

# *Pupils' Expectations and Experiences of PE across the Primary–secondary Transition in South Wales*

DR KIERAN HODGKIN  
*Cardiff Metropolitan University*

## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the experiences of physical education (PE) among a group of 10–11-year-old pupils who made the transition to an inner-city secondary school in south Wales from one of its feeder primary schools during 2013. The primary–secondary transition concerning PE is marked by significant changes in resource provision, and a mode of delivery from (mainly) non-specialist teachers to subject specialists (Capel and Piotrowski, 2000). Identified as a source of discontinuity at a time of potential risk, the impact of PE has been neglected with educational research (Dismore and Bailey, 2010). As a qualitative exploratory study, an ethnographic approach was adopted with ‘pupil voice’ a distinctive and central feature. Two six-week phases of fieldwork were conducted which examined the holistic impact of PE across transition in a secondary school and its feeder primary school (June–October 2013). Twenty-five pupils’ expectations and experiences of PE across the transition were explored: first prior to transition (primary school) and then post-transition (secondary school). Thematic analysis of pupil interviews, staff interviews and classroom drawings was conducted and created three super ordinate findings which relate to pupils’ perception of the process of transition and specifically in terms of PE; the notion of ‘being good enough’; social implications of transition and gender; teachers and teaching were all highlighted as significant issues across the transitional process.

**Key words:** primary–secondary transition, physical education, pupil-voice, ethnography.

---

<https://doi.org/10.16922/wje.20.1.6>

*Introduction: the Significance of PE and the Primary–Secondary Transition*

A smooth transition in physical education (PE) is important, it can assist in managing the apparent decline in students' motivation and physical activity levels during their secondary school years (Fredricks and Eccles, 2002; Parish and Treasure, 2003). As the main societal institution for the promotion of physical activity among pupils (Cale and Harris, 2006), an effective transition between primary and secondary school PE has the potential to ease the social concerns pupils highlight in the extant literature (Pellegrini and Long, 2002; Dismore and Bailey, 2010). Furthermore, physical activity is associated with improved emotional well-being among young people (Jago et al., 2011), and at a time of social imbalance (Galton et al., 1999; Nicholls and Gardner, 1999), PE can play a pivotal role.

The transition to secondary school triggers a vast difference in the size of facilities, the specialism of teachers (i.e. non-specialist to specialists) and a mode of delivery from child-centred to subject-centred; PE as a subject incorporates a number of these substantial differences which is another reason why the present study evaluates the particularities of the transition concerned with PE.

Finally, PE has always been a focus for pupils prior to transition (Galton et al., 2003; Nicholls and Gardner, 1999). However, in comparison with other subjects in the curriculum, PE has received little attention in terms of its impact on pupils across the primary–secondary transition (Capel et al., 2004; Lawrence, 2006). For example, subjects such as science (Logan and Skamp, 2008), music (Marshall and Hargreaves, 2008), drama (Jindal-Snape et al., 2011) and foreign languages (Hunt et al., 2008) have received significant focus during the transition to secondary school. However, one factor frequently mentioned but rarely examined is the transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3, when most children move from primary to secondary school (Dismore and Bailey, 2010).

*Background and Context: the Primary–Secondary Transition and PE*

In terms of empirical research, only a small collection of (relatively dated) studies have focused on pupils' experiences during the transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 in the context of PE (Capel et al., 2004; Lawrence, 2006; Dismore, 2007; Dismore and Bailey, 2010). These studies have somewhat contrasting conclusions about pupils' perceptions of PE across

the transition, but one consistent message is the significant impact PE can have on the primary–secondary transition.

One study conducted by Dismore and Bailey (2010) explored attitudes of children and young people towards PE, and specifically to their transition from primary to secondary school. The study (in England) highlighted the curriculum and facilities as variables of pupils' attitude towards PE. The study had two significant conclusions: first, that participation in PE can act as a powerful medium for social development, and the period when most children are moving schools can heighten the processes of social inclusion/exclusion (Bailey, 2007); secondly, that 'most pupils' attitudes towards PE either remained the same or improved following the transition to Key Stage 3, whether the children moved within or between schools (Dismore and Bailey, 2010).

According to Dismore's (2007) work, children are increasingly more prepared for PE across the transition as they participate in a number of visits to secondary schools and sports festivals, which might also assist in achieving continuity and improving communication between primary and secondary schools. The implications of such sport festivals mean that pupils can experience their new surroundings, larger equipment and teachers' expectations. All of which can have a positive impact on transition between primary and secondary school (Dismore, 2007).

One significant issue associated with PE across transition is that information is not exchanged consistently between schools (Capel et al., 2004). Whilst some schools exchange information, it is not routinely used to inform progression; information is exchanged in written format or through discussion at formal meetings (Capel et al., 2004). Herein lies a significant issue within PE and the primary–secondary transition. If PE is to take a significant role in primary and secondary schools, it is vital that progression and continuity are achieved and that repeating schemes of work and experiencing activities that are beyond their capabilities are practices which are avoided. Other factors which are recognised as significant in facilitating a smooth transition for pupils in PE include better communication between teachers, maximising learning potential and increasing levels of motivation and interest making pupils feel more at ease and confident within the secondary school environment (Zwozdiak-Myers, 2002).

In summary, PE represents an area of the national curriculum which requires attention during the transition from primary to secondary school in order to prevent Year 7 pupils from being overcome by 'enormous'

sports halls, 'real' cricket bats, 'proper' gymnastics equipment, PE kit, showers and subject specialists (Capel and Piotrowski, 2000). This is especially pertinent with the development of the *successful futures* curriculum in Wales (Donaldson, 2015). Specifically, three significant factors have emerged as having an influence on pupils' attitudes towards PE: these are the curriculum, teachers and teaching, and social development (Subramaniam and Silverman, 2002). An exploration of these factors and their impact on the primary–secondary transition will form the basis for this part of the review, beginning with an exploration of teachers and teaching.

### *Teachers and Teaching*

For pupils, the way in which PE is taught is as important as the curriculum content (Green and Hardman, 2005). Since the introduction of the national curriculum, the role of the PE teacher has changed to concentrate on the holistic development of motor, cognitive and behavioural patterns (Hardman and Green, 2011). This role will further develop under the new *successful futures* curriculum, with health and well-being a central and distinctive feature (Donaldson, 2015). However, the issue of PE teaching across transition has been cited as a potential barrier for progression among pupils, therefore the debate surrounding 'specialism' carries extra importance (Dismore and Bailey, 2010; Hargreaves and Galton, 2002).

Internationally, a large body of research has focused on non-specialist PE teachers and their ability to teach PE in primary school (e.g. Morgan and Bourke, 2008; Petrie, 2010). These studies highlight one major factor, which prevents or creates difficulties for primary schoolteachers to teach PE: confidence. It has been suggested that a strong relationship exists between teachers' training in PE and their perceived confidence to teach the subject (Morgan and Bourke, 2005). Teachers felt significantly less confident to teach those PE content areas for which they perceived they had received poorer quality training (Morgan and Bourke, 2005). Teaching is embedded with explicit and implicit beliefs, symptomatic of the extent of evaluation, judgement and choice within teachers' role (Tsangaridou, 2008). If poor-quality teacher training causes teachers to have negative beliefs about PE, it is likely to have a negative impact upon their teaching of PE.

Although teacher training might impact on teachers' confidence in teaching PE, researchers have explored personal early experiences of PE as a source for the low level of confidence in teaching among non-specialists (Keating et al., 2002). These studies indicated that personal school experiences in PE provide prospective teachers with a wide range of information about PE, which might affect attitudes, beliefs and teaching practices (Keating et al., 2002).

Primary schools face a universal shortage of appropriately qualified teachers (Hardman and Green, 2011). The issue of non-specialist versus specialist PE teachers cannot be resolved with a quick-fire solution. For example, separating the primary classroom teacher from his/her pupils would be in line with the 'holistic' approach to primary school in which the 'physical' forms an intrinsic part (Carney and Howells, 2008). A balance between the qualities of the primary schoolteacher and a teacher with the confidence and knowledge to teach PE is required. However, having specialist PE teachers does not necessarily lead to enjoyment for pupils in PE. For example, Sport Wales (2015) found that pupils of primary school age are most likely to enjoy PE and sport, in school and out of school, whereas enjoyment was not as high with secondary schools across Wales.

This finding indicates that whilst there is a large body of knowledge exploring the issue of specialism in primary and secondary schools, for some pupils the 'non-specialist' is ideally placed to produce an enjoyable PE experience. This finding also reveals that pupils are experiencing discontinuity between their primary and secondary school experience of PE.

The previous section has discussed the contemporary issues that are associated with PE, all of which have a direct impact on pupils' experience of the primary–secondary transition. The next section of the review explores the issue of gender within PE and its impact on the transition. This section draws upon two equally pertinent and related issues: first, gender differences in the way pupils perceive PE, specifically the disengagement of girls in PE; secondly, the impact of mixed-gender and single-sex PE lessons on disengagement within PE.

*Social Development within Physical Education: the Role of Gender*

Gender has long been an issue in PE with a body of research pointing towards the continued prevalence of gender inequality and exclusion in often-complex ways within the PE curriculum, structures and practices (Luke and Sinclair, 1991; Rich, 2004; Talbot, 1996). Gender inequality often refers to the non-participation of girls in PE. For example, Sport Wales has recently identified that girls are less likely to participate frequently (three or more occasions per week) in school-based or community sport, particularly once they are of secondary school age (Sport Wales, 2015). However, what the survey fails to explore is the reason behind this response. Whether, in line with Hay and Macdonald (2010), girls feel that the PE curriculum is directed towards competition, which might be dominated by boys. In accordance with this perspective, Cairney et al. (2012) found that girls reported lower levels of PE enjoyment than boys did, and these differences increased over time. This finding indicates that boys' and girls' perception of PE and competition moves in opposite directions, with boys' enjoyment levels increasing with time (into secondary school) whilst girls' enjoyment levels and participation decrease. With girls less likely to participate in PE in secondary school, a smooth transition between the two phases is emphasised here, with pupils building upon and developing their experience of primary school.

However, whilst research focuses primarily on a negative experience of PE for girls, boys too have concerns about participating in PE. For example, in a study by Tischler and McCaughtry (2011) exploring marginalised boys perceptions of PE, boys concerns included having the wrong body shape; having less coordination; being slower, weaker, less athletic, less fit and more subdued. Moreover, Brooks and Magnusson (2006) found that team sports could be highly problematic with direct physical or verbal abuse being perceived as a likely repercussion for those not displaying masculine physical prowess. For boys their concerns surrounding PE centre on the notion of masculinity but girls cite the domination of boys (activity and control) as factors, which prevent participation.

In the past PE was one of the few secondary school subjects in the curriculum where pupils had been traditionally taught different activities in single-sex groupings, building a long gendered history of curriculum differentiation (Flintoff and Scraton, 2001). The specialised training of male and female PE teachers took place separately with females focusing on health and well-being through dance and gymnastics, whilst male

teacher training centred on competitive team games (see Kirk, 1992; Flintoff and Scraton, 2001). However, the issue of 'separation' within PE has remained and still remains prominent in educational research (see Knowles et al., 2011). Many schools have entertained practices comparable to those that would have featured in PE many decades ago, many single-sex departments by male heads of PE, offering a thoroughly unreconstructed sex-differentiated curriculum (Evans and Penny, 2002). In addition, it has been suggested that:

Sporting practices, the 'core' of many PE curricula were, and still are, overwhelmingly associated with tough, aggressive, competitive and potentially dangerous practices, the antithesis to stereotypical femininity (i.e. grace, poise, flexibility, balance), causing many girls (and some boys) to perceive themselves incapable of becoming physically educated. [Hay and Macdonald, 2010: 273]

The very nature of these activities has the potential to disengage female pupils in primary school and potentially through to secondary school. Moreover, it has been suggested that the presence of males in a PE class can have an especially negative impact on female students' enjoyment of PE (Robinson, 2012). However, Hills and Croston (2012) introduce the idea of 'undoing gender'. In their ethnographic study exploring mixed-gender PE lessons in a mixed comprehensive school, findings suggest that whilst some girls expressed a belief that boys were better at PE than girls, others challenged this assumption. Several girls enjoyed opportunities to interact with boys and, in some cases, felt uneasy about the segregation that occurred when boys and girls had separate lessons (Hills and Croston, 2012). This finding highlights the importance of mixed-gender PE lessons in the social development of pupils and as a result 'undoing gender' which in turn might have a positive impact on pupils experiences across the transition. In order to fully explore all aspects of the primary-secondary transition associated with PE, an exploratory and flexible research design was chosen for this study – one for which ethnography is ideally suited (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983; Willis, [1990]2012),

#### *A Note on Method*

Two schools in metropolitan Wales were chosen for fieldwork, Urban Comprehensive School and City Primary School (both names are pseudonyms). City Primary School had pupils ranging from ages 3 to 11 and

*Kieran Hodgkin 99*

situated in metropolitan Wales, whereas Urban Comprehensive School included pupils ranging from the ages of 11 to 18, also situated in metropolitan Wales. A purposive method of sampling was adopted. A two-month period was spent in City Primary School during the final term of the academic year (June/July 2013) and in Urban Comprehensive School during the first term of the following year (September/October 2013). The pupils were placed at the centre of the study, whilst staff views were also elicited. Year 6 pupils were selected and tracked across the primary–secondary transition. A sample of twenty-five pupils were recruited from City Primary School, and a smaller sample tracked into Urban Comprehensive School. In total twelve pupils were tracked into Urban Comprehensive School and re-interviewed about their experiences of PE across the transition. In support of pupils’ views around transition, staff views were also elicited across Year 6 and 7. Ethnography within an exploratory qualitative approach was adopted. O’Reilly (2009) reveals that ethnography primarily draws on a family of methods involving direct and sustained contact with human agents (i.e. interviews, participant observation, reflection, focus

**Figure 1. A visual example of the physical activity ‘interests’ task with the pupils at City Primary School.**





**Figure 2. An example of a PE task pupils were asked to complete during my time at Urban Comprehensive School.**



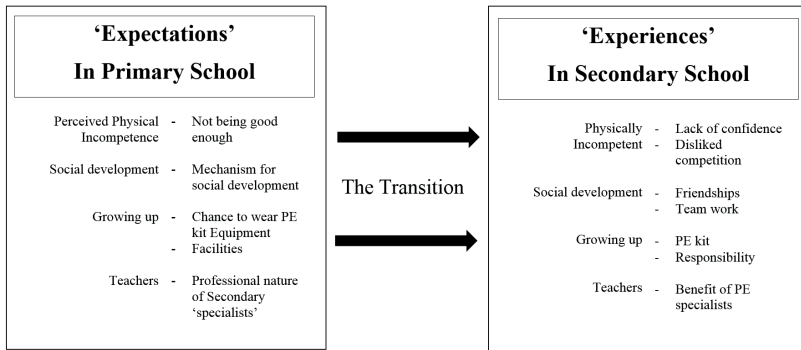
groups, field notes and informal discussions). In order to develop a rapport with pupils in the present study, a sustained period of four weeks was spent in both settings before collecting any data. In addition, classroom activities were elicited to begin to give voice to a population, who are generally muted within educational research. An example of these activities are highlighted in Figures 1 and 2.

Once all the data had been collected, interviews were transcribed and an inductive, thematic analysis was performed on all the data (i.e. observations, interviews and classroom activities). In terms of data management, Nvivo 9 software was used to store and manage the interview data. The analysis focused on pupils' experiences of PE across the primary–secondary transition, examining whether the pupils' experiences of the primary–secondary transition met their expectations or not. This is exemplified in Figure 3.

Discussion of Findings

The present study has identified three significant findings in relation to pupils' expectations and experiences of PE. These centre on being good enough for secondary school (physical competence), social development and specialist PE teachers. This is highlighted in the 'process of transition (PE)' model in Figure 3.

**Figure 3. Pupils' expectations and experiences of PE across the primary–secondary transition.**



The model indicates that, in regards to PE, pupils' experiences of the transition were similar to their expectations. For example, pupils' perceived themselves as lacking physical competence with a focus on 'not being good enough' at City Primary, an expectation that became reality at Urban Comprehensive. Moreover, the pupils recognised the significant role PE would play in social development, especially in establishing friendships, which became a reality post-transition. Finally, pupils acknowledged the positive impact of PE specialists prior to transition, which matched their secondary school experiences. The following section explores these three significant findings in relation to the extant literature. The findings are dealt with separately, beginning with pupils' perceived lack of physical competence.

*Pupils' Perceived Physical Incompetence*

Pupils in the present study perceived themselves as not 'being good enough' for secondary school in terms of their physical competence. For example,

Year 6 pupil Gregg noted 'Here we don't really learn many skills, like most of the time we play games and that, but I think that's going to be hard in secondary school cus there you do.' According to afPE (2013), PE involves both 'learning to move' and 'moving to learn'. Whilst the pupils co-operated with others on occasions (moving to learn), 'learning to move' (their physical competence) was significantly undeveloped pre-transition, consequently affecting their post-transition experiences. This was evidenced in pupils' expectation that they would struggle with the increased difficulty at Urban Comprehensive. Moreover, PE lessons in City Primary normally comprised games with boys participating in a game of football while girls played netball – leaving physical competence neglected. The primary PE co-ordinator supported and summarised this point effectively:

Yes, the application of some of the rules and games and things might be inconsistent and delivered differently. I think primary PE has a significant part to play in the development of pupils, however, I don't think pupils go up with an understanding of developing the technical side of PE. [primary PE co-ordinator, City Primary]

In the present study, the focus on physical competence comprised pupils' confidence towards PE and the onset of competition both prior to and post-transition. According to Dismore (2007), children are increasingly more prepared for PE across the transition as they participate in a number of visits to secondary schools and sports festivals. However, findings from this piece of research suggest that (in the case of City Primary and Urban Comprehensive) these visits do little to improve pupils' confidence and competence in PE, as it remains a significant issue pre-transition.

It is instead pupils' pre-transitional experiences in PE lessons which need to be managed to prevent them becoming disillusioned by PE across the transition. For example, there needs to be a significant focus on skill development to enable pupils to develop confidence prior to the move. Moreover, pupils in the present study enjoyed the competitive element of PE in City Primary, but competed with relative ease, whereas in Urban Comprehensive they struggled with the onset of competition. For example, Jemma noted,

Well like it is harder, you don't just play games, you like learn stuff, skills and that. I find like hockey hard because there are kids that are good and like we didn't do much in primary school, so it just depends like how much you learn in primary school really. [Jemma, Urban Comprehensive]

This finding demonstrates the significance of communication and collaboration between primary and secondary schools. However, whilst this piece of research centred on the pupils' experiences of the transition, the views of staff were elicited to support such views. Similarly, the head of PE stated:

Pupils inevitably have a varied experience of PE due to varying equipment, specialism, etc. However, the technical side of PE is unfulfilled, basic skills aren't being developed in primary school which is causing a problem for pupils once they have made the transition to secondary school. [head of PE, Urban Comprehensive]

This draws comparisons with the view of the PE co-ordinator at City Primary, who also identified an issue with both 'learning to move' and 'moving to learn' across the primary-secondary transition. Claire at Urban Comprehensive summarised the point effectively, 'Well it's so different in primary school it's really basic and here it's really hard, there's no like in-between so it's hard to get used to.'

In the case of City Primary and Urban Comprehensive, communication and collaboration remained a problem. In terms of City Primary, not enough information was exchanged relating to PE and the PE department at Urban Comprehensive agreed, blaming the sparse amount of PE data.

Findings from the present study suggest that pupils perceived physical incompetence was matched by their post-transition experiences (see Figure 3). The implication is that pupils, who have negative perceptions of their competence in PE, may be making conscious decisions not to participate in specific physical activities, which they have experienced at school (Carroll and Loumidis, 2001). It is fundamental that pupils are given the confidence and competence to partake in PE to avoid this stage of the development having a negative impact on future participation in physical activity beyond school. Pupils require a challenging primary school PE environment and a continuous and progressive experience once they have arrived in secondary school.

Physical incompetence was a significant element of PE, which had a negative impact upon transition. However, findings from the present study also suggest that (according to the pupils) PE has a significant role to play in social development across the transition. The following section explores PE as a positive way in which to develop pupils' social skills (i.e. teamwork) and both prior to and post-transition.

*Physical Education as a Mechanism for Social Development*

According to Dismore and Bailey (2010), there is a sense in which the PE environment was a distinctive setting for peer socialisation. Perhaps it is because PE provided greater or distinctive opportunities to socialise that lessons were also settings in which wider social issues came to the fore.

For pupils in the present study, social development comprised maintaining and establishing friendships, and they saw PE as a source of social support. For example Claire noted, 'most of the activities in PE you have to talk to other people and that it is not like maths where most of the time you work on your own'. Prior to transition pupils were anxious to retain their friends and saw PE as a vehicle in which to do this:

If you mix, like you communicate with more people and if you are going to the same high school as them then you know them because you have mixed PE, you get the chance to do that but in other subjects you don't. [Amy, City Primary]

Staff also supported this finding:

Yeah absolutely, so you have all the social skills that are important, PE is unique in some respects as it offers opportunities that other subjects do not. So for example, here, in PE pupils work as part of a team in invasion games and we regularly ask them to use apparatus to decide on the most effective way across the sports hall. This task incorporates teamwork, leadership, cohesion that are all integral parts of PE. [primary PE co-ordinator, City Primary]

The importance of these types of activities is highlighted here. They provide pupils with key skills (i.e. social skills, teamwork) required in secondary school and throughout adulthood.

At Urban Comprehensive, most pupils' experiences of PE coincided with their expectations. In terms of the social aspect of PE, pupils anticipated PE to alleviate their social concerns, a prospect which became a reality. Evidence of this can be found in James's quotation, 'yeah in PE you have to get into groups and like talk to people and you do it with different classes so you meet more people and that'. For the pupils, PE became a vehicle for developing new friendship groups and provided an opportunity to socialise during the initial period at Urban Comprehensive. Similarly, Paul describes the role of PE on social development, post-transition:

Well like I have met loads of friends in PE, because right we do it with another class so like you can meet some of the other boys from that class, and so you don't just know people that are in your class. Like if someone is on your team you know

*Kieran Hodgkin 105*

their name and pass to them and that, and then after you are friends. [Paul, Urban Comprehensive]

Paul provides an insightful description of the situations in PE, which instigate friendships and socialisation. Findings from the present study demonstrate that PE has the potential to ease the social concerns to which pupils allude to prior to transition and, importantly too, post-transition. PE allows pupils to develop friendships with a wider network of pupils through extra-curricular activity. With social development seemingly working well across the transition it is important therefore that PE plays a more integral role in developing pupils social skills post-transition and, importantly too, prior to transition.

A key underlining message throughout the present study has been the importance of the teachers in the transition process. In terms of PE, the notion of specialist versus non-specialist teachers had a significant impact on pupils' expectations and experiences. The following section is devoted to the notion of specialism across the transition and its impact on pupils' experiences.

### *The Impact of Physical Education Teachers*

Prior to transition pupils expected secondary school to be more professional due to the introduction of (in their words) 'PE teachers' as opposed to 'teachers of PE'. Liam perceived secondary school PE teachers to be:

Energetic and fun and they will help with the things you don't like and try and make you better at them even if you're not good at it, try your best. Like if you're not too good it's about taking part and if you are good at it it's about being competitive. [Luke, City Primary]

This finding suggests that (in the case of City Primary and Urban Comprehensive) pupils were lacking support prior to transition which contributed to a discontinuous experience between primary and secondary school. Similarly, Becky considered PE in secondary school to be, 'better because they will know more about PE, more than the teachers here'. Becky's experience of primary school PE, like Luke's, is that of dissatisfaction and her response conveys more confidence in the teaching of PE at secondary school with regard to increasing her knowledge and skills. In Wales, the Schools and Physical Activity Task Finish Group (SPATFG) recommended that:

All schools need to have access to well-qualified, specialist teachers, who would continually work with schools to ensure the delivery of high-quality PE programmes and who could identify and promote best practice. This support would also facilitate the smooth transition between primary and secondary schools. [2013: 6]

This finding illustrates the significance of specialism across the primary–secondary transition in Wales (where the research took place). In support of this, discussions with staff in both City Primary and Urban Comprehensive suggested that it is not just a matter of ‘specialism’, instead that effective links and support between primary and secondary school-teachers is essential. This was a perspective that was emphasised by the primary PE co-ordinator, which brought light to the issue of specialism. In contrast with Becky’s view, he suggested:

Yeah if I had spoken to you ten years ago when I came into the profession, PE is in a much better state than it was then particularly in regards to non-subject specific teachers teaching dance and gymnastics because they lacked the confidence to do so. However, PESS in particular has given them the skills and ability to deliver it and pupils speak positively about those experiences. So gym and dance has really improved and I think games in our school we have got a much more structured approach and a good way of building the skills set into small sided games. [primary PE co-ordinator]

This response indicates a positive outlook on primary school PE in comparison to the views of the pupils. The passage highlights a significant improvement in primary PE teachers’ ability to teach PE over the last ten years. However, whilst the primary PE co-ordinator identifies that gym and dance has improved, little is mentioned about invasion games such as football, netball or hockey. In addition, the thoughts of the head of PE in Urban Comprehensive highlighted a somewhat contrasting view: ‘I do think “non-specialists” hinder pupils’ progress across the transition. Nonetheless, a keen and informed non-specialist is way better than a dis-engaged ill-informed expert’ (head of PE, Urban Comprehensive).

Findings from the present study, supported by the work of SPATFG (2013) suggest that primary schoolteachers need more support in their teaching of PE, which in turn might improve pupils’ experience during the primary–secondary transition. According to the staff in the present study, teacher training is where PE is failing. The Year 6 teacher at City Primary stated:

I feel there should be more; I don’t think primary teachers get enough training in PE and sometimes it is dependent on their personal interests. There is a lot of talk

*Kieran Hodgkin 107*

about specialism in PE; it needs to be dealt with at the source, teacher training. [Year 6 teacher, City Primary]

Similarly, SPATFG (2013: 6) indicates that: 'The amount of time given to PE in Initial Teacher Training programmes is severely limited. This aspect of training needs to be dramatically improved to establish suitable conditions to deliver high-quality PE programmes in all schools.' This is an aspect of PE which requires significant improvement if PE is to take a more prominent role in the primary–secondary transition. Moreover, it is fundamental that teachers can acquire the skills and expertise to deliver consistently high-quality and motivating lessons that engage, challenge and inspire all pupils (SPATFG, 2013).

Inevitably, at Urban Comprehensive pupils responded positively to their secondary school PE specialists. This contributed to the feeling that they were being challenged in PE lessons and therefore progressing. This finding suggests that continuity and progression in terms of teaching and learning needs to be in line with the previous or next stage of the educational process. Pupils require a course of study which builds upon what they have already learnt, and a contributing factor is teachers having sufficient knowledge of PE to provide a suitable basis in primary school.

A study by Petrie (2010) found that generalist teachers could feel competent, motivated and confident in their ability to teach PE without extensive opportunities to develop PE content knowledge. However, this might not necessarily provide pupils with confidence in PE in terms of competence. This present study instead suggests that opportunities for primary schoolteachers to work alongside their secondary counterparts needs to be the norm rather than just an 'opportunity'; this in turn may lead to pupils becoming equipped with the knowledge required for secondary school and a greater chance of participation in PE and sporting activity beyond school life.

### *Concluding Thoughts*

Findings from this research both contradict and support previous empirical research related to the impact of PE across transition. For example, pupils in the present study indicated a lack of confidence in terms of their physical competence, which continued to be a problem post-transition. Moreover, pupils' perception of competition varied between the two settings, in



primary school pupils competed with relative ease, yet in secondary school the onset of competition was an aspect of PE many found difficult.

The key message surrounding PE is that pupils held an expectation that they weren't 'good enough' for the significant step up at secondary school. Pupils felt their primary school experience was lacking challenge in terms of their physical competence, which would have significance post-transition. As expected, the pupils struggled with the focus on skill-related activity at Urban Comprehensive. Moreover, the onset of competition had a significant impact on pupils' confidence in PE. Whilst they competed with relative ease in primary school, the pupils struggled with competitive activities at Urban Comprehensive.

This research also supports the important role PE can play in social development across transition, which has been a feature of previous empirical research (Dismore and Bailey, 2010). However, this research is unique in the way it pinpoints the elements of PE, which enhanced pupils' social development including extra-curricular activity and mixed-gender lessons. In terms of extra-curricular activity, this can support pupils in developing new friendships with a wider network. Moreover, mixed-gender PE lessons can provide a unique social experience prior to transition and potentially provide support for pupils post-transition. With social development seemingly working well across the transition it is important therefore that PE plays a more integral role in developing pupils' social skills post-transition and importantly too prior to transition.

Teachers played a significant role in pupils' expectations and experiences of the primary-secondary transition. Pupils recognised the benefit of having a secondary school PE specialist as opposed to a generalist primary teacher. They perceived secondary schoolteachers as having a positive influence on their progression in PE. In this case, the pupils' experiences matched their expectations with the majority responding positively to the challenging environment created by their secondary school PE teachers.

Alongside these main headlines, the present study has emphasised the significance of implementing a child-centred approach to this research area. Findings from this research advocate the importance of considering the perceptions of the population experiencing such a transition.

Future Research Directions

Previous research has illustrated the role of PE in pupils' social development (Dismore and Bailey, 2010); however, this research has indicated that 'learning to move' (physical competence) requires significant improvement across transition. This is especially important within the landscape of Donaldson's successful future curriculum and its focus on health and well-being (Donaldson, 2015). Future research is required to examine the development of physical competence within primary school settings. Whilst this study has recommended a significant area for future research, it is essential that research of this kind centres on the pupils, their expectations and experiences of the transition.

References

- afPE (2013). 'Health Position Paper'. *Physical Education Matters*, 8 (1), 82–7.
- Bailey, R. (2007). 'Youth sport and social inclusion', in H. Dismore and R. Bailey (2010), 175–91.
- Brooks, F. and Magnusson, J. (2006). 'Taking part counts: adolescents' experiences of the transition from inactivity to active participation in school-based physical education'. *Health Education Research*, 21 (6), 872–33.
- Cairney, J., Kwan, M., Veldhuizen, S., Hay, J., Bray, S. and Fraught, B. (2012). 'Gender, perceived competence and the enjoyment of physical education in children: a longitudinal examination'. *International Journal of Behavioural Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 9, 26.
- Cale, L. and Harris, J. (2006). 'School-based physical activity interventions: Effectiveness, trends, issues, implications and recommendations for practice'. *Sport, Education and Society*, 11 (4), 401–20.
- Capel, S. and Piotrowski, S. (2000). *Issues in Physical Education*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Capel, S., Zwozdiak-Myers, P. and Lawrence, J. (2004). 'Exchange of information about physical education to support the transition of pupils from primary and secondary school'. *Educational Research*, 46 (3), 283–300.
- Carney, P. and Howells, K. (2008). 'The Primary Physical Education Specialist'. *Physical Education Matters*, 3 (3), 3–4.
- Carroll, B. and Loumidis, J. (2001). 'Children's Perceived Competence and Enjoyment in Physical Education and Physical Activity Outside School'. *European Physical Education Review*, 7 (1), 24–43.
- Dismore, H. (2008). 'Key Issues in Primary/Secondary Transition'. *Physical Education Matters*, 3 (3), 30–1.

- Dismore, H. (2007). 'The Attitudes of Children and Young people Towards Physical Education and School Sport with References to the Transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3', in H. Dismore (2008).
- Dismore, H. and Bailey, R. (2010). "'It's been a bit of a rocky start": attitudes towards physical education following transition'. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 15 (2), 175–91.
- Donaldson, G. (2015). *Successful Futures: independent review of the curriculum in Wales*. Available at: [www.cscjcs.org.uk/getattachment/34a3bdcf-370f-4c92-aa1c-29500bea443c/Initial-Highlights-of-the-Donaldson-Report.pdf.aspx](http://www.cscjcs.org.uk/getattachment/34a3bdcf-370f-4c92-aa1c-29500bea443c/Initial-Highlights-of-the-Donaldson-Report.pdf.aspx) (accessed 14 October 2017).
- Evans, J. and Penny, D. (2002). 'Setting the Agenda', in D. Penny, *Gender and Physical Education: Contemporary Issues and Future Directions*. Oxford: Routledge, pp. 1–24.
- Galton, M., Gray, J. and Rudduck, J. (1999). *The Impact of School Transitions and Transfers on Pupil Progress and Attainment*, Research Report 131, Department for Education and Employment.
- Galton, M., Gray, J. and Rudduck, J. (2003). *Transfer and Transitions in the Middle Years of Schooling (7–14): continuities and discontinuities in learning*. Cambridge: DFES.
- Green, K. and Hardman, K. (2005). *Physical Education Essential Issues*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Flintoff, A. and Scraton, S. (2001). 'Stepping into active leisure? Young women's perceptions of active lifestyles and their experiences of school physical education'. *Sport, Education and Society*, 6 (1), 5–21.
- Fredricks, J. and Eccles, J. (2002). 'Children's competence and value beliefs from childhood through adolescence: Growth trajectories in two male-sex-types domains'. *Developmental Psychology*, 38, 519–33.
- Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. (1983). *Ethnography – principles in practice*. London: Tavistock Publications.
- Hardman, K. and Green, K. (eds) (2011). *Contemporary Issues in Physical Education*. Maidenhead: Meyer and Meyer Sport.
- Hargreaves, L. and Galton, M. (2002). *Transfer from the primary classroom 20 years on*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Hay, P. and Macdonald, D. (2010). 'The gendering of abilities in Senior PE'. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 15 (3), 271–85.
- Hills, L. and Croston, A. (2012). "'It should be better all together": exploring strategies for "undoing" gender in coeducational physical education'. *Sport Education and Society*, 17 (5), 591–605.
- Hunt, M., Barnes, A., Powell, B. and Martin, C. (2008). 'Moving on: The challenges for foreign language learning on transition from primary to secondary school'. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24, 915–26.
- Jago, R., Davis, L., McNeil, J., Sebire, S., Haase, A., Powell, J. and Cooper, A. (2011). 'Adolescent girls' and parents' views on recruiting and retaining girls into an after-school dance intervention: implications for extra-curricular

- physical activity provision'. *International Journal of Behavioural Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 8 (91), 1–9.
- Jindal-Snape, D., Vettraino, E., Lowson, E. and McDuff, W. (2011). 'Using creative drama to facilitate primary-secondary transition'. *Education 3–13: International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education*, 39 (4), 383–94.
- Keating, X. D., Silverman, S. and Kulinna, P. H. (2002). 'Pre service physical education teacher attitudes toward fitness tests and the factors influencing their attitudes'. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 21 (2), 193–207.
- Kirk, D. (1992). *Defining Physical Education*. London: Falmer Press.
- Knowles, A., Niven, A. and Fawkner, S. (2011). 'A Qualitative Examination of Factors Related to the Decrease in Physical Activity Behaviour in Adolescent Girls during the Transition from Primary to Secondary School'. *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*, 8, 1084–91.
- Lawrence, J. (2006). 'Negotiating Change: The Impact of School Transfer on Attainment, Self-esteem, Self-motivation and Attitudes towards Physical Education' (unpublished PhD thesis, Brunel University).
- Logan, R. and Skamp, R. (2008). 'Engaging students in science across the primary secondary interface: listening to the students' voices', *Research in Science Education*, 38 (4), 501–27.
- Luke, M. and Sinclair, G. (1991). 'Gender differences in adolescents' attitudes toward school physical education'. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 11(1), 31–46.
- Marshall, N. and Hargreaves, D. (2008). 'Teachers' views of the primary–secondary transition in music education in England'. *Music Education Research*, 10 (1), 63–74.
- Morgan, P. and Bourke, S. (2005). 'An investigation of pre service and primary school teachers' perspectives of PE teaching confidence and PE teacher education'. *ACHPER Healthy Lifestyles Journal*, 52 (1), 7–13.
- Morgan, P. and Bourke, S. (2008). 'Non-Specialist Teachers Confidence to Teach PE: the Nature and Influence of Personal School Experiences in PE'. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 13 (1), 1–29.
- Nicholls, G. and Gardner, J. (1999). *Pupils in Transition*. London: Routledge.
- O'Reilly, K. (2009). *Key Concepts in Ethnography*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Parish, L. E. and Treasure, D. C. (2003). 'Physical activity and situational motivation in physical education: Influence of the motivational climate and perceived ability'. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 74, 173–82.
- Pellegrini, A. D. and Long, J. (2002). 'A longitudinal study of bullying, dominance, and victimization during the transition from primary school through secondary school'. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 20, 259–80.
- Petrie, K. (2010). 'Creating Confident, Motivated Teachers of Physical Education in Primary Schools'. *European Physical Education Review*, 16 (1), 47–64.

- Rich, E. (2004). 'Exploring Teachers' Biographies and Perceptions of Girls' Participation in Physical Education'. *European Physical Education Review*, 10 (2), 215–40.
- Robinson, D. (2012). 'Loving and Loathing Physical Education: An Exploration of Students' Beliefs'. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 58 (1), 58–81.
- Sport Wales (2015). 'School Sport Survey: the state of the nation', 14 September. Available at: [http://sport.wales/media/1667736/school\\_sport\\_survey\\_2015\\_-\\_state\\_of\\_the\\_nation\\_english.pdf](http://sport.wales/media/1667736/school_sport_survey_2015_-_state_of_the_nation_english.pdf) (accessed 12 October 2016).
- Subramaniam, P. and Silverman, S. (2002). 'Using complimentary data: An investigation of student attitudes in physical education'. *Journal of Sport Pedagogy*, 8 (1), 74–91.
- Talbot, M. (1996). 'Gender and national curriculum physical education'. *British Journal of Physical Education*, 27 (1), 5–7.
- The Schools and Physical Activity Task Finish Group (2013). *Physical Literacy – an all-Wales approach to increasing physical literacy for children and young people*. Cardiff: Welsh Government Report.
- Tischler, A. and McCaughtry, N. (2011). 'PE is not for me'. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 82 (1), 37–48.
- Tsangaridou, N. (2008). 'Trainee primary teachers' beliefs and practices about physical education during student teaching'. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 13 (2), 131–52.
- Willis, P. ([1990]2012). *The ethnographic imagination*. London: Routledge.
- Zwozdiak-Myers, P. (2002). 'Exemplars of "good practice" – In the transfer of pupils from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 in physical education'. *British Journal of Physical Education*, 33 (3), 39–41.