Using flip cameras in Cooperative Learning to explore girls’ disengagement in physical education: the slights and the doings or non-doings caught on camera

Victoria Goodyear, Ashley Casey and David Kirk, Institute for Sport and Physical Activity Research, University of Bedfordshire

An indicator of an effective physical education programme...is that at any given time you can walk in and not one kid is opting out. When you go to another school and you see a third of the kids sitting out, there is something wrong with that programme.

Dyson and Strachan (2000, p.27)

Whilst an indicator of an effective physical education programme could be understood as one which engages students in learning, unfortunately a number of adolescent girls opt out of their physical education lessons (Dudley et al 2010; Garrett, 2004; Hills, 2007; Oliver et al 2009). From the age of 13 girls participation in physical education begins to decline, with many girls simply refusing to participate and even faking an illness or an injury to excuse themselves from the learning (Dudley et al 2010; O’Donovan & Kirk, 2007). Subsequently, many girls within a physical education class sit on the side lines watching their peers participate in the learning tasks, hiding from and engaging in anything that doesn’t resemble physical education or physical activity (Fissette, 2011). These examples of girls’ disengagement are coherent with the recent findings from the New South Wales (NSW) physical activity and nutrition survey (2010). This survey reported that girls’ engagement with physical activity during school terms is below Australia’s recommended guidelines and has declined since the previous report in 2004 (Hardy et al. 2010). Therefore, if we agree that the common and shared purpose of physical education is to provide learning experiences that will engage young people and lead them into the physically active life (Siedentop, 1996) then it seems reasonable to suggest that, due to girls lack of engagement with physical education and the low levels of physical activity, there might be something wrong with a number of physical education programmes.

In order to enhance the learning experiences and overcome dissatisfaction, many would agree that we need to find ways of understanding why girls disengage or engage (Dudley et al 2010; Enright & O’Sullivan, 2012, 2010) – i.e. the reasons for disengagement. Indeed, listening to young people’s voices has been suggested as one way to improve physical education programmes and create engaging learning experiences for young people (O’Sullivan & MacPhail, 2010). For example, drawing on the work in the United States and Ireland, through the use of photographs, magazines and student-led research projects, the reasons for girls’ disengagement were understood (Enright & O’Sullivan, 2012, 2010; Oliver et al 2009). The comments and the stories told by the students were then used to create a relevant and meaningful curricular, which subsequently enhanced girls’ engagement with physical education (Enright & O’Sullivan, 2012, 2010; Oliver et al 2009).

However, whilst student voice is one way to explore the reasons for girls’ disengagement and create engaging learning experiences, the time that teachers have available to do this within the ‘busyness of schools’ (Casey, 2010) is often limited. In other words, the time to discuss is often non-existent when teaching five lessons per day, fulfilling pastoral responsibilities and when leading extra-curricular clubs (Goodyear et al 2013). Furthermore, engaging with student voice means more than giving students a say or having a quick discussion (Thompson, 2008). In order to encourage young people to speak openly teachers need to spend time creating an environment which gives students the ‘freedom to speak’. In physical education this has been achieved through mediums such as photographs, magazines and student-led research projects (Enright & O’Sullivan, 2012, 2010; Oliver et al 2009) and if physical education programmes are to improve the learning experiences, young people need to be able to speak the ‘truth’ and not feel that they have to give the right answer in the fear of punishment due to the rules or routines of the school (Oliver, 2010; Thompson, 2008). In addition, and in order to understand the messages communicated by young people, we should look at the non-verbal means of communication and young people’s actions, as well as what is said (Thompson, 2008). Therefore, the time for extended discussions, the mediums used for students’ to communicate their experiences, and the verbal and non-verbal messages are important in order to understand young peoples’ experiences of physical education and the reasons for disengagement. Yet the time for a teacher to engage with student voice through these means is hindered by the ‘busyness of schools’ (Casey, 2010).

The purpose of this article is to present how one teacher (Victoria, the first author,) used videos created by the students as a means to better understand girls’ disengagement in her lessons. Prior to this project, Victoria had identified that a number of the girls she taught were disengaged. Approximately a third of the students in each of her year 10 (age 14-15) classes would often refuse to take part in learning tasks and they would not bring their ‘PE kit’ to lessons. When Victoria tried to understand the girls reasons for disengagement, often through a series of questions during a detention (when they didn’t bring their PE kit), she got short responses, such as “I just hate PE”. Although Victoria attempted to develop an understanding around disengagement by spending more time talking to the girls at breaks and lunchtimes, they were not willing to communicate with her during their ‘free time’, and the time she had available within the ‘busyness of schools’ (Casey, 2010)
was limited. In addition, she could not pause the activity related content to explore student voice within her physical education lessons. The department she worked within wanted her to retain a focus on the planned content in the curriculum. Therefore, this article explores a unit of basketball that used cameras (Flip cameras) within the Cooperative Learning model to understand girls’ disengagement. The aim of the unit was to explore student voice within the day-to-day realities of teaching and for Victoria to better understand her students’ experiences of physical education, in the hope that she could then enhance the girls’ engagement.

In the first part of this article we discuss the outline of Victoria’s unit and how student roles and the critical elements within the Cooperative Learning model were used to structure both learning and filming. In the second part, we report on the findings. We show how the videos provided students with the freedom to speak, where they actually slighted (or mildly insulted) Victoria and her department’s approach to teaching physical education. Furthermore, through their doings and non-doings that the girls caught on camera, an understanding was developed around the different forms of engagement for all girls in these physical education classes. The final part of the article concludes on the findings and we provide implications for how the visual method used to capture student voice, and how the subsequent findings, could be transferred to other physical education contexts.

The Unit

An eight lesson unit of basketball was used to teach to two classes of adolescent girls (age 14-15). The Cooperative Learning model was used to structure students’ learning and the use of flip cameras to investigate girls learning experiences of physical education.

Table 1. The Critical Elements of Cooperative Learning and how they were fulfilled in each lesson

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>How achieved in each lesson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual accountability: students are held responsible and assessed on their contribution to the learning tasks</td>
<td>Team sheets which denoted a signature were used to account for each team member’s participation in the learning tasks. Each students participation was also ‘caught on camera’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive interdependence –students are dependent on each member of their learning teams’ contribution to the learning tasks in order for the team to succeed.</td>
<td>Students performed in roles each lesson: a coach, camerawoman, discussion manager and an equipment manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face promotive interaction – time is given for students to talk to each other during the lesson(s) to help each other to learn, work out their common problems and identify their next goal.</td>
<td>A number of tasks each lesson focussed on discussions around the content of basketball and the filming of their lessons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small group and interpersonal skills – free and easy communication between group members.</td>
<td>The first lesson focussed on tasks to develop students understanding of how to work together and their communication skills. During lessons 2-8 the discussion manager controlled discussions and allocated time for all team members to contribute.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group processing – time is given for students to reflect together on their respective successes and failures, and share their ideas to plan for the next lesson.</td>
<td>At the end of each lesson teams spent five minutes answering two questions: 1) what went well in your team today, 2) what does your team need to improve on</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition to these elements, each team had group goals. Victoria acted as a facilitator of learning, and she used a defined structure of Cooperative Learning (Goodyear, 2013). Indeed, each team of four members had two group goals. The first goal was for the teams to work together to help each other to learn about basketball. The second goal was for teams to film video clips of their team's learning and opinions of physical education. Each lesson therefore had a dual focus on learning and filming. During lessons Victoria's task was to facilitate learning. She provided each team with resources for the content of basketball and one camera per team for filming. She used open ended questions to further students' knowledge and understanding, and to support their ability to work together to learn.

The Cooperative Learning structure that was used was learning teams (Dyson & Grinseki, 2001). This meant that students performed in a role each lesson - and the same role twice over the course of the unit. The roles included a coach, a camerawoman, a discussion manager and an equipment manager (Table 2).

Table 2. Student responsibilities for participating in each role

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussion Manager</td>
<td>Lead learning team discussions at the beginning and end of the lesson on goals, learning and filming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach</td>
<td>Lead the warm up and learning tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camerawoman</td>
<td>Film what your team is learning during the lesson and their opinions of the lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipment Manager</td>
<td>Collect and return project folders, student information sheets, cameras and equipment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first lesson introduced the purpose of using the cameras to the students, and explored how the girls would work together in their learning teams to help each other to learn. During this first lesson teams were afforded time to plan what they would film over the course of the unit and they were given time to familiarise themselves with the cameras. In lessons 2-8 students performed in their roles (see table 2), used resources to help each other learn the content of basketball, and they filmed video clips of their learning experiences of physical education. At the end of each lesson the teams would select and save three video clips to the camera, which Victoria would store on a pen drive. At the end of the unit, learning teams worked in a computer suite for two lessons to produce a five minute movie using the clips they had created. In the movie they were asked to demonstrate their learning, their experiences of the unit, and their opinions of physical education.

Following the production of the learning team movies, Victoria conducted learning team interviews within her lessons. The video was used to prompt students to discuss the content. Victoria and the respective learning team watched the movie first and then semi-structured interview questions were used to explore the students' experiences of physical education.

In the following sections we explore two main findings from this unit. First, slights: freedom to speak, which shows how the students were empowered to critique and mildly insult Victoria and her department's approach to teaching physical education.

Second, we discuss the doings and non-doings to show how the behaviour caught on camera allowed Victoria to learn that the 'sporty' normally compliant girls preferred the role of the coach, and the 'non-sporty' disengaged girls preferred the role of the camerawoman.

The slights: freedom to speak

Through the learning team movies the girls didn’t hold back on what was communicated. Indeed, the videos gave the girls the opportunity to ‘slight’ Victoria’s and her physical education department’s approaches to teaching physical education. Yet, these slights were not made during the face-to-face learning team interviews, and it seemed that all girls, and not just those who were identified as being disengaged, felt they had the freedom to speak through the medium of the camera. For example:

I think we need a teacher who is more understanding of how people are and not just get the arse (Jane, disengaged student).

We are sometimes treated unfairly by the teacher (Jo, normally compliant student)

The scheme is repeated for five years running, you do the same sports for five years in the same order (Jess, high ability engaged student)

The doings and non-doings caught on camera

This unit was the first time that the girls had been taught through the Cooperative Learning model. During the interviews, and the face-to-face discussions with Victoria all girls suggested that they were more engaged when learning through Cooperative Learning in comparison to Victoria's previous use of a predominantly teacher-centred approach. Furthermore, the girls communicated in the interviews that they liked using the cameras for both filming their opinions of physical education, and their learning around basketball.

You didn’t get like the ones on the corner saying I didn’t want to do this everyone did it because they knew that they were being caught on camera’ (Claire)

Therefore, on the premise of the interviews it would appear that the girls' enjoyed learning through Cooperative Learning, and that the use of a more student-centred approach with technology had

---

1 Insult (someone) by treating or speaking of them without proper respect or attention (Google, 2013)
a positive effect on their engagement. However, in the learning team videos the girls acted differently and behaved in different ways in comparison to what was said during the interviews. In particular, the girls who were identified as being disengaged refused to participate and were disruptive when it was their turn to perform in the role of the coach. The disengaged girls, who were often the ‘non-sporty’ students in the classes, only chose to fully engage with the learning tasks when they were in the role of the camerawoman. Indeed, they excelled in this role and engaged in the role of the camerawoman more than anyone else in their team.

When using the flip cameras they provided commentary over the basketball games and gave feedback to their team on their performance using these clips. The following example is from Katy (a disengaged student) who provided commentary over her team performing in a game.

Can this team respond and do this? Nina has the ball, the ball is passed quickly and straight to Alisha, it is now up the far end and she scores yippee, they did it!

Similar to the disengaged ‘non-sporty’ students who portrayed a different learning experience in the video in comparison to the interview, the girls identified as being ‘sporty’ disengaged when it was their turn to be the camerawoman. Indeed, these girls were often more able in the class, played for the school sports teams and were compliant in lessons. The ‘sporty’ girls had a preference for ‘performing’ in physical education, rather than adopting the more social and cognitive role of the camerawoman. Subsequently, they excelled in the role of the coach and could extend their peers learning drawing on their knowledge from extra-curricular activities or sports clubs outside of school. Yet when it was their turn to be the camerawoman, they would simply leave the camera on the bench.

Thereby, through these doings and non-doings caught on camera and represented in the learning team videos (both in terms of videoing and none participation), it could be said that whilst the girls enjoyed the unit, as they communicated through the interviews, there were certain roles within the Cooperative Learning model that they either liked or disliked that affected their engagement. The disengaged ‘non-sporty’ girls preferred the role of the camerawoman, a more social role that also draws on cognitive learning. In contrast, the ‘sporty’ girls preferred the role of the coach, a role which draws on physical performance and leadership.

**Implications for Practice**

With girls disengagement being present day focus for physical education teachers, and with student voice argued to be one method of improving learning experiences and young people’s engagement in physical education, this article has presented a method that used cameras in the Cooperative Learning model to facilitate student voice and girls disengagement. Importantly, the learning team movies created gave students an authentic voice. The girls had the freedom to speak openly and they felt comfortable to slight (or mildly insult) their teacher’s and her physical education department’s practice. Furthermore, the method of students creating their own movies through the capturing of video clips during physical education lessons has shown that the doings and non-doings are just as important to explore disengagement as well as interviews. In fact, the messages communicated through the interviews differed from the girls’ behaviour during the lessons caught on camera. This finding suggests that whilst discussions with students are important, students may not feel they can speak openly and express their real opinions and thoughts through face-to-face discussions with their teacher. Finally, using cameras within Cooperative Learning allowed the teacher to explore student voice in the ‘busyness of schools’ (Casey, 2010). Through the critical elements, and the additional features of group goals, acting as a facilitator of learning and using student roles within the structure of learning teams (Dyson & Grineski, 2001), she was able to maintain a focus on both learning and the filming of video clips.

Taking the findings from this project forward we argue that the creation of student videos can be used as a means to explore student voice and the reasons for disengagement. Indeed, pedagogical models such as Cooperative Learning or Sport Education, that provide a structure for group work through critical elements and allow students to perform in roles, can facilitate a dual focus in lessons on learning and filming. The data generated and developed as a result of these projects can then be used to inform physical education programmes as a means to strengthen young people’s engagement in physical education that may subsequently, motivate young people to engage with the physically active life. Indeed, it is worth noting that in this study, and as a result of the findings, Victoria continued to use a student-centred approach to teaching
physical education. She allowed students to select the roles they were performing in each lesson, she attempted to treat all her students with equal respect in her lessons, and she shared the findings with her department as a means to improve practice and the curricular. Subsequently, she claimed that by the end of the academic year all of the girls’ engagement in these two classes had been enhanced.

Acknowledgements

It is important to note that the discussions and findings reported within this article have been drawn from two papers:


We would also like to thank the physical education department and the students at the Buckingham School, for their support and contributions to this study.

References


Oliver, K. L. (2010). The body, physical activity and inequity. Learning to listen with girls through action. In M. O’Sullivan, & A. MacPhail (Eds.), *Young people’s voices in physical education and youth sport* (pp. 31-48). London: Routledge


About the Authors

Victoria Goodyear is a lecturer in physical education and sport pedagogy at the University of Bedfordshire, UK. She can be found on Twitter at @VGoodyear where she engages in discussions with practitioners on teaching, learning and research.

Ashley Casey is a senior lecturer in physical education and sport pedagogy at the University of Bedfordshire, UK. He can be found on Twitter at @DrAshCasey and at the site www.peprn.com were he blogs around research and practice.

David Kirk is Alexander Chair at the University of Bedfordshire, UK where he is head of the physical education and sport pedagogy research group and director of the Institute for Sport and Physical Activity Research. See his latest book, Physical Education Futures, for his critical discussion around the future of physical education.