possibilities for physical education in the senior cycle. It provided the teacher-researcher and physical education teacher with valuable insights into students' perceptions of physical education and how they can change to foster using innovative methodologies. By sharing their views participants were able to identify the environments and activities that were most successful in involving them in active participation. In challenging the curricular boundaries of senior physical education in the school a number of valuable sensitivities and possibilities were identified. The topics and themes arising from this discussion form the basis of the conclusions and recommendations in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

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 physical education curriculum. This section summarises the main findings, highlights areas where more work is needed and suggests avenues for future development of this work. It also draws an overall conclusion from the study based on analysis, findings and discussion.

6.2 Impact of Student Involvement in Negotiating the Curriculum

Despite the structure and quality of the physical education curriculum and physical education teachers in the school, inequities existed which led to student disengagement. Student involvement in negotiating the physical education curriculum in the Irish senior cycle had a positive impact on participants in this study in a variety of manifestations. Increased dialogue and collegiality allowed students and teachers to re-design their physical education curriculum, making it more relevant to the students' lives. The radical collegiality (Fielding, 1999) adopted by participants in approaching curriculum design offered scope and potential for the realisation of fresh curricular possibilities which allowed students to engage and participate in physical education in an unprecedented manner.

Through a physical education Participatory Action Research (PAR) pedagogy we listened and worked to understand who the students were, and what, where and how we might facilitate their active engagement in physical education and deepen their learning (MacDonald, 2003). It was the students themselves who, in roles as researchers, co-constructors of the research agenda, and active constructors of the knowledge and curriculum, directed the devised physical education programme towards the realisation of a cycling unit.

Opportunities for decision making and responsibility increased students' ownership, investment and participation in physical education. Carefully and moderately guided in decision making, students engaged purposefully towards

innovative tailoring of the physical education curriculum in the senior cycle and away from traditional curriculum design. Furthermore, in observing the engagement and involvement of the students in the study, it provided the physical education teacher with a new approach to working with students of that age group as they move forward in the programme.

6.3 Student Voice in Physical Education

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 physical education. Without the elicitation of student voice throughout the study, the negotiation and implementation of activities and the cycling unit would not have been realised.

The concept of student voice was difficult for De Chardin to accept and engage with initially. However, students gradually recognised the sincerity and extent to which their voice was being listened to and appreciated. Students wanted to have a say in their physical education. They wanted to be involved in negotiation and curriculum design. It required both teachers and students to engage in physical education not just in the classroom, but also outside it through continuous class consultation and negotiation (CCCN).

Student voice informed and appraised the teachers in the process of curriculum design and implemented pedagogy in ways that teachers could not recognise. By evoking student voice in a constructive and collaborative manner, students were able to use their voices competently and constructively towards improving their experiences and relationships with each other and the teacher. The physical education teacher indicated her willingness to elicit student voice in her future curriculum planning.

Evoking student voice was not without opposition. It elicited ideas of physical education and curriculum design from conflicting viewpoints. While the majority of students gradually became involved there was resistance from “smaller” voices. In acknowledging and identifying these “smaller” voices, efforts were made to address them which led to resolutions or, at the very least, passive compliance. As students began to recognise that the teachers were willing to let them negotiate and take responsibility student voice became prominent and constructive.

6.4 Student Voice in Selecting and Critiquing Activities

Students were the best indicators of the type of activities they enjoyed and which they wanted to participate. Activities students found more enjoyable and meaningful as part of a physical education curriculum were those which were characterised by responsibility, shared ownership, non- competitiveness, their novel nature and relevance to students' lives. Taster sessions provided students with an opportunity to participate in and experience different activities and evaluate them in terms of their enjoyment, meaning and potential to sustain their engagement.

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

6.5 Teacher – Student Relationships in Negotiation

Teaching and learning is all about relationships; every element entailed in the learning experience is built up around it. While students appreciated the opportunities to be autonomous and exercise their own volition they acknowledged the importance of the teacher in facilitating student learning and students decision making (McMahon, 2007). Teacher-student relationships are critical in inspiring an atmosphere of collegiality, negotiation in the classroom and promoting student involvement in curriculum design and participation in physical education. If the teachers and students are to act and be perceived by each other as real agents of change in physical education they need to adapt and re-imagine their relationship in order for a shift in roles and constructive negotiation to occur. Students and the physical education teacher in this study acknowledged the approach of the teacher-researcher in forging relationships as influential. Students saw the teacher-researcher as facilitative, approachable, realistic and fair throughout the research. In order to similarly re-imagine the physical education curriculum with students of a similar age group in the Irish senior cycle, teachers must first reflect on the type of relationship and interactions they have with their students. Furthermore, students need to have the confidence and maturity to engage with the teacher in a purposeful and objective manner.

6.6 Limitations

Curriculum construction and change is culturally specific (Penney, 2007). The findings in this study are specific to the participants and reflect their responses to the research process based on the environment and context in which it was implemented. The findings of this study relate to a specific time and place, but they do offer a site for further learning and change (Bragg, 2007).

6.7 Implications

The findings and discussion serve to strengthen the case for student involvement in negotiating the curriculum, particularly with students of this age group. In doing so it also endorses the role of students as stakeholders in the design of physical education curricula through the elicitation of student voice. Negotiating the curriculum allowed students to make more choices on what they saw as relevant physical education experiences, informing the teachers in the process.

The outcomes of this study have implications for future curriculum design. If the vision of senior cycle education is indeed one which “sees the learner at the centre of the educational experience” (*Overview of Senior Cycle Education*, 2009, p. 10.), then student voice and involvement in negotiating the curriculum has a fundamental role to play not just in physical education, but in all senior cycle subjects. Participants in this research demonstrated an ability to accomplish many of the aims and objectives set out by traditional curricula despite engaging in new and colorful content. In providing students with the opportunity to select different activities in which to engage based on their meaning and relevance, the scope for delivering curricula and achieving outcomes can be broadened and contextualized. The findings suggest that curricula constructed *by* and *with* students as opposed to for them can increase their investment and ownership and evoke responsibility rather than passivity and compliance.

The *Physical Education Draft Curriculum Framework* (2011) aims to “encourage learners’ confident, enjoyable and informed participation in physical activity while in senior cycle and in their future lives” (p. 10, 2011) with students at the centre of the experience. If this is the case, then students must be encouraged to speak their minds about physical education in order to inform peers and teachers of how they can invest and participate in informed physical activity in ways which they may not have previously imagined both now and in the future.

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

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 physical education, and across all the subjects, student involvement in the design and implementation of meaningful curricula is critical.

6.8 Key Implications for Practice

The following is a list of key implications for students, teachers and researchers for involvement in negotiation in the future based on this study:

1. Increased awareness of student voice and what it can offer to teachers in terms of a pedagogical approach to curriculum design. More opportunities for evoking student voice in different contexts.
2. Increased dialogue and collegiality between students, teachers and curriculum makers.
3. Continued professional development of physical education teachers to facilitate PAR and a “shift in roles”.
4. Continued consultation with senior cycle students prior to implementing new physical education syllabi and integration of student involvement and negotiation into the new syllabus and framework.
5. Facilitate opportunities for negotiation of physical education curriculum in the senior cycle.

6. Encourage local innovation and tailoring of physical education curriculum in the senior cycle, particularly in transition year programmes.

6.9 Recommendations

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

As this was a descriptive study, the findings and outcomes are only relative to De Chardin and not reflective of educational contexts nationally. Future research needs to explore how such an approach to curriculum design could work with students of a similar age group in a different education context.

Another consideration that requires further research is, at what stage and extent should we engage students in a process of negotiation and collegiality. While this study supports the process in a transition year context, the researcher and participants were unsure as to just how the process could be adopted with age groups (i.e., junior cycle and leaving certificate students).

Although students identified that learning had taken place, the research did not focus on how student voice and student involvement in negotiation enhanced that learning specifically. Prospective research needs to explore in greater detail how learning can be influenced by said processes.

Physical education teachers, teachers and pre-service teachers need to be made more aware of student voice and how to engage with it purposefully and meaningfully. In order for these groups to become change agents in education they need to be provided with continued professional development and opportunities to comprehend and apply such processes. The implications of this study invites research of a similar nature in other subjects to really see if the *Overview of Senior Cycle Education* is being effectively promoted and endorsed by teachers in the subject area.

6.10 Final Word

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 and McDonald, 2004). PAR can often be a precarious process creating “an in-between space of possibility and uncertainty” (Enright, 2010, p. 202). It is in this uncertainty that much of both the promise and the problems associated with

supporting a physical education PAR pedagogy lies (Enright, 2010). One of the concerns of the physical education 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 De Chardin increasingly demonstrated in this study vindicated the trust and responsibility that was presented to them by the physical education teacher and the teacher-researcher. Physical education 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 centre of educational and curricular experiences going forward.

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B e a n e , J . A . a n d A p p l e , M . W . (1 9 9 9) :
T h e C a s e f o r d e m o c r a t i c s c h o o l s . I n :
A p p l e , M . W . a n d B e a n e , J . A . (e d s) :
Democratic Schools. Lessons from the Chalk Face. B u c k i n g h a m :
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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethical Approval/Consent



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
O L L S C O I L L U I M N I G H

PRINCIPAL LETTER **Student Involvement in Negotiating and Implementing the Physical Education Curriculum in the Irish Senior Cycle**

University of Limerick,
Castletroy,
Limerick.
17/8/11

Dear Principal,

I am an undergraduate Physical Education student who will be on teaching practice in your school in Autumn 2010. As part of a Final Year Project (FYP) in the University of Limerick, I am proposing to conduct research on student involvement in negotiating and planning the Physical Education Curriculum in the Irish Senior Cycle. With the new SCPE framework having just been approved for implementation, seeking insight from pupils and teachers seems appropriate if we are going to be able to get them on board in the new programme. I would be grateful if you would consider allowing me to seek consent from students, their parents and the coordinating Physical Education teacher in your school, Mr. O' Callaghan, to allow for the carrying out this study and gaining their participation.

The pupils' and teacher's involvement in this project would be primarily during their timetabled school day- e.g. Physical Education classes and lunch time. The participating pupils would be invited to be involved in classroom experiences, student council meetings as well focus group sessions with some of their peers. The pupils would be asked to answer some questions in these focus group sessions regarding their perceptions of Physical Education and the type of programme they would like to see implemented as part of their senior cycle. The coordinating teacher will also be interviewed in order to gain his/her opinion and attitude towards the project as it progresses and develops. From these discussions, pupils will negotiate and plan a Physical Education programme alongside the researcher. This participation may benefit the participating pupils in terms of thinking and analysing the reasons for their participation in sport/physical activity, designing a Physical Education programme that is meaningful and worthwhile to them as well as implementing a curriculum that is designed to meet their needs. The findings of the study might also help Physical Education teachers and others to provide more positive and meaningful physical education and physical activity experiences for more adolescents in the Irish Senior Cycle.

While some of the questions asked may be sensitive, the participating pupils would not be required to answer any question they do not wish to. The information they do give would be kept confidential and stored on the researcher's computer with a protection password. The information will be anonymised and kept for a period of seven years, after which it will be deleted and/or disposed of sensitively.

Participation in this study would be entirely voluntary and the pupils and/or their parents/carers may chose not to consent or to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in this study at any time. If you have any concerns or questions about the project as you come to arrive at your decision about whether or not to allow me to undertake this study in your school, either myself or my project supervisor (Dr. Deborah Tannehill) would be happy to assist you. Please feel free to contact us at any time. Attached to this letter are information and consent sheets that have been approved by one of the University's ethics committees which will provide you with a greater insight into the proposed research project. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Donal Howley

Project Investigator Contact Details

Principal Investigator

Dr. Deborah Tannehill,
PESS Dept. University of Limerick.
Tel (061) 202884
Email: deborah.tannehill@ul.ie

Other investigator

Donal Howley
Undergraduate Student
PESS Department
(087) 9032112
0861189@studentmail.ul.ie

This study has been approved by the ethics committee of the Physical Education & Sport Sciences Department. If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact The EHS Research Ethics Contact Point of the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee, Room E1003, University of Limerick, Limerick. Tel: (061) 234101 / Email: ehsresearchethics@ul.ie



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

PARENT/CARER INFORMATION SHEET

Student Involvement in Negotiating and Implementing the Physical Education Curriculum in the Irish Senior Cycle

Dear Parent/Carer,

As part of my Final Year Project in the University of Limerick, I am conducting research on student involvement in planning and negotiating the Physical Education Curriculum in the Irish Senior Cycle. This information sheet will inform you about the study.

What is the study about?

The project aims to investigate whether or not pupils can negotiate, plan and implement a Physical Education programme within their Physical Education classes and if this approach is successful, applicable and sustainable.

What will your child have to do?

Your child's involvement in this project will be during the timetabled school day- e.g. Physical Education classes and lunch time. He/She will be invited to be involved in classroom experiences, student council meetings as well focus group sessions with some of their peers. The pupils would be asked to answer some questions in these focus group sessions regarding their perceptions of Physical Education and the type of programme they would like to see implemented as part of their senior cycle. The focus groups will involve 5-6 students being asked to answer questions and discuss their participation in sport and physical activity in a small group setting.

What are the benefits?

This might benefit your child in terms of thinking and analysing the reasons for why they participate in sport/physical activity, designing a Physical Education programme that is meaningful and worthwhile to them as well as implementing a curriculum that is designed to meet their needs. The findings of the study might help physical education teachers and others to provide more positive and meaningful physical education and physical activity experiences for more adolescents in the Irish Senior Cycle.

What are the risks?

While some of the questions asked may be sensitive, your child will not be required to answer any question they do not wish to.

What if my child does not want to take part?

Participation in this study is voluntary and your child can choose not to consent or to withdraw consent and stop participating in this study at any time. In addition, you can choose not to consent or to withdraw consent and stop your child participating in this study at any time.

What happens to the information?

The information that is collected will be kept confidential and stored on the researchers' computer with a protection password. The information will be anonymised and kept for a period of seven years, after which it will be deleted and/or disposed of appropriately in compliance with University of Limerick ethics procedures.

Who else is taking part?

The study will involve Senior Cycle pupils, male/female adolescents ranging from 15-17 years of age with various ethnicities, assigned to the Physical Education classes in which the study will take place.

What if something goes wrong? In the unlikely event that something goes wrong during the focus group session, the interview session will immediately stop until the investigator and participant(s) are ready to resume the session or the session would be stopped completely.

What happens at the end of the study? At the end of the study the information will be used to present results using the format required for 4th year undergraduate research. All information will be completely anonymised. The results of the final year project will be available to participants on written request to the Principal Investigator.

What if I have more questions or do not understand something?

If you have any questions related to any aspect of the study you may contact either of the researchers. It is important that you feel that all your questions have been answered.

What happens if I change my mind during the study?

At any stage should you feel that you want your child to discontinue being a participant, your child is free to stop and take no further part. There are no consequences to your child should you change your mind about their participation in the study.

Contact name and number of Project Investigators.**Principal Investigator**

Dr. Deborah Tannehill, PESS Dept. University of Limerick, Tel (061) 202884

Email: deborah.tannehill@ul.ie

Other investigator

Donal Howley

Undergraduate Student

PESS Department

(087) 9032112

0861189@studentmail.ul.ie

Thank you for taking the time to read this. I would be grateful if you would consider participating in this study.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Deborah Tannehill

Donal Howley

This study has been approved by the ethics committee of the Physical Education & Sport Sciences

Department. If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may

contact The EHS Research Ethics Contact Point of the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics

Committee, Room E1003, University of Limerick, Limerick. Tel: (061) 234101 / Email:

ehsresearchethics@ul.ie



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

VOLUNTEER INFORMATION SHEET

Student Involvement in Negotiating and Implementing the Physical Education Curriculum in the Irish Senior Cycle

Dear Student/Volunteer,

As part of my Final Year Project in the University of Limerick, I am conducting research on student involvement in planning and negotiating the Physical Education Curriculum in the Irish Senior Cycle. This information sheet will inform you about the study.

What is the study about?

The project aims to investigate whether or not pupils can negotiate, plan and implement a Physical Education programme within their Physical Education classes and if this approach is successful, applicable and sustainable.

What will I have to do?

Your involvement in this project will be during your timetabled school day- e.g. Physical Education classes and lunch time. You will be invited to be involved in classroom experiences, student council meetings as well focus group sessions with some of your peers. Pupils would be asked to answer some questions in these focus group sessions regarding their perceptions of Physical Education and the type of programme they would like to see and implement as part of their senior cycle. The focus groups will involve 5-6 students being asked to answer questions and discuss their participation in sport and physical activity in a group setting.

What are the benefits?

This might benefit you in terms of thinking and analysing the reasons for why you participate in sport/physical activity, designing a Physical Education programme that is meaningful and worthwhile to you as well as implementing a curriculum that is designed to meet both yours and your peers' needs. The findings of the study might help physical education teachers and others to provide more positive and meaningful physical education and physical activity experiences for more adolescents in the Irish Senior Cycle.

What are the risks?

While some of the questions asked may be sensitive, you will not be required to answer any question you do not wish to.

Who else is taking part?

The study will involve Senior Cycle pupils from your school, male/female adolescents ranging from 15-17 years of age with various ethnicities assigned to the Physical Education classes in which the study will take place.

What happens to the information?

The information that is collected will be kept confidential and stored on the researchers' computer with a protection password. The information will be anonymised and kept for a period of seven years, after which it will be deleted and/or disposed of appropriately in compliance with University of Limerick ethics procedures.

What if I do not want to take part?

Participation in this study is voluntary and you can choose not to consent or to withdraw consent and stop participating in this study at any time

What if something goes wrong? In the unlikely event that something goes wrong during the focus group session, the interview session will immediately stop until the investigator and participant(s) are ready to resume the session or the session would be stopped completely.

What happens at the end of the study? At the end of the study the information will be used to present results using the format required for 4th year undergraduate research. The results of the final year project will be available to participants on written request to the Principal Investigator.

What if I have more questions or do not understand something?

If you have any questions related to any aspect of the study you may contact either of the researchers. It is important that you feel that all your questions have been answered.

What happens if I change my mind during the study?

At any stage should you feel that you want to discontinue being a participant, you are free to stop and take no further part. There are no consequences for changing your mind about participating in the study.

Contact name and number of Project Investigators.**Principal Investigator**

Dr. Deborah Tannehill, PESS Dept. University of Limerick, Tel (061) 202884

Email: deborah.tannehill@ul.ie

Other investigator

Donal Howley

Undergraduate Student

PESS Department

0861189@studentmail.ul.ie

Thank you for taking the time to read this. I would be grateful if you would consider participating in this study.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Deborah Tannehill

Donal Howley

This study has been approved by the ethics committee of the Physical Education & Sport Sciences

Department. If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may

contact The EHS Research Ethics Contact Point of the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

PARENTAL/CARER CONSENT

Title of Study: Student Involvement in Negotiating and Implementing the Physical Education Curriculum in the Irish Senior Cycle

- I have read and understood the parent/carer information sheet.
- I understand the purpose of the study and how the results will be used.
- I consent for the data to be used anonymously in report format and published output.
- I am fully aware of all of the procedures involving my child, and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.
- I know that my child's participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw my child from the study at any stage without giving a reason.

For the parent/carer

I permit consent for _____ (name of child) to participate in the above study.

Name of child: (please print): _____

Name of parent/carer: (please print): _____

Parent Signature : _____

Date: _____

Investigator's Signature _____

Date: _____



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

PARTICIPANT CONSENT

Title of Study: Student Involvement in Negotiating and Implementing the Physical Education Curriculum in the Irish Senior Cycle

Should you agree to participate in this study please read the statements below and if you agree to them, please sign the consent form.

- I have read and understand the participant information sheet.
- I understand what the project is about, and how the results will be used.
- I understand that what the researchers find in this study maybe shared with others but that my name will not be given to anyone in any written material developed.
- I am fully aware of all of the procedures involving myself, and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.
- I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving a reason.
- I consent to my involvement in this research project after agreeing to all the above statements.

Name: (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Witness Signature _____

Date: _____

Investigator's Signature _____

Date: _____

Appendix B: Student Survey



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Student Involvement in Negotiating and Implementing the Physical Education Curriculum in the Irish Senior Cycle

Student Questionnaire

Name: _____

**Q1: As a Senior Cycle pupil, would you like to be entrusted with greater responsibility and involvement in negotiating and planning the content in your physical education classes?
(Tick the appropriate box)**

Yes:	No
-------------	-----------

**Q2: Would you be willing to participate with peers in establishing a group which would be responsible for planning and implementing various class activities?
(Tick the appropriate box)**

Yes:	No
-------------	-----------

Q3: Rank in numerical order which of the following aspects of your physical education classes you feel should be negotiated:

What activities we do	
In what order we do activities/tasks	
Allowing us (the pupils) to plan and lead activities and take responsibility for classes	
Other, identify:	

Q4. Rank in numerical order, which of the following aspects you feel are the most important considerations in negotiating and planning a physical education programme.

That I get to participate in something that I enjoy	
That everybody in the class gets to participate in something that they all enjoy	
Other, identify:	

Q5. Give an example of one or more activities that you would like to participate in as part of a pupil led learning experience:

Appendix C: Focus Group Interview Questions

Focus Group One and Two Interview Questions



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O L L S C O I L L U I M N I G H

- 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 PE the same so far this year as last year? In what way? (Junior Cycle V 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 Physical Education classes?

- 6) What gives you the most enjoyment from Physical Education 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 Physical Education 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)

(Frisbee, Tag Rugby, Outdoor Adventure)

12) Can you see/feel a change in your involvement in Physical Education classes and the way the lessons are being presented to you?

13) Where would you like to see Physical Education classes go from here?

(Back to the school's curriculum? A new curriculum?)

14) What role do you see yourself playing in Physical Education classes? What role would you like to play in Physical Education classes?

Focus Group Three and Four Interview Questions



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OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Reflect on your experiences in physical education classes since last October and your role in these lessons using the photos and peer quotes.....

As senior cycle students, you and your class were involved in negotiating and implementing a new curriculum into your physical education program alongside the teacher-researcher and physical education teacher.

- 1) What have been the significant changes that you have observed or experienced in Physical Education 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 physical education curricular boundaries in the school with the cycling program?**

- 7) How did your increased involvement in decision making impact on your engagement with physical education and physical activity? Were you involved more? Did you have to change the way you approached PE?**

- 8) Could you see/feel a change in your involvement in Physical Education 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 Physical Education 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 Physical Education classes? What role would you like to play in Physical Education classes in the future?**

Appendix D: One on One Interview Questions

One on One Interview Questions – Physical Education Teacher



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OILSCOIL LUIMNIGH

- 1) What is your Physical Education Philosophy?
- 2) 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? What are the challenges?(Positives & Negatives)
- 3) How does PE compare to other subjects? (Pupils interests, Status of Subject)
- 4) How do you listen/pay attention to your students' voices/interests/abilities in the classroom?
- 5) What have been the significant changes that you have observed and experienced in Physical Education lessons? Have there been many?
- 6) What practices were most successful in giving the students the opportunity to voice their ideas about physical education and physical activity as well as in the process of negotiation? (Meetings? Feedback Sheets? Discussion?)
- 7) Reflect on the activities you observed the class participating in (Frisbee, Outdoor Adventure, Cooperative Games, Tag Rugby, Cycling). How do you feel they were received by the students? Did the "taster sessions" approach to lessons work?
- 8) In what way do you feel that the students challenged formal physical education curricular boundaries in the school with the cycling program?

- 9) From your observations, how did students' increased involvement in decision making impact on their engagement with physical education and physical activity? Were they involved more?
- 10) Have students' views of their involvement in a process of curriculum negotiation affected their investment and ownership of the PE curriculum? Has it improved? Deteriorated?
- 11) Where would you like to see Physical Education classes go from here?
(Back to the school's program? The adopted program? A new program?)
- 12) Can the approach used by the teacher/researcher and the students be sustained going forward? What role could you see yourself playing in negotiating Physical Education classes? What role would you like to play in Physical Education classes in the future as the teacher?