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Extended Summary of Undergraduate Dissertation – Skye Townsend

‘A study to examine the relationship between KS4 girls and their PE teachers, and how this affects their engagement and participation within physical education and physical activity.’

Participation in physical activity (PA) is important for healthy growth and development during childhood and adolescence (Ortega et al., 2008). However, many adolescents are not reaching the recommended daily PA level to experience these benefits (Eime et al., 2016) and female adolescents are consistently reported as being less physically active than their male peers (Pate et al., 2009). Adolescence is a transitional period of life characterised by various environmental, biological, social and psychological transitions, all of which can affect participation within PA (Eime et al., 2013). Sustaining participation throughout adolescence is critical, as it has been shown adolescents are more likely to be regular participants in PA as young adults if they are active during this transitional period (Scheerder et al., 2006). Therefore, it is critical that determinants which contribute to PA decreases in adolescences are identified and recognised (Eime et al., 2013). A number of preceding studies have outlined the determinants of adolescent girls’ participation in PA (Sallis et al., 2000; Biddle et al., 2005). These determinants are said to fall into four categories: individual, social, cultural and the physical environment (Biddle et al., 2005). There are two distinct social variables within PE: teachers and peers (Gairns et al., 2005). Whilst research exists on student perceptions of teacher credibility (Ramos & McCullick, 2015), less is known regarding the extent to which social partners within the school context, such as teachers, can influence PA participation in females. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between KS4 females and their physical education teachers, and the impact this may (or may not) have on their engagement and participation within physical education (PE) within school and physical activity (PA) outside of school.

Nineteen students from years 10 and 11 (KS4) were selected from a school in the North West of England to participate within this study. Data were collected using four focus groups within the school setting. Data were analysed inductively using thematic analysis to identify themes within the data set.

Three themes emerged as influential on pupil engagement of PE and participation within PA: (1) teacher skills, (2) teacher qualities and, (3) teacher behaviours. Teacher skills included planning, feedback and adaptability. For example, findings within this study highlighted the negative impact that a lack of planning can have on engagement and participation within PE. Teacher feedback was also found to be important, with the findings revealing how teacher feedback can have both positive and negative effects on pupil participation and engagement. Findings from this study also revealed teacher adaptability can also have a positive influence on the engagement and participation of pupils. For example, when the teacher was able to adapt their lessons to meet the needs of the group, or adapt their lessons to include non-participants, this had a positive influence on pupil engagement. Teacher qualities included being understanding, motivating and enthusiastic. For example, pupils highlighted within their responses they are more likely to have positive perceptions of their teacher if they are understanding towards the pupil and any issues they might have. Furthermore, responses from a number of participants revealed when their teachers are encouraging and motivational, this improves their perceptions of their teacher, and therefore increases their participation within PE lessons. Enthusiasm was also highlighted as an important teacher characteristic for engaging pupils within the lesson. Finally, teacher behaviours included their involvement and encouragement within a lesson. For example, a key finding from this study emerging within all focus groups is the want for more teacher involvement within lessons. Participants highlighted teachers do not take part within activities, which the pupils feel would benefit the lesson and increase their engagement if they were to do so. Encouragement from the teacher was also highlighted as an important determinant, for example, when discussing participation in PA, and how participants got involved with PA outside of school, participants highlighted how teachers attempt to persuade pupils to attend extra-curricular clubs within core PE lessons can help improve participation in PA outside of school. Based on these findings, implications for both current PE teachers and teacher training programmes are discussed. For example, this study could be useful for those producing the content for teacher training programmes as it highlights the skills, qualities and behaviours pupils perceive as necessary to develop a positive student-teacher relationship. Furthermore, teachers should look to develop the said teacher skills, qualities and behaviours if they want to have a positive impact on pupil engagement and participation within PE and PA. Suggestions for future research on this topic are also discussed.

References

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