

0202

Physical education teachers' learning, gender knowledge, and professional practice

Lori Beckett

Leeds Metropolitan University, Leeds, United Kingdom

Background

This paper reports on research undertaken for the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) 'Gender Agenda' initiative, developed in 2008-9. It was presented to an audience of practitioners, invited by the DCSF in an effort to bring together schools, local authorities & research community in discussion of important gender issues and practical ideas for improving learning, motivation, involvement & attainment of particular groups of underperforming girls and boys (see DCSF Standards Site, Frequently Asked Questions #1).

Research Questions

My concern was to encourage this sort of community of enquiry in school-university partnerships to bring together teachers and academic partners in professional learning communities, geared to improving Physical education. This takes direction from Lieberman & Miller (2008), who suggested school change requires invention, adaptation & a new sense of community; it depends on strategies for professional learning that are long term and collaborative; and it necessitates enabling policies that are shaped by constituencies that are involved in the routines of schools & have an investment in their renewal.

Methods

There were three parts to the work: mapping the participation and attainment data (the 'gender gap'), as reported in *Gender and Education: the evidence on pupils in England* (Department of Children, Schools and Families, 2007); analyses & knowledge-building, cognisant of Collins, Kenway & McLeod's (2000) caution about looking at comparisons between girls and boys, their different rates and patterns of retention, participation and performance as a kind of scorecard, reiterated by Penney and Evans (2002) who suggested it is more about multiple identities and multiple differences, and when these differences become disadvantages; and addressing teachers' concerns in context, following Groundwater-Smith (2002) concern for a research perspective on practice, echoed by Evans & Davies (2006) in their discussion of 1st and 2nd order theories in regards advice for practice.

Frame

My concern was to find the intersections of teachers' and academic partners' knowledge to attend to key points of intervention and strategies and call on schools to engage in practitioner research. I took advice from Kirk, Macdonald and O'Sullivan (2006) who reinforced the idea that we need to ask good questions, seek well considered ways of coming to know, and communicate in ways that are inclusive if the field is to progress as strong and cohesive. Likewise, Dyson (2006) argued that future policy research in Physical education should be informed by classroom research and should include the students' voice in this emerging area of inquiry.

All this was intended to indicate support for practitioner research in Physical education, and make a case for bringing together qualitative and quantitative research. To this end, I turned to the 'Gender agenda' in Physical Education in tandem with school-based evidence of the 'gender gap' in Physical education, and constructed some potential practitioner research questions as they pertained to the DCSF stated concerns: on subject choice and gender bias, participation and attainment, and performance data, together with the declaration that the focus is not solely on 'the gender gap' or boys' underachievement. Following a critical analysis of these issues, I then turned to Physical education teachers' concerns, mindful that teachers have some insights into what Lingard et al (2004)

called the social dynamic of gender but also Martino & Beckett's (2004) concern about teachers' threshold knowledge: gender differences in KS3 & KS4 Physical education; boys & male advantage; girls' participation up to GCSE; post-16 & A-level attainment; disengagement; gender and other predictors. Having begun to build a bank of practitioner research questions, I continued to focus on Physical education teachers' concerns: the influences on girls' and boys' participation; boys' and girls' experiences; Girls' and boys' behaviour/s; single-sex classes; curriculum and resources/time; and the purposes of Physical education. The paper concludes with an illustration of some of the challenges & opportunities: developing socio-cultural perspectives, following Macdonald's (2006) advice on social constructivism and a socio-cultural view of learning in Physical education; and the need for thinking/doing Physical education, given Kirk (1993) saw Physical education and school sport as a site for socially constructing and constituting the body through its educational processes.

Research findings

References

- Collins, C., Kenway, J., and Mcleod, J. (2000) Gender Debates We Still Have to Have Australian Educational Researcher, 27, 1-12.
- Department for Children, S. A. F. S. S. (2008) Gender and Achievement. Department for Children, Schools and Families.
- Department for Education and Skills (2007) Gender and education: the evidence on pupils in England. IN Department for Education and Skills (Ed.), Department for Education and Skills on behalf of HM Government.
- Dyson, B. (2006) Students' perspectives. IN Kirk, D., Macdonald, D. & O'sullivan, M. (Eds.) The Handbook of Physical Education. London, Thousand Oakes, New Delhi, Sage.
- Evans, J. & Davies, B. (2006) The sociology of physical education. IN Kirk, D., Macdonald, D. & O'sullivan, M. (Eds.) The Handbook of Physical Education. London, Thousand Oakes, New Delhi, Sage.
- Evans, J. & Penney, D. (2002) Introduction. In Penney, D. (Ed.) Gender and Physical Education Contemporary Issues and Future Directions. London and New York, Routledge.
- Evans, J. & Penney, D. (2002) Talking gender. In Penney, D. (Ed.) Gender and Physical Education Contemporary Issues and Future Directions. London and New York, Routledge.
- Groundwater-Smith, S. (2002) Evidence Based Practice in School Education: Some Lessons for Learning in Museums. Why Learning? Seminar. Australian Museum/University of Technology, Sydney, unpublished paper, The University of Sydney.
- Kirk, D. (1993) The body, schooling and culture. ECS811 The Body, Schooling and Culture. Geelong: Deakin University Press.
- Kirk, D., Macdonald, D., and O'Sullivan, M. (Ed.) (2006) The Handbook of Physical Education, London, Thousand Oakes, New Delhi, Sage.
- Kirk, D., Macdonald, D., and O'sullivan, M. (2006) Section 1 Theoretical Perspectives in Physical Education Research. IN Kirk, D., Macdonald, D., and O'sullivan, M. (Ed.) The Handbook of Physical Education. London, Thousand Oakes, New Delhi, Sage.
- Lieberman, A. A. M., L. (Ed.) (2008) Teachers in Professional Communities, New York and London, Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Lingard, B., Martino, W., Mills, M. & Bahr, M. (2002) Addressing the Educational Needs of Boys. IN Department of Education Science and Training (Ed.), Commonwealth of Australia.
- Macdonald, D. (2004) Understanding learning in physical education. IN Wright, J., Macdonald, D., and Burrows, L. (Ed.) Critical enquiry and problem-solving in physical education. London and New York, Routledge.
- Martino, W. & Beckett, L. (2004) Schooling the Gendered Body in Health and Physical Education: Interrogating Teachers' Perspectives. Sport, Education and Society, 9, 239-251.
- Penney, D. & Evans, J. (2002) Talking Gender. IN Penney, D. (Ed.) Gender and Physical Education Contemporary Issues and Future Directions. London and New York, Routledge.