

Who teaches primary Physical Education?

Change and transformation through the eyes of subject leaders

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ABSTRACT

Primary physical education (PE) lessons tend to be taught by one, or a combination of, three different groups: generalist classroom teachers, specialist primary PE teachers and so-called ‘adults other than teachers’, who are almost exclusively sports coaches. Drawing upon data gathered from one-to-one interviews with 36 subject leaders (SLs), this study sought answers to two main questions: “Who delivers primary PE nowadays?” and “What are the consequences?” The findings revealed that the most common model for the delivery of PE involved responsibility being shared between the generalist class teacher and either a sports coach or specialist PE teacher. The SLs recognised strengths and weaknesses in all of the three main approaches used. However, while they favoured the use of specialist teachers because of their subject knowledge and expertise, the more prosaic constraints of cost and flexibility meant that the use of coaches had become increasingly popular. Whether or not, the growth of coaches is de-professionalizing the delivery of PE, it certainly appears to be exacerbating any existing tendency to turn primary PE into a pale imitation of the sport-biased curricular of secondary schools. Ironically, the apparent ‘threat’ to the status of PE in the primary curriculum (as well as the status of PE specialists) posed by the growth of coaches in curricular PE in primary schools may well be exaggerated by the Primary PE and Sport Premium which appears to have added momentum to a change of direction regarding staffing the subject – towards sports coaches and away from generalist classroom teachers and PE specialists. As the shift towards outsourcing PE to commercial sports coaches becomes increasingly commonplace it seems appropriate to talk of transformation, rather than mere change, in the delivery of primary PE.

KEYWORDS

Primary, physical education; coaches, specialist teachers; primary sport premium

INTRODUCTION

In March 2013, the Coalition Government introduced their new policy for physical education (PE) and school sport: *The Primary PE and Sport Premium* (Prime Minister’s Office, 2013). The Premium was the Coalition’s response following their rejection of the previous administration’s *Physical Education, School Sport and Club Links* (PESSCL) strategy (later to become the *Physical Education, School Sport and Young People* strategy) (Department for Education and Skills/Department for Culture, Media and Sport [DfES/DCMS], 2003; Department for Children, Schools and Families/Department for Culture, Media and Sport [DfCSF/DCMS], 2008). The Coalition claimed that despite substantial ring-fenced investment in School Sport Partnerships (SSP) and Specialist Sports Colleges (SSC), there had been a decline in ‘traditional’ team games and that too few children were participating

regularly in competitive sport. In 2013, the *PE and Sport Premium* replaced the interim policy of Competition Managers. It was a markedly different approach to primary school PE and sport on the part of the Coalition. The Premium, which on average amounted to £9,250 per primary school – the equivalent of around two days per week of a primary teacher’s time – was ring-fenced and provided directly to head teachers, making schools accountable for their spending, including their PE teaching provision. Although Ofsted would monitor the initial use of the Premium, and strengthen their reporting on PE, head teachers were given the freedom to decide exactly how it would be spent to improve sporting provision. The Coalition’s direction of travel in terms of policy towards primary school PE was confirmed in 2014, when the Government announced that investment in the *Premium* would be extended for a further five years up until 2020 (DCMS, DfE & Number 10, 2014).

The introduction of the Premium occurred in a context in which the ‘traditional’ model of delivering PE in primary schools – whereby a so-called ‘generalist’ classroom teacher is responsible for teaching all curriculum subjects to her or his class – has been in place for a century or more, not only in the UK (Blair & Capel, 2011) but worldwide (Tsangaridou, 2012). More recently, however, some teaching of PE in primary schools in England and Wales has been undertaken by sports coaches (Blair & Capel, 2011; Smith, 2013): sports coaches – initially employed in secondary as well as primary schools to deliver extra-curricular PE/sporting activities – are, it seems, increasingly likely to deliver National Curriculum PE (NCPE). These coaches tend to possess teaching and coaching qualifications awarded by national governing bodies of sport rather than educational teaching qualifications *per se*; and are thought as a consequence, to lack basic pedagogical skills (Griggs, 2010).

The Premium increased the onus on schools to, among other things, up-skill generalist teachers and employ sports coaches in order to improve curricular and extra-curricular PE and sport provision. According to a Department for Education (DfE, 2014) survey, almost three-quarters (70%) of primary schools in England reported using the Premium in 2013-14 to make changes to the staffing of curricular PE. Of these, the vast majority (82% – up from 37% the previous year) reported the use of external sport coaches to deliver curricular PE, while more than half (54% – up from 22%) and just under one-third (29% – up from 9%) reported increased usage of specialist PE teachers and School Sport Co-ordinators (SSCo) respectively. All-in-all, it has become apparent that PE has increasingly become an exception to the traditional generalist model for delivery of subjects in primary schools.

Against the backdrop of this apparent explosion of involvement of sports coaches in both extra- and curricular PE at primary school level, alongside schools' use of the Premium to facilitate this development, this paper endeavours to throw light on the contemporary reality of primary PE through the eyes of primary school PE Subject Leaders (SL). Drawing upon data gathered from one-to-one interviews with the SLs, the paper asks “Who delivers primary PE?” and “What are the consequences?” In the process, we seek to establish the extent to which changes in the delivery of PE are sufficient to amount to transformation, rather than mere change, in primary PE, whereby the delivery – and possibly even the content – of the subject is being re-shaped in some fundamental ways.

METHODS

The study consisted of one-to-one interviews with 33 full-time and three part-time PE SLs in 36 primary schools in the north-west of England. The selection of schools was based on a purposive sample of known characteristics in order to ensure that a diverse range was chosen.

As such, the schools contrasted, among other things, in relation to the social class of their catchment area, the number of children on roll and their current Ofsted grade. All were state schools. At one extreme, one primary school had 41.4% of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) – compared with a national average of 15.9 % – and an Index of Multiple Deprivation Score (IMDS) of 62.75. This placed the school among 10% of the most deprived in the country. In contrast, at the other end of the spectrum, was a school with only 2.4% of children eligible for FSMs and an IMDS of 3.77 (DfE, 2012). The average number of children on roll within the sample was 190, with the largest school having 475 pupils and the smallest 31. Finally, eight of the schools had been graded as ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted, while two were thought to ‘require improvement’. The remaining 26 schools were judged to be ‘good’. Ethical approval for the study was gained from the University of Chester Faculty of Applied Sciences Research Ethics Committee (FREC reference: 674/12/LJ/SES) on 21st May 2012.

The second level of sampling involved the teachers within the primary schools. Purposive sampling was again used to select potential participants, with the inclusion criteria being based on whether or not they were responsible for leading PE; that is, SLs. All interviews were conducted in a quiet and secluded office space at the SLs’ schools. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed as soon as possible after each interview was completed.

The data gathered from the interviews were analysed using the principles of Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006). In other words, the analysis involved the systematic collection and analysis of data, the coding of transcribed data and finally the construction of a credible theory from the data. In Grounded Theory the coding of texts is iterative in the sense that key incidents within the text are identified and categorised based on comparison with what had

already been grouped (Roberts, 2009). The sub-headings in the Findings express the themes that emerged from the data. The individual teachers are identified by their role (SL) and a number reflecting their position in the sequence of interviews.

FINDINGS

Three models for delivering primary PE

Although, historically, PE in primary schools in England tended to be taught by what are commonly referred to as generalist classroom teachers, it was clear from the SLs' answers that times have changed. According to the SLs, nowadays, primary PE lessons are taught by one, or a combination of, three different groups: generalist classroom teachers, specialist primary PE teachers and sports coaches – usually hired ('outsourced') from commercial providers. Only one in 10 (11%) of the SLs' 36 schools delivered PE exclusively via generalist classroom teachers, whereas in a further two-thirds (69%) of schools, the delivery of PE revolved around a 'generalist plus one' model; where the 'plus one' was either a sports coach (44% of schools) or a specialist PE teacher (25%).

There were two main approaches within the most commonly adopted 'generalist plus sports coach' model. The first involved a formal arrangement whereby the class teacher and sports coach both led one of the two timetabled PE lessons each week. The other approach was for SLs to use sports coaches to 'cover' the 'weaker' (in terms of PE-related expertise) generalist teacher colleagues: "We know who feels more confident delivering PE sessions and ... I wouldn't give coaches to myself or certain year groups because I know those teachers are confident with PE" (SL27). Thus, while some generalist teachers retained responsibility for both PE lessons each week, some taught no PE. Typically, however, schools tended to use a combination of teachers and sports coaches to deliver curricular PE.

TABLE 1

Staffing Model	Frequency of model in sample schools	Number of schools	FSM %
Generalist and Coaches	44%	16	11.5%
Generalist and Specialist	25%	9	17.0%
Generalist alone	11%	4	11.1%
Coaches alone	8%	3	20.1%
Specialist alone	6%	2	23%
Specialist and Coaches	6%	2	1.9%

The next most common model adopted was said to be the use of a generalist class teacher *alongside* a specialist primary PE teacher – typically the SL for PE, her or himself. The ‘classroom teacher plus specialist PE teacher’ model replicated the ‘classroom teacher plus sports coach’ model wherein generalists shared responsibility for PE lessons with the sporting or PE experts. Sometimes this too consisted of a more formal arrangement where the specialists and generalists were responsible for a lesson each; while in other schools, the SLs reported a more informal arrangement between colleagues that allowed individual classroom teachers to teach in their preferred subject areas:

We’ve trialled [a] kind of specialist teaching in a way and we’ve had teachers here who have been like specialists in art and art’s just not my thing at all; they’ve come through and taken my class for art and I’ve taken their class for PE and that’s worked really well. (SL15)

Alongside the majority of schools – where the SLs reported relying, at least in part, on the ‘generalist plus one’ model – a few schools (8%) used coaches to teach all of their schools’ PE lessons. In such circumstances, schools tended to recruit a number of different coaches to lead different classes depending on what was deemed necessary at the time. A small number (6%) of schools also claimed to have adopted a ‘specialist’ model whereby all PE lessons were taught by a specialist PE teacher, invariably the PE SL, while a handful (6%) of other schools used a combination of a specialist PE teacher and sports coaches to deliver curricular PE.

All-in-all, some combination of generalist classroom teacher with either a specialist PE teacher or sports coach was the dominant model for delivering primary PE in the 36 schools in the study. Only a very small number of schools were persisting with the traditional, purely generalist model and even then it tended to be supported by the use of other adults on a more *ad hoc* basis. Indeed, with the involvement of sports coaches in the delivery of primary PE in mind, it was noteworthy that several of the handful (11%) of SLs who claimed that their schools used a purely generalist system – where the classroom teacher was responsible for teaching all PE lessons across the school year – conceded that coaches were brought in to ‘support’ some PE lessons; albeit on a more informal and infrequent basis.

Having outlined the differing models in use in their schools to deliver PE, the SLs were asked about the relative merits of their schools’ chosen models.

The SLs’ perceptions of the differing staffing models for PE

The generalist class teacher model: Issues of expertise and attitude

The well-established (if somewhat idealistic) argument in favour of generalist teachers is that they have greater knowledge of the pupils as individuals and, consequently, can tailor their teaching to their pupils' individual and collective educational and pastoral needs. Within the 36 SLs in this study, however, there was only very limited support for the use of this approach in PE. Among the few SLs whose schools favoured the generalist model the conventional justification of the benefits of teachers' familiarity with their pupils' needs was prominent:

I think you need to know what your children can do because they might be brilliant at sport and that might be something that you can really celebrate but if you've never taught them I think that's a shame ... that's why we think it's important that we do have the teachers teaching it. (SL18)

The use of PE as a vehicle for the class teacher to get to know pupils better was also offered as a justification for the generalist model:

I don't think that we should hand over a whole curriculum area to outside agencies to deliver. Because I think it's one of the areas of the curriculum where actually you really get to know your children ... and every time they're doing it and you're not there seeing them, I think you lose part of what they are as a child really. (SL32)

While a handful of SLs (8%) commented thus in support of the traditional model of the class teacher delivering PE, the remainder (92%) did not speak in support of the generalist model. Indeed, more than half (56%) of the SLs declared substantial reservations. Most expressed doubts about classroom teachers' subject knowledge and associated confidence in PE. In this vein, a common theme to emerge was that "the majority [of classroom teachers] here aren't that confident in teaching PE or that knowledgeable" (SL24). The limitations in generalist

teachers' confidence and knowledge were seen to be important; not least because "it's quite a tough subject to be good at, if you're not very sporty. It is quite tricky" (SL1). In mitigation, the PE SLs recognised how difficult it was to acquire the kinds of practical knowledge necessary for teaching PE, especially when it is only one of several subjects in which generalist teachers have to develop sufficient expertise to teach effectively: "when you are teaching all subjects ... you can't be good at everything" (SL28). Consequently, many of the SLs for PE considered it quite reasonable for generalist class teachers to shy away from teaching PE – with the concomitant increase in the use of sports coaches as well as the SLs themselves.

SLs also noted that individual class teachers' attitudes towards sport and PE could be significant: "In the time I've been here we have had teachers who aren't very passionate about PE and you know, some weeks would go by, even when they could have got out, and they don't" (SL15). One SL articulated a common perception that "Some of the teachers would rather never teach PE ever again, if they could get away with it" (SL12). Some observed that the corollary to enthusiasm for sport was typically an improvement in the quality of PE on offer: "As in any subject the teachers that really enjoyed PE taught it the best" (SL35). The importance of 'sporty' attributes and attitudes was highlighted by another SL: "It depends on the teacher, doesn't it? ... we're lucky here because we have got quite a lot of sporty teachers and I've been in other schools; some of them have not got a clue about sport, you imagine what's going on there?" (SL5).

The sports coach model: Issues of expertise, willingness, flexibility and cost

Most schools relied, in part at least, on the use of coaches to teach curricular PE. When asked about their thoughts on this model, most of the SLs spoke positively of what they saw as the

attributes of the coaches. Some, for example, highlighted the coaches' subject knowledge ("I think that they know their stuff and they're good" (SL12)); their personal sporting skills and proficiencies ("They're obviously very good at the sport themselves" (SL25)); their teaching and coaching abilities ("they know how to deliver it" (SL25)); and, perhaps, most significantly – given their aforementioned concerns with generalist teachers – their attitudes ("they're usually enthusiastic young people with energy and can deliver a fun activity" (SL16)).

While most SLs began by pointing out their coaches' attributes in absolute terms, some expressed their perceived value in relative terms; that is, by contrasting the coaches' abilities with those of generalist classroom teachers. Indeed, in many cases this comparison was thought to reflect well on coaches, with one SL noting that "there are more coaches coming in because obviously they're more knowledgeable and better qualified to be able to teach it [PE]" (SL8). In this vein, several SLs made a point of highlighting the positive impact of coaches on their pupils' learning: "What we found is because his skill level at coaching is so high our very young children in Year 1 are picking up those skills and learning quicker, so you can actually see progression and development" (SL10).

Not only were sports coaches seen as possessing greater sporting expertise, according to the SLs they also tended to be more flexible insofar as they could be employed to cover the particular (sporting) needs of particular schools. A number of SLs described the ways in which coaches were recruited in order to fit with the needs of the timetable: "whatever coaches they've got we just select the ones that can cover what we want to do and we just pick from that" (SL17). A related benefit was seen as the sports coaches' impact on the amount of PE lessons that tended to be taught; in other words, their willingness or

preparedness to deliver PE in conditions that classroom teachers might (and, according to the SLs, often would) not teach. The casual employment of sports coaches was viewed, therefore, as having one over-arching benefit: it ensured that PE lessons actually happened.

It was also clear that, in many of the SLs' schools, PE was the lesson that many generalist class teachers were more willing to forego for PPA (planning, preparation and assessment) time. In this regard, the employment of coaches had the added benefit of being a cheaper way of covering PPA provision: "Well, that's the other thing – PPA – you know, coaches are a lot cheaper than a supply [teacher] ... I mean you get a coach for £120 but on supply [it's] £180" (SL8). Thus, alongside their purported sporting expertise, the use of sports coaches over PE SLs could be explained on a more pragmatic level; that is to say, in terms of an economic cost-benefit analysis:

If you were just wanting to teach PE and that was the only thing you were thinking about within school then, yes, directing specific teachers at specific subjects would be better, definitely but it's not that practical ... it's whether it can be afforded or how the time works with that. (SL14)

Despite the seeming benefits of using sports coaches to deliver curricular PE, a number of SLs expressed reservations. These revolved around the relationships between coaches and pupils, the coaches' levels of qualification and experience and the coaches' influence on learning. According to the SLs, the recruitment of coaches deprived some generalist teachers of opportunities to strengthen their rapport with pupils: "it's one of those areas where you can build up a good relationship with children and have some fun" (SL20). In a similar vein, many SLs expressed concern about the difficulties of sports coaches striking up "educationally valuable" relationships with pupils they only taught infrequently. While this

was a common theme, a handful of SLs took the opposite view that a change was often beneficial, particularly for teachers,

[who] have got that much paperwork to do and marking, and planning this that and the other, that they do seem quite relieved. The teacher will bring their class to the hall and drop them off and sometimes you do get that sigh of relief ... that 'have kid A because he's been doing my head in since nine o'clock this morning'. (SL33)

A number of SLs focused on the supposed differences between sports coaches and educators and it was a common theme that coaches were not (nor could they be viewed as) functional alternatives, let alone equivalents, to qualified teachers:

But you know, are they educators? No, I would say they're not. If you've got a sport science degree it doesn't make you a good teacher, you know, and a good deliverer of PE education and no, I was never impressed, never impressed with it. (SL11)

This unease regarding the qualifications and training of coaches vis-à-vis teachers (whether generalist class teachers or PE SLs) was believed to manifest itself most obviously in relation to class management:

The downside I guess is if the coaches aren't good at classroom management because they can't lead the class properly so what we want them to get out of the lesson wouldn't happen because the children can't behave. (SL17)

This was viewed as an acute issue on the frequent occasions when coaches were unable to cope with the more 'challenging' children: "they're not necessarily qualified teachers so can they deal with the child that kicks off? Not necessarily" (SL12). The concern then expressed by SLs was that this could lead to problems in the next lesson, with one noting that "what the

sports coaches didn't have was the management of 30 children. So the teachers were inheriting after those sessions absolute ... well, children up the ceiling" (SL36).

The lack of training as teachers was also thought to impact on the approach that coaches took to planning and recording PE lessons – with not only a dearth of documentation but, more importantly, less obvious consideration given to the issue of planning lesson progression and challenging the pupils. One SL observed that “they [the coaches] would arrive on the day and they'd go, ‘Okay, let's do this’, and there was no real build-up or structure” (SL5). Another commented: “Whether there was the progression there? There wasn't specific parts of the lesson like there should be” (SL26). When considering such limitations, some SLs consistently and repeatedly compared the practice of sports coaches with that expected of qualified teachers, usually in ideal-typical terms. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the SLs viewed coaches who were also qualified as PE teachers as the most effective: “The best was when we had a PE teacher ... she was a specialist in all areas of PE, not just football or games” (SL35).

The limitations of some coaches in class management and planning was thought to relate to their training; and more specifically that they had not been prepared for the classroom in the same way that teachers had. A further issue was the level of experience of the coaches, as many were frequently seen to be unduly young:

In five years I've known two members of staff who work for these companies who are above 25, most are 23, 24 and under, right down to 18. So you've got an 18 year old teaching a year 6 class. In fact I've been in when they've had apprentices in delivering sessions who are 16 – at 16 they're still a kid themselves. (SL33)

The relatively young age of the coaches was associated with a dearth of experience leading and teaching children, particularly in the school environment: “Some of the coaches coming in would be an apprentice, with a level one BTEC in sport and they’d be taking the session and have no experience whatsoever of being in that environment” (SL23). This inexperience was seen to relate to the coaches’ overall demeanour, where they were often viewed as lacking the necessary understanding of the ‘professionalism’ required in a school setting. In this regard, one SL commented upon the relationship that coaches established with pupils: “sometimes, I don’t know, a bit too friendly as well with the children ... it was all ‘high fives’” and a “bit of a kids’ camp mentality” (SL26). This sentiment was echoed by another SL who had observed “just how they were walking round the school – they didn’t have that overall understanding of what it means to be in the school. They were too matey, the kids were more like mates rather than pupils” (SL36). The age of the coaches and their lack of experience was, in turn, seen to be detrimental to the quality of the lesson: “So its kids in charge of kids with lots of equipment and balls and adrenaline running round the place ... it’s just a disaster in my opinion” (SL23).

In addition, some coaches were said to have gained access to schools through their expertise in one (sporting) area but were then required to teach other area of the PE curriculum where they were far less qualified, if qualified at all. This tendency for coaches to teach beyond their level of qualification was believed to impact inevitably upon the quality of the lesson: “I’ve been in some lessons where they’ve got just one level two in football, but they’re there teaching basketball. So it’s really varied with the quality of teaching” (SL33).

According to the SLs, the PE lessons delivered by coaches not only tended to be of variable quality, but were also too narrow and restrictive in content – with an undue focus on games:

Some of the coaches are very good, but they're not coaching what's in the National Curriculum, they're just coaching their skills for football say. So some schools aren't getting that broad balanced curriculum ... they're missing out on gym, dance, athletics and lots of other things. So they're not necessarily good. (SL7)

All of this was perceived in the first instance to be illustrative of coaches' tendency to take the easier option – just going out to play: “The children have got out of the habit of being ‘taught’ PE so at the start of this year they all just wanted to go out and play a game” (SL3). In this regard, according to the SLs, many coaches appeared to view PE lessons as fundamentally about entertaining and supervising children in physical activity rather than actually teaching them. This was seen by teachers to be suitable for summer play schemes or sports camps, but inappropriate in a more formal school context.

The PE Specialist model: Issues of principle and pragmatism

The final model for the delivery of PE – reported by the 36 SLs as the least commonplace, with just over one-third (37%) of schools adopting this approach – was that of a specialist PE teacher teaching the subject to different classes across the school.

Despite the relatively infrequent use of the specialist system, and the varying ways in which it was adopted in these schools, it was still described, by the SLs at least, as the preferred model. Only a small number supported the generalist or coaching approaches, while the specialist model was clearly identified by almost all (75%) of the SLs as their favoured approach: “I think it's a fantastic model; if every school could have a specialist, even part-time specialist, I think it would work a lot better” (SL7). At the same time, however, many of the SLs were quick to acknowledge the financial costs of such an approach:

One of our teachers at the time was a qualified PE teacher and she was asked if she would like to cover PE and she jumped at the chance. She worked three days of the week and she covered everybody's PE. But obviously she was a teacher and that was quite costly. When the new head teacher came in she had to look at budget, she had to cut budget. What she then did was what she did at her last school – they had employed a football coach who did what our teacher was doing but obviously at a reduced cost. So that was the route that she took. (SL35)

In terms of the supposed strengths and weaknesses of specialist PE teachers' teaching, as well as leading, primary PE, the first and main justification proffered by SLs related to subject knowledge and expertise. A relative dearth of subject expertise was considered by the vast majority of the SLs to be the key weakness of many generalist teachers who found the range and content of the NCPE too challenging. This was contrasted with the key benefits of the specialist model: "a teacher who's passionate and knowledgeable about the subject" (SL4) as well as a source of support: "they can use me for ideas. They can observe me teaching and see how I take them the next step" (SL2). A final advantage of the specialist system was viewed as having one person well placed to oversee, organise and regularly teach the subject. The specialist teacher was thought to bring a more coherent approach to planning and ensure progression from one year to the next:

Because I teach throughout the whole school and made the plan myself, I can see that it follows on so it goes from the foundation right through to year 6s and it shows overall what should be taught that year. (SL7)

All-in-all, not only did the SLs view the specialist model as resulting in better school-wide and within class organisation of PE, it also helped ensure the quality of teaching and learning

in primary PE: “I know in that school they’ve got a teacher who teaches PE; well that’s fantastic because as I say the children are going to end up having quality teaching aren’t they?” (SL28)

DISCUSSION

Of the three models described by the 36 SLs in this study – as the more prominent models for the delivery of primary curricular PE in their schools – some combination involving sports coaches was pre-eminent. In this discussion we will focus in the first instance on the pros and cons of this development before contextualising what increasingly appears a transformation, rather than merely a change, in the delivery of primary PE.

On the plus side, sports coaches were deemed to possess a number of advantages. First of all, they possessed sporting expertise (albeit, often limited to particular sports, and usually football), something which very few generalist class teachers could claim. In this regard, the SLs’ perceptions often coincided with the view of Ofsted that the use of sports coaches helps pupils to acquire and develop skills – especially when the coaches worked collaboratively with teachers (Ofsted, 2009, 2013). Some of the SLs’ views also chimed with studies which have suggested that coaches tended to have a positive impact on participation and engagement in PE lessons (Smith, 2013). In addition, sports coaches were viewed as willing teachers of PE. Once again, this was something very many class teachers were believed to lack. Sports coaches were also held to be flexible – prepared to teach PE come what come may, in terms of facilities, weather and so forth. Finally, the SLs acknowledged the evident appeal to their schools of sports coaches as a relatively cheap staffing option.

The perceived shortcomings of generalist class teachers in this study adds weight to a well-rehearsed view (see, for example, Elliott, Atencio, Campbell, & Jess, 2013; Harris, Cale, & Musson, 2012; Morgan & Hansen, 2008) neatly summarized by Tsangaridou (2012, p. 281) thus: “A significant number of primary school teachers have low levels of confidence, do not possess the skills and knowledge to deliver appropriate PE instruction, have limited content knowledge and do not feel competent teaching PE”. All-in-all, then, the main argument for sports coaches tended to be an implicitly negative one: put starkly, sports coaches were deemed better than many primary teachers because of the inherent weaknesses among the latter.

It was clear, however, that the SLs viewed the use of sports coaches as problematic for a variety of reasons, prominent among which was the coaches’ shortcomings as educationalists: they were coaches rather than teachers. The SLs regarded coaches not only as second-class educational citizens but also as a threat to the educational status of PE and the professional status of PE teachers. While acknowledging the coaches’ specific subject knowledge, personal skills and enthusiasm, they were critical of their teaching and classroom management abilities. This chimes with the wider evidence that because they possess weaker pedagogical skills (Blair & Capel, 2013; Ofsted, 2009; Smith 2013) – largely due to their lack of teaching qualifications (Blair & Capel, 2011; Pickup, 2006) – coaches tend to be profoundly limited in relation to teaching styles, behaviour management, and knowledge of both the curriculum and the children themselves (Griggs, 2008, 2010; Smith, 2013).

The fact that over half of the PE lessons delivered in the 36 schools were estimated to have involved a sports coach indicates the depth of penetration into curricular PE (quite apart from their pervasiveness in extra-curricular PE) not only of ‘outsourcing’ (Williams &

MacDonald, 2015, p.1), in particular, but the impact of neo-liberal educational policies (Ball, 2007) on the delivery of PE (MacDonald, 2014; Wilkinson & Penney, 2014) more generally. The evidence of outsourcing in this study lends support to Powell's (2014, p.73) observation that "notions of the inexpert classroom teacher and the expert outside provider [have] converged with the discourse of 'PE as sport'."

It may be misleading to suggest that this change or transformation is tantamount to a *de-professionalization* of PE; not least because PE in primary schools has long been taught by non-specialist (often unwilling) generalist class teachers. That said, the expectation that primary teachers with a PE specialism would assume a SL role has been in place since the introduction of the NCPE. Indeed, the ostensible value of specialist PE teachers leading and teaching the subject has been endorsed by the Government's introduction (announced as part of the *PE and Sport Premium*) of a pilot course: 'Primary PE specialist initial teacher training' in 2013. Against that backdrop, the widespread normalization of the involvement of sports coaches in PE appears a counter trend to attempts to professionalize primary PE; not least via the use of PE SLs. The effects of the Premium appear, therefore, to run counter to the policy (see, for example, National College for Teaching and Leadership, 2015) of subject specialists leading and delivering primary PE. Rather than 'upskilling' and training existing staff (either generalist teachers or PE SLs), in practice, head teachers appear more inclined to utilise the Premium to 'outsource' primary PE.

Whether or not, the growth of coaches is de-professionalizing the delivery of PE, it certainly appears to be ensuring that any ostensible educational content is diminished. Similar to the findings in the studies of Griggs (2008) and Smith (2013), the SLs made clear their view that PE delivered by sports coaches tends to be dominated by sport and by games and football in

particular; not least because this tends to be the background and expertise of many of the coaches. The use of coaches appears likely, then, to exacerbate any existing tendency to turn primary PE into a pale imitation of the sport-biased curricular of secondary schools.

In the remainder of the Discussion, we want to set these developments in the delivery of primary PE in context.

Setting developments in context

On top of the well-established desire among many generalist primary teachers to avoid teaching PE, several developments in recent decades have paved the way for the current context in which sports coaches have become a more and more prominent part of the primary PE landscape. Particularly influential was the introduction in 2002 of SSPs, wherein a cluster of primary schools came under the influence of a designated secondary school (a Sports College) and an SCo (see Smith, 2013). As Smith (2013) observes, the SSP programme provided impetus to a nascent trend; in effect, it extended the “widespread and normalized” use of sports coaches to deliver extra-curricular PE into curricular PE. The SSP programme not only “facilitated the increasing use of sports coaches to deliver aspects of PE in state primary schools in England”, it legitimated (in the name of promoting sport and sports participation) the accommodation of coaches “within existing curricular arrangements” (Smith, 2013, p.1). The SSP policy was not an exception, however. Indeed, it was of a piece with a range of policies since the 1980s which have tended to conflate PE with school sport (Ward & Griggs, 2011) and, in doing so, provided a justification for the use of sports coaches who then compound the issue by prioritising the teaching of sports skills (Blair & Capel, 2011; Ofsted, 2009) while neglecting other elements of NCPE which do not cohere with traditional *coaching* (rather than teaching) models (Blair & Capel, 2013; Griggs, 2008).

Whatever the pros and cons of the evident shift towards greater use of sports coaches in curricular as well as extra-curricular PE, the current context appears only likely to exacerbate matters. Directly or indirectly, the SLs in this study outlined a scenario in which a shift towards sports coaches and away from generalist class teachers and, albeit to a lesser extent, specialist PE SLs was well underway. In light of the (perhaps inevitable) failure of teacher training to address many of the inherent weaknesses in primary generalist teachers' capacity to deliver PE (Elliott, Atencio, Campbell & Jess, 2013; Harris, Cale, & Musson, 2012), the seeming desire (for a variety of perfectly understandable reasons) of generalist teachers to avoid teaching PE is likely to continue. Such predispositions are evidently made easier by the fact that, in the form of sports coaches, schools have a seemingly ideal reserve army of [relatively cheap] surplus ['expert'] labour. Thus, while one of the main issues regarding the involvement of sports coaches (wholly or partly) in the delivery of PE in primary schools revolved around what might broadly be termed educational suitability and viability, the more significant drivers for change appeared quite prosaic. There were (and continue to be) good economic and pragmatic reasons for schools to employ sports coaches: economic in the sense that sports coaches were cheaper, pragmatic in the sense that the use of coaches dealt with the reluctance and inability of many generalist teachers to deliver PE. It is worthy of note, at this juncture, that the SLs' perceptions of the use of sports coaches, and the 'outsourcing' of PE more generally, bore no clear, let alone significant, relation to the size or socio-economic context of their school – viz-a-viz either the schools' staffing models for PE or, for that matter, their policies towards the use of coaches. Similarly, there was no pattern to either the likelihood of SLs reporting more 'outsourcing' or poorer quality coaches in relation to their school's socio-economic location (see Table 1). Counter-intuitively, and despite the perception among the SLs that employing coaches rather than teachers was the 'cheaper

option', there appeared a tendency for coaches to be used in schools in all areas, including those more affluent.

The apparent 'threat' to the status of PE in the primary curriculum (as well as the status of PE specialists) ostensibly posed by the growth of coaches in curricular PE in primary schools may well be exacerbated by the *Primary PE and Sport Premium*. According to the recent DfE (2014) survey of uses of the Premium in England, around two-thirds (70%) of primary schools reported making changes to the staffing of curricular PE lessons as a direct result. While 86% of schools reported using the premium to 'up skill' and train existing staff, of the two thirds who had changed their staffing, over half (up to 54% from 22% the previous academic year) reported using specialist PE teachers and over four-fifths said they had made greater use of external sport coaches (82% compared to 37% the previous year). Thus, the Premium appears to be adding impetus to a change, even transformation, in the staffing of primary PE.

Sustaining a specialist provision in PE requires a determined commitment on the part of head teachers and their governing bodies, not least in terms of specialist PE teachers let alone facilities. This is important in light of what Rainer, Cropley, Jarvis and Griffiths' (2012) study has shown to be the 'fundamental role' of the head teacher in ensuring that specific PE-related policies (including the use of resources, such as the Premium) are delivered. It was apparent that in all 36 schools in the present study, the head teacher was, indeed, the arbiter of both economic and human resources. In some cases the SLs reported being consulted on staffing policy by their head teachers. However, there was no clear pattern to consultation where it occurred. Had the SLs exerted greater control over decision-making then there is reason to believe that the employment of PE specialists would have been far more prevalent –

this being by far their preferred model. In reality, the use of specialists was the least common model seen in the primary schools. The role of the SLs in the decision-making process appeared, therefore, peripheral: whether or not they were consulted, they were less influential in determining the approach taken by the school than they would have hoped and anticipated. All-in-all, the increased financial and institutional power allocated to head teachers through central 'market' reforms in recent decades (Ball, 2007) has created a context in which, while head teachers – in all types of primary schools – appear content to employ sports coaches, SLs will remain relatively powerless to do much about this.

In England, as in other countries around the world, such as New Zealand (Petrie and Lisahunter, 2011), primary PE, as a process, occurs “amidst multiple, and not necessarily compatible, sets of expectations, associated with government priorities, initiatives focusing on children’s health, sport, and improved national achievement outcomes”; in other words, “constantly shifting policy initiatives” (Petrie and Lisahunter, 2011, p.325) that inevitably create the context in which primary PE is delivered. In sociological terms, primary PE bears the hallmarks of a number of social processes: networks of interdependent people within which power ratios (between head teachers, SLs, class teachers and sports coaches among others) fluctuate; the unintended consequences of sometimes mutually contradictory national policies enacted at the local level; and so forth. The relative power of SLs has declined due to a changing context. Where once they were more-or-less able to influence the primary PE curriculum as SLs, the power and influence of PE SLs has diminished as the marketization of education (Ball, 2007) has shifted policy emphasis towards school *sport* rather than PE per se. The *PE and Sport Premium* appears to be exacerbating that trend. All-in-all, the utilization of ‘external providers’ and paralysis by policy are prominent features of the

primary PE context in England and Wales as much as they are elsewhere in the world (see Petrie and Lisahunter, 2012).

CONCLUSION

Sociologists tend to talk in terms of change and transformation (Roberts, 2012). Change will have occurred if the delivery of primary PE differs in some way or other from the way it was. It will be more appropriate, however, to talk of transformation in primary PE if the shift towards outsourcing PE to commercial sports coaches becomes commonplace and well-established. The relations between intentional human action and its unplanned effects are inevitably opaque (Elias, 1994): only time will tell whether the changes afoot amount to the kinds of transformation in the teaching of PE in primary schools that we are hinting at. There remains, it must be said, a good deal of continuity in the delivery of primary PE. It is our contention, nevertheless, that, amidst the evident lengthening chains of interdependency within PE networks, the portents of a future with sports coaches as the main deliverers of primary school *sport*, rather than simply PE – possibly alongside PE SLs, with generalist primary teachers having nothing to do with PE – are there for all to see. Whether that is a good or bad thing depends entirely upon what one considers to be the aims and purposes of primary PE.

Finally, we must insert a caveat. Whether or not the apparent shift away from delivery of primary PE by generalist classroom teachers towards greater use of sports coaches constitutes a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ thing (or even both) only time and suitable research will tell. Coaches may well be inadequately prepared to teach curriculum PE (Blair & Capel, 2011) but it is not beyond the realms of possibility that they may enhance children’s engagement with sport. One thing appears clear, however: the traditional pattern of PE being taught by a generalist

classroom teacher may well become a thing of the past in primary schools in England. The vague statement from the NCPE2014 Physical Education Expert Group that schools should be “committed to working with key providers of physical education and school sport to ensure that teachers are at the heart of this delivery” (AfPE, 2014) is unlikely to do anything to forestall this process.

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