

THE CONSTRUCTION AND EXPERIENCE OF ABILITY
IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how notions of ability are socially constructed, defined and experienced within physical education (PE). Pierre Bourdieu's concepts are used to examine the processes through an acknowledgement and consideration of the culture where pupils' and teachers' notions of ability are configured, reconfigured, and experienced. The study covered one academic school year in a North London mixed comprehensive school. Fifteen pupils participated in focus groups and individual interviews. The pupils were a mixture of boys (11) and girls (4), a range of abilities and ages (11 – 16 years old), and experienced PE predominantly in ability groups. In addition, six PE teachers were interviewed and PE lesson observations were conducted throughout the study. The findings identify various processes and interactions between individuals and also between individuals and the field that contribute towards the social construction of ability in PE. The findings highlight the complex and dynamic nature of the PE experience where notions of ability and the related practices have a bearing. Hierarchical ability-based practices were apparent that served to reinforce dominant notions of ability but there were other practices that could potentially challenge 'legitimate' notions of ability. The study highlights some of the constraints that teachers face in their attempts to integrate broader notions of ability, especially within a performative culture. Variations across the individual experience highlight considerations for pupils in terms of becoming physically literate and reaching their potential. The study aims to raise key questions for stakeholders in considering how ability-based practices work in facilitating a learning environment that supports all levels of ability and preparing all young people for lifelong activity. In addition it stresses the need for greater agreement amongst stakeholders on the purpose of PE in the current climate and suggests that a review of the aims of PE is warranted.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Physical education (PE) has been the subject of much debate since its inclusion within the education system (Kirk, 1988, 1992; Macphail, 2004; Penney & Evans, 1999). It has been argued that during its development, PE has been influenced by dominant political ideology and social elements that have advantaged certain groups (Bailey et al., 2009a; Evans & Penney, 2008). What is valued and considered to be of educational importance within PE is therefore shaped by social, political and cultural, as well as educational forces. In particular, the prevalence of a performative culture within PE has been highlighted and it has been argued that the associated values have influenced notions of ability in PE (Evans, 2004; 2013). Understanding what abilities are valued in PE and how they are configured is an area that has received limited attention and Evans and Davies (2006) comment that it is quite extraordinary that we have had very few studies since the 1970s of how in PE, teachers and pupils are categorised by ability and:

Consequently we know very little of what and how, organisational practices in schools and teacher education reflect and endorse particular conceptions of 'ability', or how tracking, streaming, mixed ability, or banding, bear on how pupils think about their own and others' bodies in relation to learning, achievement and participation in physical activity. Teachers are also differentiated and regulated within school and teacher education subcultures by conceptions of 'ability' through processes that reflect and recreate relations of power, order and control. (p. 117)

The resulting ability-based pedagogy, defined as learning, teaching and curriculum, (Kirk, Macdonald, & O'Sullivan, 2006) also holds implications for how young people of all abilities may experience PE. Knowing what can be done to provide engaging PE experiences for all young people is a crucial issue (Tinning, 2007) as there are implications for learning, becoming physically literate (Whitehead, 2001; 2010), notions of identity, and lifelong engagement in physical activity (Kirk, 2010).

In addition, it has been previously highlighted that research in PE has often failed to incorporate the proactive contribution of children (Groves & Laws, 2003) calling for research to be conducted where they are central to the investigation. There is however a growing body of evidence in PE where young people's voices have contributed towards informing research and the development of various effective and equitable practices (O'Sullivan & Macphail, 2010). The overall aim of this study is to

therefore examine how ability is socially constructed and defined within PE and to explore young people's experiences in PE in relation to such definitions.

1.1A brief narrative of the self

I have experienced the field of education and physical education from a variety of perspectives and in relation to many of the transformations within PE that have been a result of changes in government and ideological shifts. Many of these experiences have contributed towards my own development as a practitioner, a pedagogue, and also as a researcher. Furthermore, not only have they informed my own perceptions of the influence that physical education can have on young people's lives but I believe they have led me to the point of wanting to research those experiences.

My early recollections as a learner are quite positive in terms of the messages about my physical ability that I believe were transmitted through associated practices during primary school. I felt that I was perceived by teachers, peers and members of my family as very 'sporty', someone who was considered very able in PE. A specific memory is that of being the first girl in the school allowed to participate in the boys' race on sports day. I believe that in this context I was treated differently to other pupils and had high expectations placed upon me to succeed.

In addition to messages about my physical ability I was encouraged to take the eleven plus exam which I passed and ended up attending the grammar school. My parents were delighted by this outcome but unfortunately I was concerned that I would not be able to do much physical activity due to the strong academic emphasis that existed within the school, an assumption that was met and may be explained by the dominant notions of intelligence/ability in education at that time and the resulting status of PE. My time at grammar school was an unhappy period and ability sets were standard practice, except in PE; my assumptions now are that this was associated with a belief that PE held little relevance to a pupils' overall academic achievement. Being unhappy led to misbehaving and being labelled a 'trouble maker' which, resulted in being defined as 'less able' and consequently placed in numerous lower ability groups for most of my academic studies at school. The most positive experiences were the ones that I had in PE lessons.

Reflecting upon these early memories with my current knowledge of theoretical concepts I believe that my beliefs and my identity were impacted upon by my related

experiences in both primary and secondary school. In the low ability groups I identified as inferior to many of my peers in academic subjects and struggled to believe that I would succeed in any related field. Conversely I felt quite able in PE. I certainly feel that my formative experiences have had a lasting impression on my overall identity where I have often felt more confident in my ability as a practitioner than in my ability as an 'academic'. Furthermore, reflection on my experiences has helped to establish my alignment with a symbolic interactionist perspective where I very much relate to the notion of multiple identities that are manifested through behavioural, cognitive and emotional responses to patterned societal symbols and language (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934/1967; Stryker, 1980).

My interest in training to be a PE teacher was associated with my attempts to 'make a difference' and to ensure that education was a positive experience for young people. As a PE teacher I was aware of changes in policy, especially the introduction of a National Curriculum which, from my perspective, served to reinforce a very traditional and masculine curriculum where team games dominated. This in turn influenced what we taught but also how we defined ability in PE. On reflection I probably treated pupils differently based upon their ability and my own expectations. As Head of PE I had some autonomy in the pedagogical strategies that were employed. I also experienced some of the challenges in attempting to change practices and beliefs within the field of PE. I believe I experienced socialisation in the work place where I had to conform to 'fit in' and be accepted, not only in the school but in the borough I worked in where PE meetings and interschool competitions were very much dominated by those who had been in the profession for many years. In addition, I also believe that my time as a teacher helped me to develop a level of sensitivity in working with young people but also in understanding some of their experiences. These skills support my ability in communicating with young people and acting as a facilitator to discussions such as those within focus groups.

My development since leaving the teaching profession has included studying and becoming a sport psychologist which has required expanding my theoretical knowledge of how people develop cognitively, how they can perceive themselves, individually or as part of a group/team. It also required me to enhance my practitioner skills such as listening and counselling others. Since then I have worked in academia as

a teacher trainer and as a lecturer in social psychology, pedagogy, and child development. My more recent professional experiences have fuelled my desire to be able to contribute towards discourse and future developments within physical education, especially in relation to enhancing the experiences of young people.

1.2 Theoretical underpinnings

According to Kirk (1992) discourse refers to “the ways in which people communicate their understanding of their own and other’s activities and of events in the world around them” (p. 23). Discourse in PE is therefore the ways in which stakeholders communicate their own perspective about the nature and purpose of PE (Green, 2009); “physical education is defined by what is said, done and written in its name” (Kirk, 2010, p. 1). Furthermore, discourses are associated with the processes by which ideologies are articulated and also developed (Green, 2009). From a sociological perspective Green highlights that it is important to understand that discourse reflects thinking but is also part of that thinking process. The decision to explore how young people experience PE emerged as part of a wider attempt to interpret and extend related discourse as well as contribute towards enhancing my own understanding of their experiences.

The notion that physical education is a socially constructed field has been well documented (Evans, 2004; Kirk, 1992, 2010; Macphail, 2004). This perspective seems particularly useful in recognising how it has been influenced by dominant political ideology and social elements that have been suggested to advantage certain groups (Bailey et al., 2009a; Evans & Penney, 2008) where debates concerning the purpose and nature of PE have been central to its development and internal ‘culture’. Furthermore, in positioning ability from a social constructivist perspective the importance of understanding the development of the field of PE and appreciating the relationship between past and present practices (Penney & Evans, 1999) can be emphasised.

In addition to understanding the field and culture of PE, exploring how ability is conceptualised within PE warrants an appreciation of different theoretical perspectives. Defining ability with conceptual clarity is a difficult task as the term is frequently used across different domains where its meaning considerably alters in relation to the perspective of the user (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2001) and the context (Tranckle & Cushion, 2006; Wright & Burrows, 2006). Many notions of ability in education, PE,

and sport, have developed within the psychological literature (Croston, 2013); a perspective which has reinforced dualistic debates on the purpose of education (Peters 1966; Williams 1964) and dominant conceptions of ability that can be associated with ‘legitimate’ values said to be rooted in biological determinism (Penney & Lisahunter, 2006). This particular idea of ability provides a one-dimensional perspective that reflects Cartesian dualistic assumptions that isolate the body from its existence and context. Such a lack of appreciation of context has been criticised as being limited and subsequently the suggestion that ability in PE is more of a social construction has been presented (Evans 2004; Evans & Penney 2008; Hay & Macdonald 2010a; 2010b; Wright & Burrows 2006); this perspective seems more relevant in exploring the processes within the field of PE that inform and shape notions of ability.

Contextualised historical understanding is crucial in Bourdieu’s sociology (1986; 1990). His framework has been used to underpin the notion that ability in PE is a social construct, through facilitating an acknowledgement that the field structures the habitus and, as such it is acquired in a social context that has specific historical, political and social agendas (Evans, 2004) as in the case of PE. Bourdieu (1986) identifies certain competencies, ‘capital’, which have an exchange value in particular fields. Within PE, it has been suggested that ‘legitimate’ values are reproduced by those who hold the most capital reinforcing notions of ability and contributing to the maintenance of power by the dominant groups (Evans 2004; Evans & Penney 2008; Hay & Macdonald 2010a; 2010b). The ideas of Bourdieu therefore facilitate exploration of what abilities are valued in PE and, also how young people experience PE in relation to the capital that they may or may not possess.

In addition, Bourdieu’s ideas (1986, 1990) incorporate a symbolic interactionist perspective, where there is an emphasis on understanding the behaviour of an individual within the context of the social group of which he or she is a member, for example, within ability groups. A symbolic interactionist perspective also permits a focus on interactions and the individual’s interpretations of those interactions and it has been argued that the importance of significant others, especially peers and teachers, should not be underestimated (Groves & Laws, 2000). An individual’s perspective of ability has a profound influence on the educability of young people (Hay & Macdonald, 2010b). Consequently, in order to support *all* pupils it is vital that we understand the

ability-based interactions and processes, and the consequences of such practices. In particular, it has been suggested that for some young people the physical capital they acquire by demonstrating certain physical competences is vital in developing a sense of self (Wright & Burrows, 2006). Where certain physical competencies are privileged over others in PE (Hay & Lisahunter, 2006) this can impact upon some pupils developing a low self-concept, which has the potential to influence other desirable outcomes in PE (Li & Xiang, 2007) such as adherence, increased motivation, effort and persistence (Marsh, Papaioannou, & Theodorakis, 2006) which can further influence engagement, learning and achievement.

Furthermore, ability grouping has been highlighted as a critical variable in terms of how pupils perceive themselves in school (Zevenbergen, 2005). Setting pupils by ability can also influence levels of attainment (Ireson, Clark, & Hallam, 2002), self-concept, achievement and motivation (Boaler, 2005; MacIntyre & Ireson, 2002) and reinforce ability-related experiences for many (Zevenbergen, 2005). However, research on streaming pupils based on ability and its influence on pupil self-concept remains inconclusive (Child, 2007).

It has been suggested that ability is a taken for granted concept that remains under-theorised within the field of PE (Evans, 2004; Hay, 2005). Bourdieu's ideas of reproduction have been investigated to some extent in PE (Hay & Macdonald, 2010a, 2010b; Hay & Lisahunter, 2006) however there has been limited emphasis on the interactive processes in relation to self-concept and overall identities. Developing an understanding of ability-based practices and gaining an insight into some of the potential issues associated with respective practices is vital in ensuring that *all* pupils can be supported in fulfilling their potential. If we are indeed interested in developing *all* pupils in school then we need to be "concerned with the issues of ability - how it is recognised, conceptualised, socially configured, nurtured and embodied in and through the practices of PE" (Evans, 2004, p. 95), and challenge, as Evans suggests, the current political culture.

This study is an attempt to contribute to pedagogical and professional understanding of how ability is conceptualised and experienced by investigating the processes that contribute towards the social construction of ability in PE. In addition, this investigation aims to explore and compare the pupil experience in relation to

perceived levels of ability and consider the implications of such experiences with the intention of enhancing the PE experience for all abilities.

Two research questions will be addressed:

How is ability conceptualised within PE?

How do pupils of varying levels of ability experience PE?

1.3 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into a further six chapters. Chapter two presents: an overview of key historical developments within PE over the last hundred years and the corresponding ideologies; PE and sport policy; and debates on the aims of PE. It particularly emphasises the importance of understanding the development of the field of PE and appreciating the relationship between past and present practices in positioning ability as a social construct. It includes early discourse on the aims and values of PE that challenge what is of educational value within the educational system. It also highlights groups that have been at an advantage within various forms of PE that have ensued, where it has been argued that PE has continued to reflect much of the historically class-based and gendered struggles. Chapter two stresses that it is within this culture that pupils' and teachers' notions of ability are configured and reconfigured.

Chapter three highlights the complexities involved in the conceptualising of ability in PE. It explores literature on the use of ability-based pedagogy in education and physical education and considers the influence on notions of ability. In addition, chapter three explores different theoretical perspectives from which to consider related experiences and the impact upon the learner as well as different theoretical perspectives from which to position ability. It makes a case for the social construction of ability in PE and concludes with an overview of Pierre Bourdieu's framework.

Chapter four provides the rationale and the theoretical and practical considerations for the investigation. It explains the frameworks and paradigms that underpin the adopted methodology. It also provides a detailed outline of the chosen methods and the context of the investigation. It concludes with an overview of the data analysis.

Chapters five and six present the analysis of the empirical data from this research. Chapter five addresses how ability is conceptualised within PE and chapter six addresses how pupils of varying levels of ability experience PE. Consequently, chapter

five provides the context for the pupil experience. It serves as an introduction to views on ability and highlights the key associated ability-based practices and policies within the school. Initially it explores how ability and talent are defined and considers the importance of distinguishing between the context of PE and sport. It also explores how talent is operationalised through practices such as the Gifted and Talented (G&T) register and PE groupings. Chapter five highlights the teachers' understandings of ability and talent that were constructed in relation to particular notions of ability with a distinct emphasis on physicality; this resulted in a certain type of pupil being defined as talented which subsequently contributed towards how ability groups were formed and experienced. Overall, chapter five serves to outline the ways that ability was constructed and enacted within the school and also highlights some of the tensions within the field of PE that have evolved from previous, and continuing, debates on the distinction between PE and sport. It underpins the following chapter.

Chapter six addresses how pupils of varying levels of ability experience PE and analyses how young people experienced and interpreted the meaning of ability in their own lives. It presents an in-depth analysis of the ways that pupils of differing abilities are affected by ability-based pedagogical discourses and practices. It highlights how ability perceptions can be constructed and reinforced in accordance with social processes, interactions, communication and negotiation that serve to strengthen ability identities, processes that pupils draw upon to make sense of their ability and position themselves accordingly within the field. It also stresses how some pupils, those who are considered as 'potentially' talented, can have a more variable experience in PE and consequently a more variable ability-based identity. In addition, chapter six explores perspectives associated with ability and schooling such as those presented by Bourdieu which are employed in the analysis of the individual narrative. The findings support Bourdieu's supposition that a major role of the education system is cultural reproduction and the possession of capital was found to be a significant factor in influencing the pupil experience in PE. Where such conceptions of ability remain associated with specific types of capital, this can impose constraints and educational limitations which can affect pupils' future engagement in PE and physical activity, and key considerations are highlighted in terms of all abilities and their levels of confidence, motivation and engagement and learning in PE.

The final chapter presents the conclusions of the study. It highlights the key findings in relation to how ability is defined and reinforced but also considers how notions of ability can potentially be challenged. The implications for young people and the field of PE are discussed and consideration is given to how ability-based practices help to raise educational objectives and standards for all pupils. In addition, reflections are made on the research process and the adopted methodology. Areas for future research are suggested and recommendations are made for stakeholders in relation to policy and practice. Key recommendations are that teachers should develop their knowledge and confidence in using broad notions of ability in PE and avoid early assessment of talent in PE. Furthermore, teachers need to be clearer as to why they use certain ability-based practices and whether they work to support all pupils. In addition, the study identifies that stakeholders should work towards developing a more holistic definition of ability in PE. It is also suggested that having a clearer agreement on the role that physical education has in relation to current and future educational demands is essential as debates about how to define ability seem to centre persistently on the purpose of PE. A clearer agreement on the aims of PE would facilitate conceptual clarity in defining ability and may serve to enhance the pupil experience in PE.

CHAPTER 2 THE FIELD OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION

The definition, purpose and nature of physical education have been the subject of considerable debate. As PE has developed, it has been influenced by certain forces, events and ideologies (Kirk, 1988, 1992; Macphail, 2004; Phillips & Roper, 2006). It has been suggested that PE has been socially constructed and, as such, its purpose and practices have often reflected those whose interests it serves best (Kirk & Tinning, 1990; Penney & Evans, 1999). According to Kirk (1992)

The act of defining physical education is a social process, one that involves drawing on ideas in general circulation, and fixing these ideas in a meaningful configuration. This fixing, as an intrinsic part of defining the subject, is no arbitrary process . . . particular definitions of physical education have gained acceptance as the orthodox version of the subject, and these definitions have advantaged certain social groups over others at particular times in history. (p. 25)

Consequently, as government policies, the prevailing culture and dominant ideologies have changed, so have the definition, aims, and content of PE, all of which have impacted notions and experiences of ability within PE (Kirk, 1992; Wright & Burrows, 2006). In order to conceptualise ability it is important to first explore the key influences that have contributed to defining the field of PE. This chapter presents an overview of key historical developments within PE over the last hundred years and corresponding ideologies; policy in sport and PE; and debates on the changing status and aims of PE.

2:1 The development of PE in England

Developments in PE have been greatly influenced by particular ideologies, many of which were based on gender and class (Scraton, 1992). Ideology, at its most basic level, is a set of principles that are held by individuals or groups (Mangan, 2000) but are not necessarily fixed (Kirk, 1988). Political and social environments are important in framing ideologies which, in turn, can inform educational practices and become “official knowledge” (Kay, 2007, p. 27). This ‘official knowledge’ acts to frame and legitimise dominant beliefs and practice and, “education acts to socialise and shape the young, according to particular knowledge, skills, values, assumptions and commitments” (Kay, 2007, p. 27). Consequently, what constitutes ‘official knowledge’

and ‘legitimate practices’ has important connotations for notions of ability in PE (Hay & Lisahunter, 2006).

Sport is an integral part of a society’s culture and the history of sport can provide a unique insight into the way a society changes (Perkin, 1986). Similar to PE, the history of sport has been entwined with the identities of class, ethnicity and gender (Bourdieu, 1978; Johnes, 2010). Britain was, and is a class-based society and this has shaped perceptions and experiences of sport. Whilst it is not within the scope of this study to provide a thorough review of the history of sport, it is important to highlight certain influences on both sport and PE, and their relevance in relation to exploring how notions of ability are constructed and experienced within PE.

In order to relate past to present practices in PE and to identify government agendas and influential ideologies on the social construction of PE and notions of ability, historical developments are reviewed in two sections. First, early influences and developments in physical *activity*, including political, social and cultural contexts are described. Secondly, developments within physical *education* from the early 1960s, a period that marks the transition from physical training in the state elementary schools taught by generalists teachers, to the creation of a ‘subject’ taught by specialist secondary school teachers (Kirk, 1992).

2.1.1 Early influences and developments in physical activity, mid 19th – mid 20th century

Physical education evolved out of two types of physical activity: first, organised games and competitive sports which were associated with 19th century private boarding schools; and secondly, physical training which was initially associated with military drill and then with Swedish therapeutic gymnastics in state elementary schools (Kirk, 1988; Donovan, Jones & Hardman, 2006). Children’s educational experiences differed in relation to class and gender and, in relation to the current study, it is important to understand how these contrasting experiences have influenced legitimate notions of ability in PE and the associated experiences.

Class divides

The practices, ideals, and priorities in education and taught physical activity for the working classes were noticeably different from those of the middle and upper classes. Both contexts provide early examples of ‘legitimated practices’ in physical

activity. Compulsory state elementary education was introduced by law with the Forster Education Act in 1870. After this, taught physical activity only existed for boys in elementary schools, was not part of the curriculum, and initially consisted of military drill, performed by large groups in limited spaces supervised by army sergeants; this was in direct contrast to the wide range of extracurricular physical activities experienced in the boys' public schools (McIntosh, 1981).

Working class drill served two main 'legitimate' purposes, to improve the fitness of army recruits and to instil discipline, through Swedish gymnastics and army type drill. The Fisher Act, in 1918, and the 1919 syllabus made some provision for local education authorities to develop physical activity beyond military drill. However, during this time, older groups of children were still required to work in unison which, according to Davis, Bull, Roscoe, and Roscoe (2000) reflected the strict social class segregation before the Second World War (WWII), where those in power were keen to retain a clean, disciplined working class.

The contrast in boys' public schools was evident where, from 1850 onwards, games were purposefully and deliberately integrated into the formal curriculum of the public schools (Mangan, 2000). The perceived benefits of games in the boys' public schools were that they developed leadership, character and team spirit (Bailey et al., 2009a). The potential of sport as a source of discipline and morality was recognised by Thomas Arnold and his followers (Holt, 1989) who encouraged pupils and staff to consider games as part of the formal curriculum where character moulding took place (Mangan, 2000). There was a proliferation of clubs, societies and organised games where 'athleticism' permeated the 'house system' in which success in games was very important. Athleticism had close associations with Victorian images of "masculinity, embodying physical prowess, gentlemanly conduct, moral manliness and character training" (Hargeaves, 1994, p. 43). The culture of athleticism gradually dominated the whole system of elite education and 'sport' increasingly came to mean organised team games where teams created a powerful group focus (Holt, 1989).

Notions of fair play, respecting the spirit of the game and, fair competition were all part of the code of the gentleman amateur which distinguished them from the lower middle classes (Holt, 1989). For the working classes, team games were only introduced as extracurricular activities by some enthusiastic teachers where they were regarded as

merely supplementary physical activity (McIntosh, 1976). It was public school men, the elite, who took the concept of athleticism and founded many of our national sport governing bodies (Holt, 1989). Despite the decline of athleticism, residual elements of the ideology were prevalent until well after WWII and, “its widespread adoption had extensive educational and social repercussions” (Mangan, 2000, p. 1). Athleticism strongly influenced boys’ public schools between 1860 and 1940 (Mangan, 2006) and, its influences on PE can be seen in the ‘legitimate’ values that permeate games where elitism is still reinforced (Kirk, 1988), which has implications for notions of ability in both PE and sport.

During the inter-war years, physical education continued to be the privilege of the middle-classes, with a limited push to develop it in state schools (Scraton, 1992). Social class differences continued to be marked during the post-war period but an increase in the school leaving age to 14, in 1933, meant that more secondary schools were built for working-class children (Davis et al., 2000). In order to provide for greater diversity of needs, in the same year, a syllabus for Physical Training (PT) was produced by the Board of Education for the state sector. It specifically created two separate sections, one for children up to 11 and one for 11 to 14. The syllabus recommended a comprehensive curriculum of physical activity, including games and gymnastics, but the continued lack of resources hindered its implementation (Davis et al., 2000). The Butler Act, in 1944, signified free compulsory education but class divides, and different notions of ability, were still clearly evident with the grammar, technical and modern schools as they were increasingly selective. This was despite the intention of the 1944 Act which was to remedy inequalities related to wealth and educational opportunities (Peters, 1966). Games were not made compulsory in state schools until 1944 despite the importance of athleticism in the public schools (Holt, 1989).

Gender divides

In contrast to the elementary military style drill and strong male games tradition, women were not considered suitable for strenuous physical activity as their roles were deemed to be in the home, as wives and mothers. Medical constructions of gender appropriateness significantly influenced the PT syllabi, helping to maintain the belief that women should be denied education and other activities which would cause constitutional overstrain and an inability to produce healthy offspring (Hargreaves,

1994, 2002). These beliefs derived from biological determinism and the scientific suggestions that women were weaker than men; they centred on the physical and mental benefits of exercise, and a concern for the national good and the future of the human race (Hargreaves, 1994). As such, women were considered the much weaker sex. Scraton (1992) states that girls' physical activity, in comparison with that of boys, was focused on more gentle exercise, gymnastics and callisthenics.

Beliefs associated with social Darwinism also supported the assumed biological advantage of men that led to economic advantage. Bourgeois women developed their use of physical activity to “creatively reinterpret social Darwinism in a way which legitimated a freer, more positive mode of physical expression” arguing that “healthier women were more feminine and more functional” (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 111). This was seen in the development of Swedish gymnastics for women where all girls experienced a system of physical activity based on stereotypical ideas and images about desirable gender-specific behaviour, roles and characteristics (Scraton, 1992). Swedish gymnastics was imported to meet the perceived needs of health for women and was delivered in girls' schools, whose needs were perceived to differ from those of boys. This innovation reflected the dominant gendered ideologies of the time and has underpinned the basis and development of a comprehensive system of girls' PE (Scraton, 1992) as well as impacting upon gendered notions of ability. Swedish gymnastics was further championed through the work of the first women specialists of PT and became the “traditional hallmark of the professional female educator between the late 1890s and the 1930s” (Kirk, 1990, p. 45). Gymnastics and some organised games became core components of the curriculum for girls and, from the 1880s, became consolidated into a formalised system.

The first female specialist PT College in Dartford was founded by Madame Österberg, in 1885 (Bloomfield, 2005). After training here, newly qualified teachers were considered very powerful within girls' schools, being responsible for discipline and for knowledge of health and hygiene. Increases in the demand for better education for girls became closely linked to advances in female sports and PE (Hargreaves, 1994; Scraton, 1992). By 1914 PT was formally established within the secondary school system for girls and included gymnastics, swimming, outdoor games and some dancing (Scraton, 1992), which continued during the inter-war years. However, in the

elementary system, class divides were still evident with the older girls only receiving Swedish instruction. Scraton suggests that these were the foundations from which the comprehensive system of PE emerged in the post war period (1944). In contrast to boys, girls were only encouraged into team games to develop moral consciousness relating to the unquestioned discipline of rules and regulations and were not allowed any physical contact.

Distinctive gender divides continued within PT, reinforced by the continuation of single-sex teaching and teacher training (Scraton, 1992). After WWII, in boys' secondary schools, games, sports, track and field athletics and swimming gained ground within the curriculum. The same trend occurred in girls' schools but was less marked because of the emphasis on the 'art of movement', which female teachers claimed was fundamental to all PT (McIntosh, 1976). Modern educational gymnastics was introduced into the curriculum for girls, emphasising more child-centred themes supported by the educational philosophies of thinkers like Rousseau. Men's PT teacher training continued to adhere to discipline, fitness and competitive team games "underpinned by the natural sciences . . . cementing the images of and divisions between 'feminine appropriate' and 'masculine appropriate' activities" (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 153). The development of games has continued to be gendered in nature (Penney & Evans, 1997) and this has implications for how girls' and boys' ability is perceived in PE, especially where games continues to dominate the curriculum.

From approximately the early 1900s to the 1950s the PE profession was predominantly female with Swedish gymnastics as its hallmark (Kirk, 1988). It was not until after the 1950s that men began to enter the field sufficiently in order to have an impact on the type of activities taught. This eventually led to the demise of female dominance and Swedish gymnastics, a feature that highlights the class and gender struggles which have contributed to a legacy that continues to define and shape PE, and notions of what constitutes ability (Kirk, 1988; 1992; Scraton, 1992).

Summary

Physical education has been characterised by images of difference where the scope and quality of experience in physical activity was predominantly determined by children's gender and social background (Hargreaves, 1994; Kirk, 2005). This stratified system of schooling was considered as a fair and accurate reflection of society at the

time. It is within these various contexts that ability has been interpreted differently for different groups of children; for boys, the ability to perform in competitive organised sports and for girls, the ability to perform movements designed to aid health, obedience and training (Kirk, 1992; Evans & Davies, 2004; Wright & Burrows, 2006). Taking the historical influences of class and gender into account is therefore crucial in comprehending how notions of ability are constructed and experienced.

With respect to defining PE, it was a time of changing philosophies and ideologies in secondary state education, with a decline in drill-based programmes and an increased emphasis on the development of the individual through a broader based curriculum. It is not clear when the term ‘physical education’ replaced ‘physical training’, however, there are a number of instances that indicate an emergent recognition that physical activity was an important part of a child’s education. Bailey et al. (2009a) suggest that the 1909 Syllabus of Physical Exercises highlighted the contribution that physical activity was expected to make to the educational development of children. It recognised two main effects of PT: the physical and the educational, where the physical effects were on general health, remedial and developmental benefits; the educational effects were primarily moral and cognitive however, it was still *physical activity*.

In the training of PE specialists, the Board of Education, in 1930, recommended that it was not desirable for PE to be in the hands of those whose qualifications were limited to physical training (McIntosh, 1968). Subsequently, the McNair Report (His Majesty’s Stationery Office, HMSO, 1944) was carried out for the purpose of advising the Board of Education on guiding principles for the training of teachers. It emphasised the vital role that teachers have in developing individuals and acknowledged the importance of trainee teachers developing pedagogical and professional skills, and was intended to help raise the standing of education. In relation to recognising the value of physical education it stated that:

This subject includes all those aspects of education which influence the physical life of the child and young person, including his mental attitude to his body and welfare. It is thus a fundamental and integral part of general education . . . to embody such a conception as we have outlined we find the term physical education preferable to physical training. (HMSO, 1944, p. 159)

A further publication, ‘Moving and Growing’ (Her Majesty’s Stationery Office [HMSO],1952) had a significant impact on the way that PE was both taught and thought about in primary schools (Evans & Penney, 2008; Kane, 1976). It reflected the shift towards a more child-centred curriculum and approach to teaching PE, emphasising both the importance of playful movement and the consideration that every child had an equal right to a ‘movement education’ (Evans & Penney, 2008). Educational gymnastics, incorporated child-centred ideals and made a distinct and rapid impact on female PE, however, male physical educators were in opposition, and emphasised scientific principles over exploration and play (Kirk, 1990). Kirk and Gorley (2000) point to the period post-WWII, where PE in state schools moved towards a sport-based form consisting of techniques considered “fundamental to sport performance and the actual performance of sports and games” (p. 124). The development of the perceived importance of sports skills in PE has implications for notions of ability and, as such, essential debates on the similarities and differences between PE and sport will be addressed later within this chapter.

2.1.2. Developments in PE from 1960 onwards

The period of time between the mid 1950s and early 1960s represents a watershed in PT and the growth of PE as a subject taught by specialist secondary school teachers (Kirk, 1992). The introduction of the comprehensive schooling system, in 1965, was an attempt to reduce class divisions and to create more equal opportunities in education. During this time, Kirk (1992) suggests that three separate traditions were brought together in PE in an attempt to formulate a single subject for the comprehensive secondary school system. These traditions were: the competitive team games of the boys’ public (private) and grammar schools, the Swedish gymnastics and games of the girls’ private schools, and the physical drill of the state elementary schools, each of which embodied different, and in some cases widely disparate, ideologies. Some influences had more impact than others and PE became, and continues to be, dominated by team games Kirk (1998), where its development and integration into the curriculum was considered a reconstruction of the bourgeois games ethic as ‘traditional PE’. Kirk (1992) suggested that this was ironic in that competitive team games were never really a substantial part of physical activity for the working classes they were only part of boys’ public school education. Kirk (1992) stated that “the myth of ‘traditional physical

education' effectively concealed . . . its class specific origins" (p. 117). Kirk (1992) also suggested that this myth suited the male PE teachers as it provided them with a 'legitimate' rationale for games teaching and, through the 1960s, further helped to promote games as the basis of British sport; a notion that continues to be perpetuated through the PE curriculum and one that influences perceptions of ability.

Gender divides were still evident in PE. Modern educational dance and gymnastics continued to be a prominent feature of girls' PE throughout the 1960s and 70s, whereas PE for boys continued to adhere to discipline, fitness and competitive games (Hargreaves, 1994). These differences in provision for boys and girls PE supported previous images of, and divisions between, 'feminine appropriate' and 'masculine appropriate' activities (Hargreaves, 1994). What is now regarded as 'legitimate knowledge' in PE has been strongly influenced by its gendered history. Where teachers and the general public fail to recognise these influences there are significant consequences for children's experiences and opportunities in PE and sport (Kirk, 2002). Furthermore, it can be suggested that where a teacher's perception of ability is associated with gendered notions of ability, a boy and girl of similar ability may receive differential levels of recognition, teacher treatment and expectations, which will have consequences for their overall experience in PE.

In an attempt to help advance PE the Schools Council for Curriculum and Examination sponsored an inquiry in 1971 which was designed to discover details of current practices and evaluate whether they were meeting the aims of PE (Kane, 1976). The inquiry found that distinctive gender differences were evident in the pedagogical approaches and the type of activities taught (Kane, 1976). This is perhaps a reflection of the continuation of separate training for male and female teachers of PE. It was not until 1986 that mixed PE teacher-training courses became obligatory (Hargreaves, 1994), sometime after the United Kingdom (UK) Sex Discrimination Act (SDA) passed in 1975, which made discrimination on the basis of sex illegal in the general contexts of employment and education.

Changes in PE in the 1970s and 1980s were also influenced by concerns over the health of young people, with an emphasis on preventing a sedentary lifestyle (Bailey et al., 2009a). Ideology related to scientific values and scientific functionalism that focused on the physical and physiological functioning of the body increased its

dominance in PE (Kirk & Tinning, 1990). This perspective was viewed by physical educators as “complementary to competitive sport by promoting the idea that sports science can make a significant contribution to improving elite performance” (Kirk, 1992, p. 165). Kirk and Tinning also suggest that there are links between scientific functionalism and patriarchal dominance, in that gender inequity is perpetuated through this scientific knowledge base. In addition, male physical educators advocated an approach to gymnastics that was influenced by “competitive sport and the new ‘scientific’ knowledge related to fitness and skill development” (Kirk & Tinning, 1990, p. 14) and PE has continued a long association with health benefits (Johns, 2005).

During the 1980s, education in state schools was under scrutiny and critique from the Conservatives and was considered to be in ‘crisis’. The Conservatives were intent upon reforming education, moving away from child-centred approaches and attempted to raise educational standards in the hope of improving economic success (Whetton, 2009). The Education Reform Act (ERA), introduced in England and Wales in 1988, was considered the most significant piece of legislation to have entered the education system in post-war Britain (Armstrong, 1996; Evans, Penney, & Bryant, 1993; Flintoff, 1990). The introduction of the ERA resulted in a complex package of measures intended to comprehensively change the state education system (Evans et al., 1993) and, served as an indication of a move towards central government being fundamentally involved in the provision of education in state schools in England and Wales (Penney & Evans, 1999). The Act addressed both the context and the content of education, bringing critical questions to the forefront, such as what education is about, whose interests it serves and what the curriculum in schools should look like (Penney & Evans, 1999). It is therefore vital to clarify what PE is about in order to have conceptual clarity in relation to notions of ability. One of the key measures of the Act was the development of a National Curriculum for state schools in England and Wales (Penney & Evans, 1999).

The National Curriculum for Physical Education (NCPE)

The National Curriculum (NC) offered steps towards greater equity in the quality of provision by referencing entitlement of all pupils to a ‘broad and balanced curriculum’ (Evans, Penney, & Davies, 1996; Hargreaves, 1994; Penney, 2002). However, there were concerns that this, and other ERA recommendations, would

actually produce and exacerbate educational and social inequalities rather than raise educational standards (Evans et al., 1993; Penney & Evans, 1995), and had little to offer equal opportunities for all children in school (Flintoff, 1990).

The NC was defined through individual subjects that were treated as discrete areas of knowledge, where hierarchical distinctions were made. Most important were the core subjects of English, maths and science, whereas PE was much lower down as one of the foundation subjects (Penney & Evans, 1999). The framework for the NCPE (Department of Education and Science and Welsh Office [DES/WE], 1992) was not one in which all subjects would be equal, “their place and status in the curriculum would reflect the historical and established hierarchy of school subjects in the United Kingdom” (Penney & Evans, 1999, p. 36) which, were further reinforced through the timing and phasing in; PE was one of the last subjects to come online. Houlihan, (2000) suggested that “the determination of the content of the NCPE took place within a complex multilayered context” . . . and “that context was the long-standing debate about the status of PE relative to other elements of the curriculum and, by implication, the status of PE teachers relative to their peers” (p. 172). This low status of PE was in contrast to *sport* and, as Kirk (1992) highlights, there was a post-war rise in the prominence of competitive games where *sport* was supported through politician’s beliefs that developing sporting talent could enhance Britain’s international prestige. The status and aims of sport and PE are of significant consideration in relation to notions of ‘ability’ in PE and will be elaborated upon later in this chapter.

Even though the introduction of the NCPE (DES/WO, 1992) was regarded as an opportunity for the PE profession to consolidate some existing ideas and strategies, such as Health-Related Exercise (HRE) and co-educational teaching (Evans et al., 1996), it was not seen as a positive process by everyone (Penney & Evans, 1999). The NCPE was considered to be restrictive over the potential of PE teachers to develop progressive and innovative pedagogical approaches (Evans et al., 1996). The NCPE stipulated six areas of activity where games held the highest status (Penney & Evans, 1997) and re-established a ‘traditional’ and recognisable curriculum (Penney & Evans, 1999). The returned emphasis on traditional team games “re-focused and legitimated a particular set of masculine dispositions that can be traced back to the ideology fostered in the Victorian public schools” (Brown, 2005, p. 7). Further, the dispositions embedded in

these games activities “place hegemonic masculine schemes of perception at the centre of PE discourse and practice” (Brown, 2005, p. 7). Interestingly, the PE profession warned that focusing on traditional competitive games was a detrimental experience for all except the most physically able or competitive pupils (Kay, 2007). In essence, PE reflects much of the historical gendered struggles and continues to include aspects of gender power relations in terms of its content, practice, aims and nature. This in turn has a strong influence on the nature of children’s experiences of PE, notions of ability in PE, as well as marking out PE as being fairly unique in its traditionally gendered approach (Kirk, 2005).

The NCPE (DES/WO, 1992) is a significant document that has defined PE and ability in England since the 1990s (Evans & Penney, 2008). In their analysis of how ‘educability’ and ‘physical ability’ are socially constructed through the practices of PE, Evans and Penney highlight the impact of the curriculum upon teachers’ and pupils’ perceptions of ability. They suggest that the PE curriculum is ‘encoded’ with particular notions of ability and compare two curriculum texts in PE: *Movement and Growing* (HMSO, 1952) and the NCPE. The former defined a child-centred view of teaching that celebrated the significance and importance of playful ‘movement for growing’ through a variety of activities (Evans & Penney, 2008); it encouraged teachers to move away from drawing upon premature distinctions between children and move towards emphasising an individual’s unique development, with the aim of recognising that all have ‘potential’.

Contrastingly, Evans and Penney (2008) stated that the NCPE (DES/WO, 1992) “advocates a pedagogy largely devoid of any reference to a rationale for PE, or to the affective dimensions or learning” (p. 40). It provides an abundance of information on how learners are to be observed, monitored and assessed where the processes of differentiation are stressed and performances are measured according to pre-given criteria; encouraging ability to be considered as age related where normative comparisons are unavoidable. The NCPE implicitly contains a developmental approach that is intended to shape the understandings of teachers and produce a particular type of PE and, in particular, notions of ability (Evans & Penney, 2008). Those children who do not develop in the prescribed way would be ascribed a ‘positional’ status by virtue of how well they can perform, confirming their place in an ability hierarchy, where they

are destined to remain until “their potential is reassessed at a later age and phase” (Evans & Penney, 2008, p. 42). Additionally, pupils are able to make comparisons against others, which can have both positive and negative effects, particularly upon their self-perceptions, the implications of which are a key focus of this study.

Both of these documents reflect ideologies of corresponding ability-based hegemony (Evans & Penney 2008) which, when investigating the social construction of PE and notions of ability, is a vital consideration in enhancing our understanding of pupils’ experiences in PE. Evans and Penney also express a concern that the desire to measure performance objectively limits the opportunity for children to express and reach their potential ability. The current educational climate continues to be dominated by measures of ‘success’ as defined by pupil attainment, performance levels, exam grades and league tables and it is difficult to see where changes in defining success may occur.

The NCPE was first introduced in 1992 (DES/WO) and has gone through a variety of changes. The more recent NCPE (Qualification and Curriculum Authority [QCA], 2007) was formed through statutory changes implemented across all subjects but was disappplied in September, 2013 with the intention of introducing a new NCPE in September, 2014. Since its disapplication, state schools have not been constrained by a National Curriculum and have been able to run a curriculum of their choice. Whilst versions of the NCPE have arguably introduced greater flexibility and less emphasis on prescribing specific activities, such as games, it can be suggested that the NCPE (QCA, 2007) stipulated specific intended outcomes which, by some interpretation, may only be met through certain activities, hence little change. Additionally, having greater flexibility for schools to interpret a NCPE may actually widen the gap in performance between schools and further highlight the problems of under performing pupils (Oates, 2009). For example, better resourced schools are able to provide a wider range of activities and therefore develop wider perceptions of pupil ability. In relation to indicators of ability the NCPE (QCA, 2007) contained the same level descriptors as previous versions with minor additions in relation to how pupils may work with others. Consequently, the document helped to reinforce a performative culture, one that “celebrates competition, comparison and accountability” (Evans, Rich, Allwood, & Davies, 2007, p. 53). It is not evident how this supported PE teachers in recognising and

acknowledging ‘potential ability’ as opposed to ‘actual ability’, a key question for this study to address. It remains to be seen how a new NC may contribute towards further change.

Interestingly, the individuals who were selected by government and who formed the initial working party to write, and produce, the first NCPE (DES/WO, 1992) did not consist of any physical educators but rather privileged those with interests in sport (Penney & Evans, 1999); this appeared to reflect the government’s view of PE at the time where boundaries between PE and sport were blurred (Penney & Evans, 1999). The development of the NCPE was in the context of a lack of acknowledgement by government ministers and policy developers that there “is a critical distinction between PE and sport” (Penney, 1998, p. 121). Understanding discourse on the differences between sport and PE has implications for notions of ability, because if they are distinctly different concepts, they should have discrete aims and outcomes and, therefore notions of what constitutes ability. The core arguments follow.

2.2 The legitimisation crisis in PE

Some would suggest that the introduction of a NCPE has helped to give status to PE as a ‘recognised’ and important area of the curriculum. However, PE has not always been a compulsory subject within schools. Armour and Kirk (2008) highlight the use of ‘ill-educated’ ex-army PT instructors, who taught the military course in elementary schools and, who were accorded low standing, as significantly impacting upon the status of PE. As such, PE has often struggled for legitimisation particularly within state schools (Evans et al., 1996). Perhaps the most compelling explanation for the ongoing legitimisation crisis in PE derives from the dualistic notion of mind and body as separate and differently valued in terms of ‘educational worth’.

The idea that humans had two components (dualism), consisting of mind and matter was exemplified by the philosophical beliefs of René Descartes (Barab & Plucker, 2002). He founded his opinions on the separation of the learner from the learning context, “effectively isolating the body from its mind, the self from its world, the content from its context” (Barab & Plucker, 2002, p. 165). Gilbert Ryle’s (1949/1990) influential philosophical text aimed to contest the classical dualistic belief that the mind and body were two distinct types of existence. Ryle suggests that it is a Cartesian ‘category mistake’ (Cartesian myth) to suggest that the mind and body are

different sorts of structure, fields of cause and effects, because the workings of the mind cannot be separated from physical states as a way of explaining physical actions; the difficulty created by the dualistic view is that it fails to explain how mind and matter interact, as they apparently do in human experience.

Cartesian dualism has been influential on educational thought (Armour & Kirk, 2008; Barab & Plucker, 2002) and consequently, has undermined the search in PE for legitimisation as a worthwhile subject (Kirk, 1988). Despite Ryle's (1949/1990) critique, the distinction and differential valuing of mind and body has persisted and shaped status judgements about PE (Williams, 1964).

When mind and bodies were thought of as two separate entities, physical education was obviously an education *of* the physical; in similar fashion mental education made its own exclusive demands. But with new understanding of the nature of human organism in which the wholeness of the individual is the outstanding fact, physical education becomes education *through* the physical. (Williams, 1964, p. 8)

Where Williams (1964) argues for 'education *through* the physical' as opposed to 'education *of* the physical' he places an emphasis on the wholeness of the individual in PE. He stresses that PE is an "education of the potentials of the whole person through physical activities, rather than an exclusive education of the physical" (Williams, 1964, p. vii). According to Lee (2004), this is in direct contrast to the aims of sport, which are elitism and the pursuit of excellence. If the outcomes of PE are indeed more than the education *of* the physical then this should be reflected in notions of what constitutes ability in PE. Unfortunately, Williams suggests that the concept of an education *through* the physical has not always prevailed, nor is it even commonly accepted. Williams also highlights that in addition to the selection of the type of activity, it is the outcomes of these activities that are important. Consequently, Williams acknowledges that ideological influences have traditionally impacted upon the aims and purposes of PE where "social, economic, and political influences have operated to use physical education for varied purposes" (p. 14), a view with which more recent authors would concur (Kirk, 1988, 1992; Kirk & Tinning, 1990; Macphail, 2004; Penney & Evans, 1999; Phillips & Roper, 2006).

Alongside the debates of Ryle (1949/1990) and Williams (1964), Peters (1966) presented a distinctive view of education which suggested that the concept of 'education' implies that "something *worthwhile* is being or has been intentionally

transmitted in a morally acceptable manner” (p. 25). He debates the meaning of *worthwhile* and emphasises that ‘education’ should include a cognitive perspective, involving knowledge and understanding. Peters makes similar distinctions to those of Cartesian dualism and states that “we do not call a person ‘educated’ who has simply mastered a skill . . . he must also have some body of knowledge and some kind of conceptual scheme to raise this above the level of disjointed facts” (p. 30); s/he must therefore have some understanding of the reason why. He also stresses that drills and indoctrination are not education as they involve little or no comprehension.

In defining *worthwhile* pursuits in the curriculum, Peters (1966) suggests that we need to consider the purposes of curriculum activities in order to justify them. He proposes that the curriculum activities that are *worthwhile* are “science, history, literary appreciation, and poetry” (Peters, 1966, p. 159). They are worthwhile because they “are ‘serious’ in that they illuminate other areas of life and contribute much to the quality of living” (Peters, 1966, p. 159). They also have a wide ranging cognitive content that can enlighten one’s views on wider things which, Peters considers, distinguishes them from games, which do not do this; subsequently, he concludes that games cannot be a *worthwhile* activity. Peters nonetheless recognises the social value of playing games which may contribute some educational worth, in particular, contributing to moral education by providing opportunities for “acquiring knowledge, qualities of mind and character, aesthetic grace and skills that have application in a wider area of life” (Peters, 1966, p. 159). In other words, PE is worth more educationally if it is *through* the physical and not just *of* the physical, similar to the distinction made by Williams (1964).

The views of Peters (1966) have influenced subsequent writings on curriculum matters and philosophical discourse in PE (Kirk, 1988) perpetuating the assumption that PE involves physical activity and cannot therefore engage pupils cognitively; consequently, if a school’s task is to develop ‘intellectual ability’ then PE has little to offer (Kirk, 1988).

The main justifications for physical education’s presence as a subject in the curriculum, often rest, then, on claims that physical activities are useful media for the development of desirable qualities such as social skills, moral knowledge, discipline and obedience, and health, but they are not, in and of themselves, of educational value. (Kirk, 1998, p. 45)

Discourse on the purpose and nature of PE remains and where the emphasis in PE is on developing ‘the physical’, it would follow that perceptions of ability would align with physical displays of ability.

There is more recent support for the distinction between learning *through* the physical and learning *of* the physical; Talbot (1999) distinguishes between learning to move and moving to learn. Kay (2007) and Kirk (2004) both suggest that PE is concerned with education *through* the physical and not with the production of elite sporting performers. Additionally, Laker (2003) highlights the advantages of education *through* the physical where both PE and sport can contribute to citizenship, which he defines holistically as part of a constructivist learning theoretical framework, a situated learning theory that emphasises learning as a social process. In contrast, Kirk and Tinning (1990) suggest that PE has survived despite this tradition of dualism, where “physical educators would be likely to reject the notions that engaging in physical activity is in some sense a ‘non-cognitive’ activity . . . and is inferior to other curriculum topics due to its eminently practical nature” (p. 3). Professionals who would advocate PE as an integral part to any child’s development would have a vested interest in the continuation and valorisation of PE.

PE has a contribution to make to the education of pupils especially when the emphasis is on the *learning* and *educational* processes and the activities within PE are the means of achieving these aims (Capel, 2000b). Consequently it would follow that for the current study, the intended outcome would have a bearing on interpretations of ability. In addition, government policy on sport and PE has contributed to the formation of perceptions of the purpose of PE and it is this notion that is explored next.

2.3 PE and sport policy

When the Conservative government came into power in 1979 their policies on sport and PE continued to prioritise competitive games, which perpetuated the bourgeois games ethic. The Conservatives remained in power for 18 years. Penney and Evans (1999) acknowledge the impact of this administration, especially between 1977 and 1988, during which a plethora of policy initiatives in the UK served to “highlight, perhaps as never before, the contested nature of education and physical education” (p. xi). This was a period of economic recession and the Conservatives were committed to changing the education system to help support the perceived needs of the economy

(Houlihan, 2000). They were also keen to redress a perceived decline in national sporting prowess, for which PE teachers received the blame. Arguments about the loss to civic pride associated with this decline continued to fuel debate around the nature and purpose of PE. Public discourse on this issue also gave impetus to the argument for more government involvement in the running of sport (Kirk, 1992).

Since then, sport has increasingly become recognised by government as a potential vehicle for delivering a variety of political agendas such as social inclusion, increased participation, and health (Flintoff, 2003; Houlihan, 2000). However, some would argue that few of these motives actually relate to the intrinsic benefits and values of sport (Houlihan, 2002). There has been further suggestion that sport policy reflects a shift away from educational objectives and a move towards elite development and school sport performance objectives which has re-prioritised competitive team sports within the NCPE (Green, 2004; Houlihan, 2000; Kay, 2007). For example, after a 20 year absence of government policy on sport, the introduction of 'Sport: Raising the Game' (Department of National Heritage [DNH], 1995) emphasised the development of the sporting elite and supported the government's prioritisation of school sport over PE. This was probably the most instrumental policy moment in shifting momentum in PE towards elite sports development and school sport (Houlihan, 2000). Subsequent policy continued to stress these priorities with 'Sporting Future for All' (Department for Culture, Media & Sport [DCMS], 2000) and 'Game Plan' (Department for Culture, Media & Sport/Strategy Unit [DCMS/SU], 2002) being especially significant. It follows that the outcomes and qualities that are valued and promoted through sport and PE policy impact upon interpretations of ability.

Game Plan (DCMS, 2002) was designed to influence sporting practice for the 20 years following its publication (Green, 2006). As well as reiterating the government's commitment to elite success, it also acknowledged sport as a potential vehicle for 'social investment', by focusing on lifelong opportunity, social inclusion and child-centred sport. Green suggests that these foci mirror social investment objectives where, sport is once again recognised as a vehicle for political ideologies (Houlihan, 2002). Green highlights that where children are merely valued for their potential contribution to economic prosperity (extrinsic goals), their well-being and/or enjoyment (intrinsic goals) is overshadowed. Indeed, one of the main concerns that has emerged from the

increased prioritisation on elite sport development is the unease over the treatment of young athletes (Green, 2006). In particular, Green highlights a senior official at the British Athletic Federation who commented that nobody cares what happens to athletes if they are not successful; a possible outcome that the domains of sport and PE should be highly concerned with.

The above policies were consolidated in the Physical Education, School Sport and Club Links strategy (PESSCL) (DCMS & Department for Education & Skills [DfES], 2003). The strategy was implemented through eight key strands, one of which was for schools to identify and support G&T pupils in PE. The strategy had two clear aims: first, to improve levels of participation and health by delivering two hours of 'high quality' PE for 85% pupils by 2008; and secondly, to produce greater success by athletes in the international sporting arena. The expectation for PE teachers to cater for all pupils and contribute to the development of the elite is contradictory (Penney & Evans, 1997) and this dilemma continues to face PE teachers.

The successor to PESSCL (DfES & DCMS, 2003) was the PE and Sport Strategy for Young People (PESSYP) (Department for Children, Schools & Families [DCSF], 2008) which set out aspirations for each child aged 5 to 16 to have access to five hours of PE and sport a week by 2011, as well as creating new sporting opportunities for 16-19 year olds to participate. It also extended initiatives and funding to support G&T pupils. The strategy was delivered through the infrastructure of School Sports Partnerships (SSP) and Specialist Sport Colleges (SSC) who were key contributors in the delivery of PESSYP. The funding for this strategy was cut by the coalition government in October, 2010 with the intention of implementing strategies that focused more on 'school games competitions' (Phillpots & Grix, 2014).

Sport policy has reflected a growing political engagement with sport and the development of the sporting elite, moving away from the former 'sport for all' ethos, a continuation of a theme highlighted by Kirk (1992). London's successful Olympic bid was further testament to the importance placed upon elite sport success in the UK by the early 2000s (Green, 2006). Lawson (2005) questioned this emphasis on the elite and whether sport, exercise and PE professionals, and their respective policies, actually empower the people they serve. Subsequently, it can be suggested that policy has combined the aims, values and practices of PE and sport, particularly on identifying and

developing the elite and, that this practice has a significant bearing on how ability is valued and perceived within what can be described as a ‘performative’ culture (Evans, 2013). It is therefore important to consider the key arguments.

2.4 The aims of PE and sport

The term *sport* is increasingly being used in policy discourse to encompass PE (Kay, 2007), the nature of which has been, and continues to be, highly contested (Bailey, Morley, & Dismore, 2009b; Capel, 2000a; Kay, 2007; Kirk & Gorley, 2000; Murdoch 1990). In making a clear distinction, the NCPE Working Group (NCPEWG) suggested: “Sport covers a range of physical activities in which adults and young people may participate. Physical education, on the other hand is a process of learning, the context being mainly physical” (DES/WO, 1991, p. 7). Despite this distinction, politicians responsible for policy development have often regarded PE and sport as synonymous (Capel, 2000a; Penney, 1998), as evidenced in recent policy objectives (PESSYP). Concern about this has been raised in a declaration on PE from the National Summit on Physical Education as follows: “a major distinguishing feature of PE – the focus on learning as opposed to sporting outcome - is in danger at times of being overlooked or subordinated to the purposes of sports development” (British Association of Advisers and Lecturers [BAALPE] / Physical Education Association of the United Kingdom [PEAUK] / Central Council of Physical Recreation [CCPR], 2005, p. 4). Where this is the case, the prioritisation of the aims of sports development undermines the educational objectives of PE.

Some physical educators have gone to considerable lengths to draw a distinction between PE and sport (Kirk, 2004) however, school subjects can be defined more by their practices than policies (Kirk, 1992). Murdoch (1990) states that the activities on the PE curriculum have increasingly been recognised as *sports*, which has made it difficult for the PE profession to claim that *sports* activities have educational benefits, as argued by Peters (1966). Additionally, Kirk (2004) makes a distinction between *sport-based PE* (short blocks of sports activity) and *sport*. He suggests that the former has serious limitations in providing an “educationally sound or authentic experience of sport” (Kirk, 2004, p.189). His viewpoint reflects concerns from the 1940s that sport-based PE would be viewed as a means for supplying elite sport with talented youngsters leading to the neglect of the majority who were less able (Kirk & Gorley, 2000); again

bringing into question the focus of the aims and purpose of PE, a dilemma that continues to challenge stakeholders.

Sport-based practices have dominated secondary PE in the UK since the 1950's and the emergence of the NCPE has done little to change the fact that these practices, especially team games (Bailey et al., 2009b), continue to be the focal point of PE in schools (Kirk, 2004). This is a concern as it is the more able pupils who have the more positive experiences in sport-based PE and the less able who have more negative experiences (Kirk, 1992). Where schools place an emphasis on sport and competitive success there is an imbalance in resources, with greater support for the more able (Capel, 2000a); an emphasis supported through the PESSYP (DCSF, 2008). Many would agree that the pursuit of excellence is important for the able performer and PE teachers have a role in identifying potential, but a key question pertinent to the current study, as highlighted by (Capel, 2000a), is whose role is it to develop excellence?

Consequently, claims that are made about the benefits of PE and whether they go beyond proficiency in physical activities are addressed by Whitehead (2001; 2010) who presents the concept of physical literacy. She states that the idea has been used as an alternative to the notion of being physically educated and highlights its early use in reference to PE by the UK Sports Council in 1991. Whitehead (2010) states that "appropriate to each individual's endowment, physical literacy can be described as the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to maintain physical activity throughout the lifecourse" (p. 11-12).

Thus, in order to become physically literate an individual needs to be able to perform basic movement competencies which, are within their own physical capacity and, be able to apply these in different situations as well as understanding how they can learn and develop further (Haydn-Davies, 2005). The notion that each individual has their own potential is supported by the concept of physical literacy and this should be a key focus of PE (Haydn-Davies, 2005). This is again in contrast to the aims of sport (elitism and the pursuit of excellence) (Lee, 2004) which, through policy and practice, continue to be intertwined with the aims of PE.

Physical literacy thus involves a holistic engagement through embodied capacities that the individual requires, in order to interact effectively with the environment where they can learn and consequently modify their movements

(Whitehead, 2010). Additionally, with respect to conceptualising ability, Wright and Burrows (2006) argue that the concept of physical literacy appears to be an acceptable ideal to work towards, however, it fails to acknowledge the social and cultural contexts where movement and learning takes place; recognising the context would further enhance our understanding of how the concept of ability is constructed (Wright & Burrows, 2006) and experienced in PE.

In short, the aims of PE have been, and continue to be, the subject of considerable debate (Alderson & Crutchley, 1990; Bailey et al., 2009a; Capel, 2000a, 2000b; Kay, 2007; Kirk, 1988, 2006; Murdoch, 1990; Talbot, 1999). They have changed in relation to prevailing ideologies and have at one time or another included physical, social, affective, and cognitive purposes (Bailey et al., 2009a). Talbot (1999) suggests the aims of PE are to: develop physical literacy; develop the skills and understanding required for the lifetime involvement in physical activity and sport; provide a learning experience where the focus is on the body; contribute to the integrated development of mind and body; enhance self-confidence, social and cognitive development; the emphasis should be on *learning*. The functions of sport are different to PE in that they are to promote elitism and the pursuit of excellence, foster a sense of national identity and to identify talent, corresponding with the emphasis on the development of the elite within policy such as the PESSYP (DCSF 2008) (Lee, 2004). Where PE has often been used for non-educational purposes (Kirk, 1988) and confused with the aims of sport, notions of ability have been confounded.

2.5 Summary

In positioning ability, the importance of understanding the development of the field of PE and appreciating the relationship between past and present practices (Penney & Evans, 1999) has been emphasised. Physical education has been influenced by dominant political ideology and social elements that have advantaged particular groups (Bailey et al. 2009a; Evans & Penney, 2008), and despite government initiatives to insure ‘equal opportunity’ in education, PE continues to reflect much of the historically class-based (Wright & Burrows, 2006) and gendered struggles (Kirk, 2002).

This chapter has also stressed the importance of understanding discourse on the aims and values of PE and challenging what is of educational value within the educational system (Peters, 1966; Ryle, 1949/1990; Williams, 1964). In addition, the

merging of PE and sport policy and the shift away from educational objectives and a move towards elite development, competitive team sports, elitism and competition has been emphasised (Houlihan, 2000; Kay, 2007). In terms of ability, ‘legitimate knowledge’ is therefore not fixed, but is instead constantly in process, shaped by social, political and cultural, as well as educational forces. ‘Legitimate knowledge’ is also not politically nor culturally neutral, but on the contrary “embodies and communicates the interests and values of those parties who have a major hand in constructing the school curriculum, a process which unjustly disadvantages some categories of pupils in relation to others” (Kirk, 1992, p. 2). Working within this context means that PE teachers’ actions are rarely accidental; they have an origin, a history and are almost always inevitably constrained by prevailing political ideologies (Evans & Penney, 2008). It is within this culture that pupils’ and teachers’ notions of ability are configured and reconfigured, where the emphasis is typically on ‘performance’, where the social and cultural context gives ability its meaning; any investigation of how ability is experienced in PE therefore needs to take these ideas and processes into account. The next chapter examines how ability in PE is conceptualised.

CHAPTER 3 CONCEPTUALISING ABILITY

The previous chapter examined how the field of physical education has developed. This chapter focuses on the different ways that ability in PE can be conceptualised.

Conceptualising ability necessitates a clear definition. However, this is no simple task as the term is frequently used across different domains where its meaning changes substantially according to the perspective of the user (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2001) and the context (Tranckle & Cushion, 2006; Wright & Burrows, 2006). It follows that understanding different theoretical perspectives as well as the field and culture of PE is crucial in exploring and comprehending how ability is perceived and also experienced within it. In order to position ability for the current study this chapter explores various ability-based practices and theoretical perspectives that have influenced how ability is conceptualised within physical education. In addition, it also explores different perspectives from which to consider related experiences and the impact upon the learner. This chapter presents: an overview of key ability-based practices within PE; consideration for the impact upon pupil self-perception; psychological and sociological perspectives on ability; a discussion of Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework.

3.1 Ability-based practices in PE

Chapter two helps to highlight some of the complexities involved in conceptualising ability within PE where the defining practices are related to shifts in the prevailing culture and dominant ideologies (Kirk, 1992; Wright & Burrows, 2006). Two particular examples are considered pertinent in exploring ability-based practices: Firstly, the tendency to combine the aims and practices associated with both PE and sport which influences related practices such as those incorporated as part of the G&T programme, a practice that was in effect at the time of the study. Secondly, the state education system was founded on the basis of existing class divisions and related assumptions about intelligence which were the premise for streaming and setting, a contentious practice that remains in education and PE (Gillard, 2009). This section considers both practices in terms of their contribution to conceptualising ability and also aims to provide greater insight into the constitution of the field, all of which adds clarity to the context in which the study took place.

3.1.1 Identifying talented pupils in PE

Broadly speaking, 'ability' can be used to describe a level of competence or refer to the notion of a specific talent (Hay & Macdonald, 2010a). In the sporting domain, assumptions about ability are closely linked to those of talent where considerable disagreement persists among experts on defining and identifying talent (Abbott & Collins, 2002; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2001). Where there are inconsistencies, this merely adds to the complexities involved in its conception (Tranckle & Cushion, 2006).

Notions of talent within the field of sport have traditionally centred on physical and performance variables, as well as psychological skills, which are perceived as a requisite for success (Abbott & Collins, 2002; Gould, Diffenbach, & Moffett, 2002; Williams & Reilly, 2000). It has been argued that the dominant conception of talent in PE reflects many sport-based models (Wright & Burrows, 2006) and this notion has been raised as a concern (Bailey, Tan, & Morley, 2004; Bailey & Morley, 2006; Croston, 2013; Morely & Holt, 2003). In particular, Penney and Lisahunter (2006) stress that where 'legitimate' notions of ability in PE are defined by physical sports skills and the characteristics that are more associated with elite sport, such a view of talent is too narrow for PE (Kirk, 2004; Penney, 2000).

Prompted by these concerns, Morley and Bailey (2006) developed a specific model to help support a clearer understanding of defining and identifying talent in PE. The model was designed with the intention of differentiating between potential and actual performance, to reflect a multi-dimensional portrayal of abilities, and, to focus on PE rather than domain specific concepts such as sport (Morley & Bailey, 2006). Within their model they propose that talent identification (ID) in PE should not just be concerned with physical abilities but also social, cognitive, creative and personal abilities which should equally be valued and recognised by those teaching PE. Morley and Bailey therefore suggest that ability in PE is best reflected and defined through a multi-dimensional portrayal of abilities rather than 'legitimate' uni-dimensional notions of physical ability, corresponding more with the concept of physical literacy (Whitehead, 2001; 2010).

In the UK, defining ability in education has been supported through G&T policy. The DfES made a clear distinction between the two terms where 'gifted' referred

to pupils with ability in ‘academic subjects’, and ‘talented’ described pupils with ability in subjects such as art, music and PE (Office for Standards in Education [Ofsted], 2001). The reason for this distinction was not clear but indicates a continuing underlying hierarchy (Bailey, 2004), that reinforces dualistic debates on the purpose of education (Peters, 1966; Williams, 1964) and the status of PE (Kirk, 1988). Differentiating between terms such as ‘gifted’ and ‘talented’ confounds notions of ability further which may be related to a preoccupation with arguing the origins of talent, such as the nature versus nurture debate (Tranckle & Cushion, 2006).

The G&T programme emerged as part of the Excellence in Cities Initiative (EiC) which was introduced by the New Labour government in 1999 in an attempt to improve educational standards (Haight, 2004) and to raise the aspirations of children in inner city schools (Freeman, 2002). Within the EiC initiative, the government made explicit an expectation that schools should identify and develop G&T pupils and support them through whole school policy and distinctive teaching and learning. This was an expectation for all curriculum subjects including ‘physical education and sport’ (DfEE, 2000) and was supported through related policy (PESSYP) (DCSF, 2008) and specific resources (Youth Sport Trust [YTS], 2009; Morley & Bailey, 2006).

In an attempt to investigate the ways in which English schools identify and support talented pupils in PE, Bailey et al. (2009b) conducted a national survey on policy and practice. The findings indicated that schools utilise a range of strategies and policy to identify and develop talented pupils in PE (Bailey et al., 2009b). The most commonly reported criteria used by PE teachers to identify talent was performance in both school and club sport. Only a minority of respondents reported using criteria based on NCPE (DfES/QCA, 2000) which, according to Bailey et al. is surprising as the NCPE has a clear description of a child at the exceptional performance level and one might expect the use of such documentation to support the identification of talent. In addition, limited use of GCSE levels, Key Stage (KS) 2/3 transfer information, and non-physical tests were reported. These findings indicate a lack of knowledge or use of recent documentation and support (Morley & Bailey, 2006), and highlights that uni-dimensional, ‘legitimate’ notions of talent persist in PE.

One of the reasons for the inconsistencies in talent ID procedures among the survey respondents was the reported lack of expertise, experience and support for PE

teachers (Bailey et al., 2009b). Previous research (Bailey et al., 2004) has suggested that many PE teachers lack confidence and aptitude in identifying talented pupils and are therefore obliged to rely upon 'traditional' selection strategies (Bailey et al., 2009b). Respondents also indicated the majority of their expertise was in games which perhaps also contributes to the reinforcement of many 'legitimate' assumptions as to the nature of ability in PE; a key theme within discourse surrounding the social construction of ability in PE (Hay & Lisahunter, 2006; Hay & Macdonald, 2010a). Bailey et al. (2009b) concluded that many talent ID practices may therefore be compromised by a lack of policy direction, an uneven distribution of staff expertise, and perhaps varying perceptions of ability in PE. Bailey et al. (2009b) suggest that wider dissemination of good practice and the creation of clearer guidelines are required in order to support equitable talent ID and development practices in PE.

In order to gain further insight into the processes involved in talent ID in PE Croston (2013) investigated associated practices and perceptions within secondary school PE departments across London. The study aimed to establish a regional picture of practices as well as determining how PE teachers define talent in PE and sport. Data were collected in relation to: Policy; talent ID processes; staff training; and PE teachers' definitions of talent in PE and sport. In comparison to Bailey et al. (2009b) the findings reflect limited progress in PE specific policy, training, awareness and use of available resources. Croston suggests that PE teachers continue to predominantly utilise physical ability as a key indicator of talent. However, there was some indication that PE teachers' perceptions of talent were widening where they indicated a slight increase in the use of cognitive, personal, social and creative abilities, as presented in the multidimensional model (Morley & Bailey, 2006). The findings also reveal inconsistencies in PE teacher's definitions of talent in PE and sport, where some are able to distinguish between the two whilst others are not. This contributes to discourse on the nature and purpose of PE (Kay, 2007; Kirk, 1988, 1992, 2004; Kirk & Tinning, 1990; Lee, 2004; Macphail, 2004; Penney & Evans, 1999; Phillips & Roper, 2006; Talbot, 1999; Williams, 1964) and notions of ability.

Defining talent in PE therefore remains a contentious issue. The apparent merging of PE and sport, in policy and practice, reinforces the association of talent with physical performance which has re-catalysed debates on whether this is an appropriate

way to conceptualise talent within PE (Croston, 2013). There is an assumption that we should be identifying and developing talent in PE without understanding some of the implications and consequences. For example, identifying talent in PE and sport can be problematic as predictions are often unreliable as they neither necessarily predict future talent in PE (Bailey et al., 2009b; Bailey & Morley, 2006) nor do they guarantee adult success in elite sport (Bloom, 1985; Martindale, Collins, & Daubney, 2005; Vaeyens, Gúllich, Warr & Philippaerts, 2009). As such, attempts at making predictions about talent are often very unreliable (Freeman, 1999) and therefore questionable.

Additionally, early labelling of talent in PE, or sport, excludes late-maturers (Abbott & Collins, 2002; Freeman, 2006; Martindale et al., 2005; Vaeyens et al., 2009) and others from specific opportunities that could help enhance their hidden or latent talent (Bailey et al., 2009b). This concern has been highlighted within the sport domain:

Categorising some children as innately talented is discriminatory . . . preventing young people from pursuing a goal because of the unjustified conviction of teachers or parents that certain children would not benefit from the superior opportunities given to those who are deemed to be talented. (Howe, Davidson & Sloboda, 1998, p. 407)

Additionally, Martindale et al. (2005) emphasise that providing specialist selective training and opportunities only to those who perform well excludes others with ‘potential’, who would then almost certainly find it difficult to “catch up once deselected” (p. 356), missing out on early deliberate practice, which, according to Ericsson, Krampe, and Tesch-Rómer (1993), is a vital component in becoming an expert performer.

Despite the fact that talent ID became compulsory for all secondary schools, and was backed by various national resources (Bailey et al., 2004; Bailey et al. 2009b), there is limited evidence of how schools embraced the G&T programme or, if indeed, any underlying principles and practices remain since its cessation. Furthermore, where an expectation, and even a responsibility, may remain within the field of PE, to concurrently develop elite performers alongside raising levels of participation highlights an important question posed by Lee (2004): how do we develop talent within schools without compromising educational principles? Where some individuals are in/excluded on the basis of their perceived talent prevents as many as possible from participating for as long as possible; a strategy that has been suggested as effective in the development of

talented athletes as a larger pool of ‘potential talent’ is retained for longer from which to select the best (Martindale et al., 2005; Morley & Bailey, 2006).

Assumptions and practices associated with talent in PE raise important questions for stakeholders. Understanding these ability-based practices makes some contribution towards comprehending how ability is conceptualised within the field. However, they also need to be understood in combination with other practices, such as those of ability groupings.

3.1.2 Ability grouping in PE

The pedagogical strategy of grouping pupils by ability has a long and controversial history within the English education system (Gillard, 2009; Hallam & Ireson, 2005; Ireson et al., 2002). Corresponding with educational ideologies that have impacted upon physical education, the creation of the state education system was founded on the basis of existing class divisions. According to Gillard, this basis for segregation became untenable so an alternative excuse for segregating children had to be found. Psychology and eugenics with their reductionist notions of intelligence provided the answer and became widely accepted and underpinned the tripartite system following the 1944 Education Act, where streaming and setting was common practice, resulting in a division at every level of the education system based upon ability. However, this did not go without objection, theories of intelligence were questioned and many children were humiliated by their perceived ‘failure’, selection procedures were considered flawed, streamed systems were inflexible, and “early decisions about children’s intelligence became self-fulfilling prophecies; the whole system perpetuated and accentuated social class divisions” (Gillard, 2009, p. 70).

As developments in education continued many primary schools began to unstream and they discovered that mixed ability teaching did not negatively affect the performance of the more able and led to improvements in attitudes and behaviour and in the self-esteem of the less able (Gillard, 2009). Educational reports began to support mixed ability teaching and unstreaming began to be seen in the lower years of the comprehensive school. Mixed ability teaching was developed throughout the 1970s and 80s in tandem with the move towards the comprehensive system, and more ‘progressive’ methods of teaching, and was commonly used within PE (Raymond & Rayden, 1997). However, despite the growth of mass secondary education, Kirk (1988)

argues that it had little success in terms of its attempts at reducing social inequality and many of the new comprehensive schools adopted the old structures of streaming and setting pupils according to ability which, in turn, continued to reproduce previous inequalities. A clear return to streaming and ability groups was seen when New Labour came into power and launched attacks on the comprehensive ideal and mixed ability teaching, pressurising schools into adopting specialisation and setting. The government strategy for the early identification and support of the particularly able (G&T) pupils was an example of this type of ‘accelerated learning’ (Gillard, 2009).

There has been an abundance of research investigating teaching strategies and the grouping of pupils and “almost without exception, they have shown that mixed ability teaching, with appropriate and flexible use of in-class groups is the most beneficial system” (Gillard, 2009, p. 70); although it has been suggested that successful mixed ability teaching does rely heavily on teacher skills and effective use of differentiation (Boaler, Wiliam, & Brown, 2000; Hallam & Ireson, 2005). Furthermore, the governing body that regulates teaching practices in English schools (Ofsted) have no evidence that setting is more beneficial to some pupils, yet politicians still cling to the ideals and practices of setting (Gillard, 2009) and, as such, the use of ability groups in education remains a current but contentious practice.

The practice of ability grouping has undergone widespread investigation in a classroom based context and the support that does exist for this pedagogical strategy highlights some common reasons, such as: there is a perception that ability groups facilitate an effective learning environment; they are easier to plan and deliver on as the work is set at the same ‘appropriate’ level; managing behaviour is more straightforward (Boaler et al., 2000; Hallam & Ireson, 2005; Kerckhoff, 1986; Zevenbergen, 2005). Furthermore, in maths, English and science there is some suggestion that once allocated to an ability group students experience limited transition (Boaler et al., 2000; Ireson, et al., 2002) this is despite some teachers noting that ability is changeable (MacIntyre & Ireson, 2002). The lack of transition highlights concerns about pupils progression as it may not account for their changing needs or development rates (Boaler, 2005), and may also exclude any with ‘potential talent’ benefiting from wider resources. This practice raises further concerns over equal opportunities and support for *all* pupils, especially where PE teachers rely on their own opinion of the pupil’s ability (Ireson et al., 2002).

More specifically, where PE departments identify talented pupils early, in year 7, who then remain on a G&T register for the duration of their schooling life, this limits places for any 'late developers' and allows for very little transition and/or equality of opportunity. Furthermore, when pupils are moved in and out of ability groups this is sometimes based on behaviour and levels of effort as opposed to changes in 'actual' ability level (Ireson et al., 2002).

Where a variety of interrelated factors impact upon the placement and transition of pupils in ability groups there is scope for pupils to be misplaced, the consequences of which are significant as it has been suggested that, on many levels, pupil attainment can be influenced by their ability group (Ireson et al., 2002). Furthermore, where self-concept has been measured within ability groups there is a suggestion that low ability pupils can suffer low self-concept or self-esteem which can be a precursor to low achievement and motivation (Boaler, 2005; MacIntyre & Ireson, 2002). Additionally, structured ability grouping can result in different teacher expectations (Boaler et al., 2000; Hallam & Ireson, 2005; Kerckhoff, 1986; Zevenbergen, 2005) which may also impact upon a pupil's self-perceptions.

Whilst policy and research serves to inform some ability-based pedagogy, investigation into the impact of ability groupings in education, and more specifically in PE, remains limited. Furthermore, what appears to be missing from much related research is exploring the impact that ability groupings have on the learner (Fletcher, 2008). Stakeholders would be better supported with greater insight into effective ways to group pupils for their learning. In addition, understanding the impact of ability-based practices in PE on the individual learner will enhance our comprehension of young people's experiences and inform how they might be improved. In particular, there is some suggestion that ability-based experiences can impact on an individual's self-concept and/or their identity (Boaler, 2005; MacIntyre & Ireson, 2002; Zevenbergen, 2005) and is a key consideration for stakeholders as the development of a healthy self-concept is regarded as one of the most important developmental tasks of human beings (Bracken & Lamprecht, 2003). Moreover, improvement of a student's self-concept is valued in its own right as an educational outcome (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976) and, as such, it has been a key focus of the NC since its inception (Lee, 1996). Additionally, the aims of the NCPE (QCA, 2007) have been for young people to

become successful learners who enjoy learning, make progress and achieve and become confident individuals who are able to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives. However, research that does exist on streaming pupils based on ability and its influence on pupil self-concept remains inconclusive (Child, 2007).

3.2 Notions of ‘self’ and identity

One of the challenges in this study is the exploration of the impact that ability-based practices can have on a pupil in PE and how they perceive themselves in relation to their assigned ability, and what processes contribute towards how they see themselves in this context. In order to explore notions of self-perception it is therefore important to understand some of the theoretical perspectives that have been presented to explain the formation of the ‘self’ and an individual’s identity.

The notion of the ‘self’ has been extensively researched from psychological, sociological, and social psychological perspectives (Harter, 1998) and, as such, many related concepts exist. The self has been described as both a social and cognitive construct (Harter, 1998) however much related research is plagued with confusing terminology (Butler & Gasson, 2005), where terms such as self-concept and identity can potentially both be used to describe how an individual perceives themselves. Although there are several definitions of self-concept (Stiller & Alfermann, 2007) it can broadly be defined as an individual’s perception of themselves, which has been formed through experience with, and interpretations of, their environment which are further reinforced by the evaluations of significant others (Shavelson et al., 1976). Similarly, the notion of identity is associated with a sense of ‘self’ and is perceived as something that is negotiable which is created in the process of human interaction and meanings (Jenkins, 1996). Consequently, it may be assumed that they are interchangeable concepts however acknowledging different theoretical perspectives reveals some important conceptual differences. This section explores the ‘self’ from both the social and cognitive perspectives as well as considering notions of self-concept and identity with the intention of clarifying how self-perceptions are analysed and discussed in relation to the findings.

3.2.1 Self-concept and self-esteem: a multidimensional perspective

James (1890/1950) set the stage for considering multiple selves that may be manifest in different inter-personal relationships whereas his contemporaries placed an

emphasis on the unified self, for example, Jung (1928) and Rogers (1951). Until the mid-1970s, self-concept was treated as uni-dimensional (Child, 2007). However, following a seminal paper by Shavelson et al. (1976) several dimensions to the self were suggested within other multidimensional models (Bracken & Lamprecht, 2003; Harter, 1987).

Shavelson et al. (1976) suggest that there are seven features critical to the construct definition where self-concept may be described as “organized, multifaceted, hierarchical, stable, developmental, evaluative, differentiable” (p. 411). Facets of self-concept may form a hierarchy from “individual experiences in particular situations at the base of the hierarchy to general self-concept at the apex” (Shavelson et al., 1976, p. 412); emphasising the notion of a general self-concept that can be formed by a variety of other components, for example, academic (different subjects) and non-academic (physical, social and emotional) facets, a line of reasoning that proposes self-concept as situation specific (Shavelson et al., 1976). They concluded that this hierarchical feature led to the hypothesis that general self-concept is more stable, whereas situation-specific self-concept is unstable as it changes more with variation in different situations.

Bracken and Lamprecht (2003) developed Shavelson et al.’s. (1976) notion of self-concept further and provided a multidimensional model also with global self-concept at the apex of the overlapping dimensions below it (academic, social, affect, competence, physical, and family), suggesting that an accurate definition of self-concept should include all of these aspects. Within this theoretical framework, self-esteem “refers to the global component of self-concept that is specifically intended to reflect broad, general self-perceptions that are not specifically tied to particular content areas” (Chanal, Marsh, Sarrazin & Bois, 2005, p. 54) and as such is considered as different to self-concept.

Specific multidimensional and hierarchical models of physical self-concept have been developed in relation to PE and sport settings, incorporating the sub-dimensions of sport competence, physical attractiveness, physical strength, and physical condition (Fox & Corbin, 1989; Stiller, Würth, & Alfermann, 2004). From this perspective, these facets would need to be considered when investigating pupil’s self-concept in a PE context, as a single global measure of the self cannot sufficiently describe domain specific self-concept (Chanal et al., 2005). Where an individual feels positive about

themselves within the physical domain is considered beneficial in achieving further desirable outcomes such as adherence, increased motivation, effort and persistence (Marsh et al., 2006) and, as such, should be an important objective for PE lessons. Marsh et al. further suggest that positive levels of physical self-concept lead to higher levels of exercise behaviour which, in turn, promote higher levels of subsequent physical self-concept which, may then impact upon an individual's notion of their own ability within PE. From this perspective, self-concept therefore has a mediating effect that impacts upon other desirable outcomes in PE (Li & Xiang, 2007).

Self-concept and self-esteem are described as hypothetical and measurable constructs “generated to summarise certain features of human behaviour (Butler & Gasson, 2005, p. 190). Within the last three decades self-constructs have taken centre stage within social psychology, developmental psychology, clinical psychology, educational psychology and cognitive psychology, however controversies remain in terms of how stable the self is (Harter & Whitesell, 2003). There are those who believe that global self-esteem is relatively stable over time, there are those who point to normative developmental changes and others who signify short term fluctuations in self-esteem (Harter & Whitesell, 2003); in the latter sense related concepts may be considered dynamic.

3.2.2 Identity

Personal identity has been linked to the ‘self’ where it has been suggested that the meaning of ‘self’ parallels the general meanings of identity (Jenkins, 1996). In exploring the concept of identity difficulties can arise within different perspectives where, for example sociologists and lay actors often and unavoidably use the same terminology and, as such, the distinction between common sense understandings and sociological usages is not always clear (Jenkins, 1996). Furthermore, Jenkins uses ‘identity’ and ‘social identity’ interchangeably and argues that all human identities are social identities because identity is about meaning which requires agreement or disagreement; where identity is described as simply ‘is’ this pays “insufficient attention to how identity ‘works’ or ‘is worked’, to process and reflexivity, to the social construction of identity in interaction” (Jenkins, 1996, p. 4). Understanding the processes that contribute to an individual's identity helps to distinguish it from concepts

such as self-concept and self-esteem where there is perhaps a greater emphasis on measurement.

In highlighting important processes, Jenkins (1996) believes that identity remains rooted in social experience and membership of social groups; it is not something that can just be changed at will. Social identity is defined as “our understanding of who we are and of who other people are, and, reciprocally, other people’s understanding of themselves and of others” (Jenkins, 1996, p. 5); it is the product of agreement or disagreement, it is negotiable, fluid and ever changing (Harris & Parker, 2009). We therefore can have an identity that is unique to us but one that is also shaped by membership to certain groups where we construct ourselves in “accordance with broader social processes through interaction, communication and negotiation . . . together, these elements comprise the basis of identity formation” (Harris & Parker, 2009, p. 3). From this perspective, an individual’s ability group and the related experiences in PE can be considered significant in terms of contributing towards their individual and social identity.

In explaining ‘self’ Jenkins (1996) states that there are four core features: similarity, difference, reflexivity and process, which leads to his definition of self as: “each individual’s reflexive sense of her or his own particular identity, constituted vis á vis others in terms of similarity and difference, without which we would not know who we are and hence would not be able to act” (p. 29-30). Consequently, many of his ideas on social identity are closely associated with those from a symbolic interactionist perspective. Jenkins states:

If identity is a necessary prerequisite for social life, the reverse is also true. Individual identity – embodied in selfhood – is not meaningful in isolation from the social world of other people. Individuals are unique and variable, but selfhood is thoroughly socially constructed: in the processes of primary and subsequent socialisation, and in the ongoing processes of social interaction within which individuals define and redefine themselves and others throughout their lives. (p. 20)

This view derives from the work of Cooley and Mead and offers the template for Jenkins’ (1996) model which informs his argument of “the internal-external dialectic of identification as the process whereby all identities – individual and collective – are constituted” (p. 20). Exploring the symbolic interactionist perspective would therefore seem appropriate.

3.2.3 'Self' and identity: a symbolic interactionist perspective

The symbolic interactionist perspective has been used by social psychologists to explain the processes that contribute to forming an individual's identity, self-concept and self-esteem; it therefore presents some common theoretical ground for the current study in relation to exploring the ability-based processes that may impact upon an individual and their self-perception within the field of PE.

The work of James (1890, 1892) and of symbolic interactionists, such as, Cooley (1902/1964) and Mead (1925, 1934/1967), have made a significant contribution to our understanding of the self (Harter, 1998) and identity (Jenkins, 1996). Symbolic interactionism has been portrayed as “an essential focus for social theory by its positive contribution to an understanding of the ‘acting’ individual and the nature of social interaction” (Roberts, 2006, p. 4). Symbolic interactionists emphasise how social interactions profoundly shape notions of the self and identity (Harter, 1998; Jenkins, 1996). There are sub-theories within interactionism of which symbolic interactionism is just one. The work of George Herbert Mead is usually taken as the starting point of symbolic interactionism (Delamont, 1983; Roberts, 2006) and although Mead did not widely disseminate his ideas they have been interpreted by others.

Mead was a pragmatist, a social psychologist (Morris, 1967). Mead (1934/1967) suggested that a social psychological perspective “presupposes an approach to experience from the standpoint of the individual” (p. 1). It is a perspective that aims to determine “that which belongs to this experience because the individual himself belongs to a social structure, a social order” (Mead, 1934/1967, p. 1). Hence, in social psychology, the study of the experience and behaviour of an individual is dependent upon the social group to which he/she belongs, for example ability groups. Mead believed that the self develops from the process of social experience and that we can distinguish the self from the body, it is an object to itself. The individual experiences him/herself only indirectly, “from the particular standpoints of other individual members of the same social group” (Mead, 1934/1967, p. 138). Thus, the context is important in relation to the self. Individuals can have different relationships with various different others as each can possess many social selves/identities (James, 1890/1950; Jenkins, 1996) and different social reactions (Mead, 1934/1967). From this perspective it is the social process itself that is responsible for a particular self/identity.

Mead (1934/1967) postulated two types of human interaction within the social process, symbolic (interpretation) and non symbolic (reflexive action). Roberts (2006) explains that 'symbolic' refers to the idea that, when two people are interacting they are constantly interpreting their own and the other's actions, reacting and interpreting, suggesting that individuals have the ability to produce and respond to 'significant symbols' in communication. Mead states that "it is in the form of the generalized other that the social process influences the behaviour of the individuals involved in it" (Mead (1934/1967, p. 155). This action is 'reflexive' and is part of the experience of an individual, as he or she takes the attitude of the other (towards him or herself) and modifies the social process as he/she reflects (Mead, 1934/1967).

Herbert Blumer (1969) further described symbolic interactionism as perceiving a human society as living in a process of interaction and interpretation, supporting the central notion that all humans are possessed of a self, and that they are reflexive, or self interacting. That simply means that we think about what we are doing and that, what goes on inside our heads is a crucial element in how we act (Delamont, 1983).

For symbolic interactionists it is through interaction that meanings are negotiated in defining the social world. People act according to the meanings they have and as formed in the continuing interaction with others, which in turn informs new interaction; it is therefore the researcher's task to study such processes and meaning. (Roberts, 2006, p. 34)

One way to investigate this process is to ask pupils about their experiences within the PE context.

Symbolic interactionism offers a fairly complex model of self-conception which generates a straightforward prediction: self-concept is derived in part from seeing ourselves as others see us (looking-glass self, Cooley, 1902/1964). If this is the case there should be a strong correlation between how we rate ourselves and how others rate us (Hogg & Vaughan, 2005). Subsequently, it would follow that pupils in a high ability group in PE would consider themselves to be of higher ability than others in a lower ability group, because the teachers have respectively assigned levels of ability. However, a further consideration in the formation of the self is that people may not see themselves as others see them but instead as they *think* they see them (Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979). Consequently, how a PE teacher's interactions and expectations are perceived by a pupil is also an important consideration.

Symbolic interactionism posits that the multiple identities of an individual (the self) are manifested through behavioural, cognitive and emotional responses to patterned societal symbols and language (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934/1967; Stryker, 1980). The self is formed through societal interaction and through the responses of others in various situations. Ultimately, the self reflects the perceived meanings of society (Mead, 1934/1967). When the symbolic interactionist approach is applied to the classroom certain consequences follow: the classroom relationship of teacher and pupils is seen as a joint act, the interaction is understood as the daily 'give and take' between the teacher and pupils, and there is a process of ongoing negotiation by which every day realities are defined and redefined (Delamont, 1983).

Related research continues to stress that self-concept and identity are best understood within the role of frames of reference (Jenkins, 1996; Marsh & Hau, 2003) and the context. As such, they are both cognitive (Harter, 1998) and social constructions which link with the assumptions of symbolic interactionism and an emphasis on the appraisals of significant others. Therefore, in gaining a greater understanding of a pupil's self-perception in PE, understanding the field is vital.

Symbolic interactionism provides one perspective on the processes that contribute towards an individual's notion of their self. Within the context of PE there are two further social psychology perspectives that are worthy of consideration in terms of exploring the processes involved within ability-based practices and their potential impact upon the young learner. They are: self-fulfilling prophecy and the big-fish-little-pond effect (BFLPE).

3.2.4 Self-perceptions: expectations and labelling of ability

The practice of grouping pupils by ability results in an overt labelling process which distinguishes between those who have ability and those who do not. Since social value is placed on the notion of ability, a hierarchical distinction can arise from this procedure (Bailey & Morley, 2006). Subsequently, it has been suggested that teachers can have certain expectations of pupils in relation to their ability label and these remain evident in education (Boaler et al., 2000; Hallam & Ireson, 2005; Freeman, 2006), PE (Hay & Macdonald, 2010a) and sport (Wilson & Stephens, 2007). As this involves interactions this can impact upon self-perceptions as well as varying levels of engagement in PE.

Within education, Freeman (2006) investigated differences between students of identical measured ability and achievement where some were labelled as gifted and others were not. She found that the gifted were treated differently by their parents and teachers, both positively and negatively and, were aware of adult expectations of their 'giftedness'. Several of these rose to the challenge and to the high parental expectations, whereas others felt under too much pressure and that they could never live up to the expectations of being gifted. Moreover, Freeman (1998) states that labelling some as gifted placed pressure on them in terms of achieving, more so for those who had been 'incorrectly' labelled and could not fulfil their parent's expectations.

The level of expectation has important consequences for the young person as it can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy (Jussim, 1986; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Trouilloud, Sarrazin, Martinek, & Guillet, 2002), which has both positive and negative consequences for an individual's self-perceptions (Freeman 1998). According to Kolb and Jussim (1994), the term self-fulfilling prophecy was first coined by Robert Merton in 1948, to describe how "erroneous beliefs about people and situations sometimes create their own fulfilment" (p. 27). A landmark study on labelling and self-fulfilling prophecies in education was conducted by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) who tested the proposition that "within a given classroom those children from whom the teacher expected greater intellectual growth would show such greater growth" (p. 61). The findings indicated that experimentally created teacher expectations resulted in gains in performance on the part of those students who had been randomly assigned a high IQ label, regardless of their 'actual' ability. Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) refer to the fulfilment of teacher expectations as the 'Pygmalion effect' and state that the teacher needs to be cautious in their role where such prophecies may be fulfilled as "she is no casual passer-by" (p. 182), emphasising the influence that a teacher can have on pupil's self-perception. Additionally, they also caution against teachers setting inappropriately low standards for those that they consider 'less able'. Despite their original methods being questioned (Alpert, 1974) there have been attempts to replicate their findings in the contexts of education (Jussim & Eccles, 1992), sport (Solomon et al., 1996), and PE (Trouilloud et al., 2002) all of which have yielded mixed results.

In a review of self-fulfilling prophecy and teacher expectations, Brophy (1983) concludes that whilst teacher's expectations can affect student achievement the effects

are minimal because teacher expectations are generally accurate. Furthermore, explaining the self-fulfilling process is complex as it involves various interactions, behaviours and beliefs about learning and the instruction process, on the part of the teacher and the student (Brophy, 1983). In attempting to explain some of these processes various models have been presented. Jussim (1986) suggests that self-fulfilling prophecies incorporate a wide range of complex psychological and social processes and, as such, he discusses research and theory developed across many domains, including social, personality, developmental and educational. In endeavouring to explain the conditions under which self-fulfilling prophecies occur, Jussim proposes three possible stages: one, the initial expectation from the teacher regarding a student's future achievement, which can be revised or maintained; two, the relationship between teacher expectations and their actual treatment of the student, the interaction between them, which may be differential dependent upon their initial expectation and assumptions about ability; three, the students reaction to this differential teacher treatment/interaction.

Jussim (1991) further presents a reflection-construction model of relations between social perception and social reality, where he suggests one theme that underlies much social psychological research and theorising is the belief that "social perception is a major force in the creation (construction) of social reality" (p. 54). For the current study, this would suggest that where pupils are perceived as talented this can reinforce their belief that they are talented and the converse to be the case for those who are not perceived as talented. Trouilloud et al. (2002) investigated Jussim's (1991) propositions in PE and explored the extent to which teacher expectations in swimming, based on their own, naturally occurring assumptions and not experimentally configured, help create self-fulfilling prophecies, perceptual bias or accurately predict student achievement. In relation to teacher accuracy and expectation, Trouilloud et al. made an assumption that PE classes might be a context more favourable than other school subjects, due to the fact that PE teachers see their students in action more often and, as such, have numerous opportunities to adapt and refine their expectations. Additionally, they highlight the notion of a student's perceived ability, an important factor in mediating other desirable behaviours, and the possible role this plays in expectancy effects; a second purpose of their study was therefore to explore the extent to which

teacher expectations influenced student's perceived ability and thus their performance in PE.

Their results demonstrated that where teachers had high expectations student achievement was higher, a finding consistent with other studies in PE (Bibik, 1999; Rosenthal & Babad, 1985). However, Trouilloud et al. (2002) stress caution in interpreting this point by stating that it does not prove any causation and also does not differentiate the three sources of expectancy confirmation. Their findings also provide support for the hypothesis that "naturally formed teacher expectations are mainly accurate" (Trouilloud et al., 2002, p. 601) and they therefore predict student achievement due to this accuracy, and not as Jussim (1989) suggests because they are self-prophetic. They suggest that their study provides a more general picture of the complex relations between teacher expectations and student achievement.

3.2.5 Self-perceptions: ability group comparison

The significance of group membership and social comparison has been highlighted in relation to an individual's perception of their own level of ability (Chanal et al., 2005; MacIntyre & Ireson, 2002; Margas, Fontayne, & Brunel, 2006; Marsh & Craven, 2006; Marsh & Hau, 2003). In non-physical domains, there is some suggestion that there are negative consequences for placing pupils in selective ability groups. In terms of social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), it has been proposed that a student will have a lower academic self-concept in an academically selective school than in a non-selective school (Marsh & Craven, 2006; Marsh & Hau, 2003).

In physical education, Chanal et al. (2005) investigated the so-called BFLPE. They found that gymnastic self-concept was positively predicted by individual gymnastic skills, but negatively predicted by class average gymnastics skills, suggesting that it may not necessarily be favourable to separate a high ability group in PE. More specifically, they found that due to the heterogeneous nature of the high ability group, those who were not the very best in the group made their social comparisons against those at the top, possibly suffering lower levels of self-esteem than they would in a mixed ability group where their social comparisons are made against a wider range of abilities. In comparison, Margas et al. (2006) investigated social comparison within ability and heterogeneous groups in PE and measured physical self-evaluations. They concluded that the type of group did not have a significant impact upon self-evaluations

in PE for high level sports students, although group membership was an influential factor. Whilst research remains inconclusive, Boaler et al. (2000) highlighted that setting pupils into ability groups leads to assumptions that all pupils in a set are at the same level which, can lead to teachers having the same expectations for all pupils, overriding any consideration of the individual, and as Boaler et al. suggest, ability grouping is therefore not the simple solution for raising standards.

From a psychological perspective, it is important to note that within the context of PE, young children's interpretation of success and ability is considered developmental (Harter, 1978, 1981, 1999; Nicholls, 1978, 1989). Both Harter and Nicholls state that children are not capable of fully understanding the concept of ability until adolescence and also highlight that normative perceptions of ability play a significant role in fostering motivation. However, from a social psychological view point, where students do make normative comparisons in a PE group situation, the interactions and composition of that group can be seen as significant in terms of the possible impact upon a student's self-perception.

3.3 Theoretical perspectives on ability

The previous two sections have explored ability-based practices and their potential influence on the pupil. Furthermore, the importance of different theoretical perspectives has been emphasised. The latter consideration is extended in the next section with the intention of theoretically positioning ability for the current investigation.

3.3.1 Psychological perspectives on ability

Many notions of ability in education, PE, and sport, have developed within the psychological literature. The detection and measurement of 'intelligence' or 'general cognitive ability' has attracted widespread attention within educational psychology (Child, 2007). Defining ability remains complex and the word intelligence has developed some implicit meanings; it has "erroneously come to mean a possession, something one has in a fixed quantity, and probably located in one's head" (Child, 2007, p. 283). Traditional assumptions about ability/intelligence in education have been based on high Intelligence Quotient (IQ) scores or other achievement tests (Feldhusen, 2001; Freeman, 1998), and discussion of intelligence, ability, or talent has traditionally located constructs in the minds (Barab & Plucker, 2002). Intelligence has also been

correlated with developmental theories (Horn, 2004); for example, Jean Piaget's cognitive developmental theory (Wadsworth, 2004), and Gagné's (2003) Differential Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT). Nature and nurture debates on ability have also been a strong focus in psychology research on intelligence (Bouchard, 1997; Galton, 1869/2006) and physical ability (Bloom; 1985; Howe et al., 1998; Ericsson et al., 1993).

In an educational context, Freeman (1998) suggests that while there is considerable evidence for biological differences between the 'highly able' and other children there are also important environmental factors involved. Furthermore, in sport, there are some suggestions that certain genetic predispositions are necessary in the successful development of excellence (Ahmetov et al., 2008); although there is still no evidence of a single gene for 'giftedness' in general (Freeman, 1998) or for excellence in sport (Davis & Baker, 2007).

Early nature-nurture debates have contributed to the development of 'legitimate' knowledge and ability in the field of PE (Davids & Baker, 2007). These were driven by biological determinism emphasising biology as the major constraint to expertise and achievement. However, Simonton (1999) suggests that in recent years, psychologists have increasingly favoured the nurture account where, "investigations have unearthed a huge inventory of familial, educational and sociocultural environments that apparently contribute to development in a wide range of talent domains" (p. 435). Much of our understanding about environmental influences on performance comes from studies of sports expertise (Davids & Baker, 2007), for example Bloom (1985); Côté (1999); and Ericsson et al. (1993) who also present a case for the importance of deliberate practice in the development of the acquisition of expert performance.

Freeman (1998) suggests, that there has been a move towards a wider view of intelligence, where "it is an individual way of organising and using knowledge, which is dependent on the social and physical environment" (p. 5). The idea of fixed capacities is being replaced by measures which aim to make distinctions between various components of intelligence, and as such, can be presented as profiles of ability (Freeman, 1998); for example, Howard Gardner's (1993) theory of multiple intelligences, although this has received little empirical support (Freeman, 1998), and Gagné's (2003) model. However, beliefs that ability is fixed and measurable, similar to

IQ, still remain within education (Gillborn & Youdell, 2001) and despite changing perceptions of intelligence, the use of IQ tests has had a strong impact upon the identification and education of the more able (Von Károlyi, Ramos-Ford, & Gardner, 2004). However, where cognitive ability is linked with the capability to process information and impact upon the act of a physical skill, Ericsson et al. (1993) suggest that the relation of IQ to exceptional performance is weak.

Psychology provides one perspective on the concept of ability which has influenced ability-based pedagogies such as those of ability groupings (Gillard, 2009). However, Evans (2004) suggests that in some related research ability is viewed as one dimensional, presenting a reductionist perspective that defines life in measurable terms rather than inner experience that neglects to take into account the individual's standpoint (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). In particular, where ability is linked with incremental attributions such as motivation, effort, and luck, it is not viewed as dynamic or as a sociocultural construct and process (Evans, 2004). Furthermore, Barab and Plucker (2002) highlight that if we isolate the self from its world, the body from its mind, the context from its form, and the parts from its whole, the history of dualistic thinking reveals its inadequacies as a way of explaining thought and knowledge and, these perceptions “still dominate most lay and many theoretical conceptions of talent” (p. 167). Barab and Plucker (2002) stress that ability should therefore not be viewed as a construct possessed by an individual but as a set of relations, that are “actualized through dynamic transactions” (p. 178), assumptions that can be supported from a symbolic interactionist perspective. Moreover, Evans (2004) states that “education and educability are defined only in relation to the values, ideals and mores that prevail in schools and other social fields” (p. 99) and, as such, consideration should be given to the ways in which abilities are configured.

3.3.2 A social construction of ability in PE

The notion that ability in PE is socially constructed has been presented by various authors (Evans 2004; Evans & Penney 2008; Hay & Macdonald 2010a, 2010b; Wright & Burrows 2006). This perspective is in contrast to a reductionist view as it highlights an acknowledgement of the social context of the specific field, with an appreciation of how that field has developed. The case for a social construction of ability has gathered momentum and many authors consider ability as “a dynamic,

sociocultural construct and process” (Evans, 2004, p. 99). Subsequently, it can be argued that where PE has been influenced by certain forces, events and ideologies (Kirk, 1988, 1992; Macphail, 2004) that have advantaged particular social groups (Bailey et al. 2009a; Evans & Penney, 2008) this has a bearing on notions of ability.

In exploring this perspective, Evans and Davies (2004) suggest that, within the wider field of education, there is a relationship between individuals’ sense of value, status and embodied self and the ways that success and failure, and achievement and ability, are socially constructed by teachers and pupils in schools. Furthermore, and in addition to previously discussed ideological influences upon the education system (Hargreaves, 1994; Kirk, 1988, 1992), Evans and Davies state that in the 1950s schools were depicted as functioning to socialise children into the values and norms necessary for the effective execution of their roles in society, which were largely dictated by their class and gender, examples of which can be seen in chapter two.

Such processes highlight the influence of the psychological perspective on notions of ability where pupils were differentiated via their academic achievements and “deviance or failure to succeed either in gaining academic credentials or, in PE, good *performance* in sport, fitness and health, tended to be explicated in terms of individual lack of intelligence” (Evans & Davies, 2004, p. 5). According to Evans and Davies (2004), discrimination on the basis of presumed ‘intelligence’, “has become integral to the policies of successive Conservative and Labour governments in the UK since the 1980s” (p. 5). This adds a sense of irony in that rather than educational policy contributing towards the erosion of educational inequalities, there appears to be an increase in the inequality of attainment differences which are associated with social class and ethnicity (Evans & Davies, 2004). Wright and Burrows (2006) suggest that where intelligence is measured by school tests, “achievement is not transparent but constitutes unjust social relations which disadvantage those who do not have the cognitive abilities valued in academic context” (p. 277). It is within this context that ability has now come to be understood by policy-makers, politicians and teachers, as a substitute for common sense ideas of intelligence (Evans & Davies, 2004). Additionally, Gillborn and Youdell (2001) state that a discourse of ability, “that underlies the multiple and complex selections that separate out the able and the less able within schools” (p. 97) provides the opportunity for teachers “to identify the winners

and losers at the earliest possible stages, allowing continual checks to ensure that those predicted for success ‘fulfil’ their potential” (p. 97). From a sociological perspective, this mirrors many ideas about reproduction in education where class and the distribution of economic capital can be perpetuated by practices within a given field (Bourdieu, & Passeron, 1977; Postone, Lipuma, & Calhoun, 1993).

In taking this last point further, Evans (2004) emphasises that the class and/or cultural background of each child will affect how some may be more or less able to achieve legitimate notions of ability, not only due to their predisposed dispositions (*habitus*) but also according to the amount of capital they hold in relation to the particular field. The notion that some students are privileged over others in a PE context has been explored from a socially constructed perspective (Hay & Macdonald, 2010a, 2010b; Hay & Lisahunter, 2006). For example, Hay and Macdonald (2010a) acknowledge the importance of students who already possess capital in PE, which they suggest is essential to the process of ability construction, as the recognition and reproduction process tends to rely upon “what resources a student already possessed rather than what the field and agents operating in it could provide” (p. 12). They highlight an association between the possession of physical and cultural capital where they emphasise class discrepancies in relation to pupil aspirations in PE and draw on comparisons between a low socioeconomic government school (Green Pines) and an elite private school (St Johns) to reveal low and high pupil aspirations respectively. Hay and Macdonald (2010a) suggest that the pupil’s belief in their capacity to achieve was associated with the possession of cultural capital and “a belief in capacity associated with the social positions parents/family members” (p. 15). They further suggest that the risk in investment appeared to be greater for the pupils at Green Pines where there was a lack of such resources as compared to the pupils from St Johns, who had a much greater belief in the realistic translation of their ability into capital, for example achievement grades.

Wright and Burrows (2006) provide further insight through a comparison of physical and cultural capital in elite and government schools, where, in elite schools the importance of ability “as embodied capital was explicitly recognised and proclaimed as part of the school’s purpose” (p. 284); and conversely, in the working class schools PE

was talked about as providing students with the capacity to function as good citizens and workers. This reflects historical class divides in PE highlighted in chapter two.

In addition, the notion of gender and physical capital in PE has been investigated (Hills, 2007). She presents data collected from a year-long ethnographic study involving 12 and 13 year old girls from an inner city mixed comprehensive school. Her findings provide varied examples of how girls experience PE, particularly in relation to difference and competence. Hills (2007) suggested that the construction of physical capital for the girls in the study “related closely to the capacity for successful displays of competence” (p. 349).

The findings of Hills (2007) hold important considerations for ability-based practice as competence has been identified by many as a differentiating factor for girls’ experiences in PE. For example when girls feel less competent they have a more negative experience in PE (Cockburn & Clarke, 2002; Williams & Bedward, 2001) which can impact upon levels of enjoyment and motivation (Cockburn, 2001). Furthermore, Flintoff and Scraton (2001) highlight that we know little about girls’ and young women’s lived experiences of PE or how they negotiate an identity in the field of PE; their study was intended to explore girls’ experiences of school PE, as well as their perceptions on physical activity. Flintoff and Scraton reported that many of the respondents found it difficult to articulate a clear rationale and purpose for doing PE and were quite critical of the type of PE offered to them. The curriculum, in all cases, was heavily biased towards team games, which has been highlighted as being traditionally masculine (Penney & Evans, 1997). Where PE is a positive experience for girls it is fun, contributes to health and well-being, and gets them out of the classroom (Couturier, Chepko, & Coughlin, 2005). Conversely, the competitive nature of the PE class (Carlson, 1995) and a curriculum that reflects very male ‘traditional’ activities (Olafson, 2002) have been highlighted as contributing to negative experiences in PE for girls as well as those who are ‘less able’.

Wright and Burrows (2006) extend gendered debates on the configuration of ability which are based upon biologically determined differences and social expectations, and consequently different embodied capacities. Additionally, Hay and Macdonald (2010b) investigated how the discursive conditions in the field of PE (structures) contribute to the construction of gendered abilities in two Australian

schools. They suggest that the practices of PE have been resistant in valuing abilities that lie outside the ‘masculinist norm’ and gendered notions of ability remain prevalent. Hay and Macdonald emphasise that these notions are reinforced through the teacher’s perceptions and interactions where girls are marginalised; girls in their study were only recognised as able if their “conduct aligned with the hegemonic order of the field . . . or if their possession of physical and cultural resources was valued in a way that transcended the gender boundaries” (Hay & Macdonald, 2010b, p. 282).

The idea that teacher treatment and expectations of pupils in PE can differ in relation to a pupil’s gender has been investigated (Berg & Lahelma, 2010; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Nicaise, Cogérino, Bois, & Amorose, 2006; Wright, 1996). Differential teacher treatment of boys and girls has been found in PE where boys receive more favourable interactions in relation to the amount of feedback, praise and acceptance that they receive (Nicaise et al., 2006). Furthermore, Flintoff and Scraton, reported that girls in their study were aware that teachers had low expectations of them in relation to the development of their skills; this is in contrast to the high expectations of boys in PE where they are assumed to have the physical strength and characteristics (physical capital) to meet ‘legitimate’ values within a PE setting (Berg & Lahelma, 2010). Where boys do not demonstrate hegemonic masculine qualities in PE places them in a marginalised position (Brown & Rich, 2002) and can have negative consequences for enjoyment and participation in PE as well as adult life (Wellard, 2006).

In addition to gendered assumptions, there are further examples of differential pupil treatment and expectations in PE. There is the suggestion that high ability students are privileged in terms of achievement possibilities, teacher perception and treatment, and low ability students are marginalised (Hay & Macdonald, 2010a). One explanation is that the PE teacher relationship has been highlighted as more positive where teachers recognise and value ‘legitimate’ characteristics that they associate with those of ‘high ability’ in PE, where gendered notions of ability are just one contributory aspect; conversely PE teachers have lower expectations of those who are considered as having ‘low ability’ (Hay & Macdonald, 2010a). Interestingly, similar processes are evident within the sporting domain where coaches/teachers can have low expectations of young performers which is consequently interpreted as negative treatment/interaction by the

performer. This can result in negative experiences that lead to feelings of inferiority and possible attrition (Wilson & Stephens, 2007).

The significance of the teacher in contributing towards a social construction of ability has been highlighted. Hay and Lisahunter (2006) emphasise how powerful the PE teacher (Michael) is in defining the field of PE in his school where the “significance of the teacher’s habitus through his expectations and perceptions cannot be understated” (p.306). Hay and Lisahunter further demonstrate how the practices of the PE teacher consolidate the students’ perceptions of who is able where he treats them differently based upon their ability, privileging the most able in his perceptions and interaction. Reinforcement of dominant notions of ability can also be seen in Michael’s gendered and racial view of ability, where he perceives the male Samoan students as being “more physically able and the females more academic” (Hay & Lisahunter, 2006, p. 307). The students in his class draw on these gendered discourses when describing ability, acting to further strengthen ‘legitimate’ notions of ability. In support of this suggestion, Hay and Macdonald (2010b) also indicated that it was the teacher’s values, beliefs and expectations of students that shaped the practices of the field, rather than the ‘coded’ curriculum (Evans & Penney, 2008) supporting the suggestion that PE teachers are key agents in reinforcing legitimate notions of ability.

Whilst much of the research described in this section has explored the processes and agents that contribute to the social construction of ability there is limited consideration on the impact of associated processes upon the pupils. Hay and Lisahunter (2006) provide some insight into the positioning of students in PE, in relation to their valued ability. They present data from Australian schools in the form of vignettes, one of which is from the perspective of a student (Emily) and her experiences in upper primary and lower secondary PE. In describing Emily, Hay and Lisahunter acknowledged her multi-dimensional habitus and subsequently identify a variety of ‘selves’ for her, some of which were impacted by particular contexts that privileged certain discourses over others. This is in contrast to some of the alternative ways to perceive and measure aspects of the ‘self’ as described in the previous section. Emily’s position was explained within the social field of PE which was dependent upon the compatible interaction of her selves (habitus) with the discourses with which she wanted to, or could engage (Hay & Lisahunter, 2006). For example, despite not being in

the more prestigious ‘athletic excellence class’, Emily felt strongly about PE in year 7 but this became more negative as she progressed. Emily had a lack of desire to connect with the discourse of a ‘good student’ which was compounded further by her increase in size and constant comparisons with others, consequently her space to accrue physical capital lessened and the value of PE for her decreased; she became marginalised by her own actions and the reactive distancing of her by teachers. Emily came to realise that PE was not allowing her selves to be active in field-legitimate ways, and as a result, because she was unable to change them she eventually disengaged from the subject (Hay & Lisahunter, 2006). Understanding ability-based experiences, interactions and the potential implications for individuals in PE from a social constructivist perspective would therefore support stakeholders in enhancing PE for *all* pupils.

In summary, what passes for ability in education, PE and sport can therefore be seen as “social constructs laden with values” (Evans & Davies, 2004, p. 7) that are awarded symbolic capital. Hay and Macdonald (2010a) argue that ability in PE is therefore about what resources an individual possesses and employs in and through their habitus, and that the “interaction of field, habitus and capital produce and reproduce notions of ability as well as the practices both informing that construction, and constrained by the construction” (p. 16). This is in contrast to psychological perspectives of ability.

Furthermore, how ability is conceptualised has important consequences for what happens in PE and pupils’ experiences, particularly in relation to their gender and social class (Wright & Burrows, 2006). The field of PE continues to privilege “skills and competencies associated with organised sport” . . . and those qualities are often associated with “hegemonic forms of white masculinity” which is of concern (Wright & Burrows, 2006, p. 288). Hay and Lisahunter (2006) conclude that “habitus and field are equally and conjointly significant in the mis/recognition of students possessing ability in PE” (p. 308). They suggest that this is a shift away from the psychologically based perspectives which “by default ignore the mechanisms by which value and recognition of and for ability are established and conferred” (p. 308). Hay and Lisahunter stress that educational research must offer explanations (Nash, 1999) and we should seek to understand how ability is constructed through the legitimation of particular forms of

capital (Evans, 2004); this is a key focus of the current study and the related findings are explored within chapter five.

The emphasis on physical performance is a key aspect of physical capital and has been prevalent within PE whereby the form this has taken has been shaped by the cultural and social contexts in which PE has been developed alongside its existence within the broader context of education (Wright & Burrows, 2006). Consequently, how the PE teacher employs specific pedagogic strategies is important as it reveals their own values, beliefs and expectations of both PE and students in PE, but also helps to form a context which confers and recognises ability within those fields (Hay & Macdonald, 2010a; Hay & Lisahunter, 2006). Understanding teachers' ability-based practices, definitions of ability in PE, and the mechanisms that serve to reinforce these notions will serve to enhance stakeholders' understanding of the reproductive processes that exist but also provide insight into how these may be challenged.

Unfortunately, the conceptualisation of ability in PE has received little critical attention in professional discourses and has perhaps become taken for granted or assumed (Evans, 2004) particularly where PE has relied on sport models or the psychological perspective on ability. Identifying PE as a field made up of a structured system of social relations between stakeholders (Hunter, 2004) underlines the importance of social context, as in Bourdieu's framework, for analysing discourse and practices, in particular, in exploring how individuals experience ability. In supporting the case for a social construction of ability and providing a framework from which to explore how ability is constructed and also experienced within PE, this section concludes with an overview of Bourdieu's ideas and concepts that underpin much of the research described in this section.

3.4 Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework

Within sociological theory, there are a number of interweaving strands or themes, one division of which relates to considerations of elements which make up the social world consisting of either "the creations, interpretations, meanings and ideas of thinking and acting subjects (subjective)"; or the view that "human condition is characterized by an immutable and common set of constraints in which there is no opportunity for choice or intention (objective) (Waters, 1994, p. 5). Bourdieu was particularly well known for contesting the various dualisms that have characterised

social theory and one such challenge was the nature of subjectivism and objectivism (Thorpe, 2009). Bourdieu (1990) defines objectivism as constituting the social world:

As a spectacle offered to an observer who takes up a point of view on the action and who, putting into the object the principles of his relation to the object, proceeds as if it were intended solely for knowledge and as if all the interactions within it were purely symbolic exchanges. (p. 52)

Subsequently, Bourdieu argues that social life must be understood in terms that do “justice both to objective material, social, and cultural structures and to the constituting practices and experiences of individuals and groups” (Postone et al., 1993, p. 3). This is in contrast to a psychological perspective.

Bourdieu’s early influences were from a structuralist tradition (Postone et al., 1993). He considered some related elements as important in his thinking but suggested that it fails to effectively explore the objective social conditions that produce subjective orientations to actions, which he considers is an inadequate position from which to understand social life (Postone et al., 1993). As such, Bourdieu broke away from structuralism, signifying a theoretical shift from cultural rules that, supposedly governed behaviour, to an emphasis on the pursuit by actors of strategies (Jenkins, 2003). Bourdieu has therefore attempted theoretically to overcome the dualisms that have characterised social theory and, instead, to formulate a reflexive approach to social life. Quite simply, he provides a framework that enables consideration of the context, the history of that context and the contributing structures, processes and agents. In that respect, his framework has proved useful in exploring the social construction and experiences of ability in PE (Evans, 2004; Evans & Penney, 2008; Hay & Lisahunter, 2006; Hay & Macdonald, 2010a, 2010b; Wright & Burrows, 2006) through acknowledgement and consideration of the culture where pupils’ and teachers’ notions of ability are configured, reconfigured, and experienced.

There are three fundamental concepts that he presents as part of his theory of practice, they are: habitus, capital, and field (Hurtado, 2008; Postone et al., 1993).

3.4.1 Habitus

Habitus is described by Bourdieu (1990) as consisting of “durable, transposable dispositions” (p. 53) which are socially constituted through the conditionings associated with a particular state of existence. Bourdieu (1990) suggests that habitus is dynamic and “structures new experiences in accordance with the structures produced by past

experiences, which are modified by the new experiences within the limits defined by their power of selection” (p. 60). It is embodied in individuals while at the same time being a collective property of groups of individuals who have experienced similar socialisation (Hurtado, 2008; Koca, Atencio, & Demirhan, 2009). Socialisation refers to “the processes by which we learn to become members of the social groups, communities, societies to which we belong” (Evans & Davies, 2006, p.116). Reay (2004a) highlights the process whereby the structural code within a given culture becomes inscribed as the habitus which then generates the production of social practice. For Bourdieu, habitus consists of the subjective ways in which different classes understand and perceive the world, and the tastes and preferences that they have and how they value things such as education and sporting pursuits. A person’s habitus is therefore a product of their history which ensures the active presence of past experiences of the individual, in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action (Nash, 1999). Habitus thus unites the past and the present.

Habitus is also a concept that facilitates the joining together of structure and action, society and the individual. More particularly, it enables the analysis of agents’ behaviour by presenting them as “objectively coordinated and regular without being the product of rules . . . or conscious rationality” (Postone et al., 1993, p. 4). In other words, it is intended to capture the practical mastery that people have of their social situation, while grounding that mastery in a social context. Subsequently, the importance of understanding what has shaped PE and the impact upon perceptions and experiences of ability within PE is significant in comprehending a person’s habitus but also in exploring how habitus contributes to experience.

Habitus is described as a conceptual tool that is central to Bourdieu’s methodological framework and one which he uses in an attempt to transcend the dualisms of agency and structure, objectivity and subjectivity and, the micro and macro (Reay, 2004a). It is through the “workings of habitus that practice (agency) is linked with capital and field (structure)” (Reay, 2004a, p. 432). Each habitus develops out of an individual’s position within the structure and where this is based on an individual’s economic position (Bourdieu, 1990) it is not plausible to separate habitus from capital. Habitus therefore functions as a bridge between the objective and the subjective, the social context and the individual experience and action (Koca et al., 2009).

Dispositions and schemes can be acquired in social contexts such as those structured by gender, ethnicity and social class (Evans, 2004). The concept of habitus can therefore also provide a means through which it is possible to theorise and understand the embodiment of certain aspects of the social context which will predispose people to act, think and behave in certain ways (Zevenbergen, Edwards, & Skinner, 2002), in this context understanding the behaviour of teachers and pupils and their perceptions and experiences of ability.

3.4.2 Field

The concept of field adds to the “possibilities of Bourdieu’s conceptual framework and gives habitus a dynamic quality” (Reay, 2004a, p. 435). Field has been described as a social system (Zevenbergen et al., 2002), a network of social relations and structured systems of social positions (Bourdieu, 1990). Fields can be occupied by either individuals or institutions engaged in the same activity and are structured internally in terms of power relations (Thorpe, 2009). The field is a mediating context wherein external factors are brought to bear upon individual practice and institutions (Jenkins, 2003). Evans (2004) suggests that the concept of field “is Bourdieu’s way of conceptualising horizontal differentiated social spaces, as they are intersected by vertical differentiation” (p. 100). Evans provides examples of vertical differentiated fields as class, race, religion, gender, disability and horizontal differentiated fields as media, family, schools and the work place, and suggests that these social spaces are never constituted independently of each other. In the context of Evans’ and the current study, it is suggested that we therefore cannot interpret ability without reference to a “person’s gender, age, ethnicity, ‘disability’ and the values prevailing within and across particular fields” (Evans, 2004, p. 101) and hence the significance of understanding how the field of PE has been formed.

Bourdieu (1990) discusses his notion of ‘feel for the game’. He details this as an example of a practical sense in a sport setting and suggests that it gives an idea of the encounter between the habitus and a field, “between incorporated history and an objectified history, which makes possible the near-perfect anticipation of the future inscribed in all the concrete configurations on the pitch or board” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 66). He also suggests that a ‘feel for the game’ is produced by experience of that game, and therefore of the objective structures within which it is played out; the ‘feel for the

game' is what gives the game a "subjective sense – a meaning . . . but also a direction, an orientation, an impending outcome, for those who take part and therefore knowledge of what is at stake" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 66). It also gives the game an objective sense, because the sense of the probable outcome is supported by practical mastery.

Bourdieu (1990) contrasts the above to social fields which he describes as "products of a long, slow process of autonomization" (p. 67) where an individual is born into the 'game', and is where various fields provide themselves with agents equipped through the habitus needed to make them work. Corresponding to this notion, Bourdieu describes 'doxa' as the relationship of "immediate adherence that is established in practice between a habitus and the field to which it is attuned, the pre-verbal taking-for-granted of the world that flows from practical sense" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 68); in other words, the 'legitimate' presuppositions in a given context. Doxa can therefore be perceived as a deeper aspect of the overall habitus (Hurtado, 2008). In this sense, it can be suggested that the habitus of the PE teacher and their notions of ability will be influenced by their experiences and their 'feel for the game'.

3.4.3 Capital

It has been suggested that habitus, competencies or dispositions, carry a cultural worth that have an exchange value in certain contexts or fields (Evans, 2004) and, consequently can be seen as holding some sort of capital (Shilling, 1993a). Bourdieu (1986) identified different types of capital, that can be held by social agents and much of his work focuses on the interplay among them. They are: economic capital; cultural capital; and social capital. In line with his attempts at overcoming dualistic notions within sociological theory, Bourdieu (1986) elaborates on his notion of capital and states that it is both "a force inscribed in objective or subjective structures, but it is also . . . the principle underlying the immanent regularities of the social world" (p. 241). Consequently, capital serves as a particularly useful concept to help explore how individuals of varying levels of ability experience PE in terms of the underlying structures and mechanisms that either produce or reproduce associated practices. Furthermore, the possession of certain types of capital allows for analysis of what abilities are recognised and what type of experiences can result.

Bourdieu (1986) makes various associations across types of capital but also identifies some differences. He suggests that economic capital is quite overt, convertible

into such things as money and property, and is commonly the root of all other types of capital. This concept is central to his arguments about reproduction where he has regularly claimed that class relations are fundamentally founded on the distribution of economic capital (Postone et al., 1993).

In terms of cultural capital, Bourdieu (1986) suggests that it can exist in three forms: in an objectified state, such as the possession of cultural goods; an institutionalised state; and an embodied state. Within an objectified state, Bourdieu presents a hierarchy of knowledge and understanding and an appreciation of culture which he defines as 'legitimate' which he associates with the dominant class. Bourdieu suggests that this hierarchy is socially constructed and is an example of how dominant ideologies are reinforced.

In its institutionalised state, capital refers to academic qualifications that are recognised within the field where there is an acknowledgement of 'cultural competence'. This form of cultural capital allows for comparison of individuals, in relation to ability for example. It also allows for conversion between cultural and economic capital and assigns 'value' to the holder within any given field (Bourdieu, 1986). The notion of institutionalised capital can also contribute to debates on the value and status of PE qualifications within education and wider society.

In its embodied state, cultural capital can be linked to the body and is also described as physical capital. Bourdieu (1986) argued that embodied capital forms an integral aspect of the individual's habitus and cannot be accumulated beyond the capacities of the individual. However, despite Bourdieu presenting the body as a bearer of symbolic value (physical capital) that considers the body as both a biological and social phenomenon, Shilling (1993a) argues that Bourdieu is not concerned with examining any biological processes to human embodiment. Consequently a critique of Bourdieu here is that his work contains an under developed view of the biological dimensions of human embodiment (Shilling, 1993a).

Shilling (1993b) argues that corporeal capital is too important to be seen as merely a subdivision of cultural capital and in support of his assertion the notion of physical capital has been specifically discussed by many in the context of PE (Hay & Lisahunter, 2006; Hay & Macdonald, 2010a; Hunter, 2004; Shilling, 1991, 1993a; 2004a; 2004b; Wright & Burrows, 2006). Shilling (1993a) suggests that physical capital

encompasses the symbolic value of the body's external appearance, its shape and physique which are external manifestations of the particular 'habitus'. More specifically, Evans (2004) suggests that an individual's habitus can be perceived as abilities defined by the values and attitudes prevalent within a given field. For example, in health-related education the emphasis is placed upon body improvement, which "may configure ability as a willingness to continually work on and engineer the body . . . towards slender ideals" (Evans, 2004, p. 101). Consequently, physical capital can be equated with an indicator of health and work done on the body, leading to developments in strength, fitness or stamina which, can be related to the capacity for the body to perform physical work (Wright & Burrows, 2006); qualities valued in 'legitimate' and physical notions of ability in PE. In addition, Shilling (1993a) emphasises that the production of physical capital refers to the physical development of the body in ways which are recognised as having value in the social field, for example where lifestyle associated with social class can become inscribed in the body (Shilling, 1993b); whereas the conversion of physical capital refers to the "translation of bodily participation in work, leisure and other fields into different forms of capital" (Shilling, 1993a, p. 111).

Shilling (1993b) suggests that sociologists have neglected to examine the physical education of bodies which compounds, in his opinion, the mistaken view that schooling is mainly concerned with educating the mind. Shilling's (1993b) point here helps to reinforce two important ideologies already highlighted within this review: discourse on the nature and purpose of PE (Alderson & Crutchley, 1990; Bailey et al., 2009a; Capel, 2000a, 2000b; Kay, 2007; Kirk, 1988, 2006, Murdoch, 1990; Talbot, 1999) and traditional assumptions about ability (Barab & Plucker, 2002; Feldhusen, 2001; Freeman, 1998). Shilling (1993b) argues that the embodied nature of schooling and the corporeal implications of educational knowledge are overlooked. Subsequently, in the context of PE, knowledge is divorced from action which, for the sociologist, would result in less focus on the 'real' subject matter (Shilling, 1993b). Indeed, the body has been argued to have great social significance in PE where the shaping and viewing of the body as a form of physical capital takes place (Shilling, 1993b). In particular, the body and the bodily/physical capital invested in it play key roles in the

production of social inequalities and school PE and sport contribute to this process (Shilling, 1991; 1993b; 2004b). This is of significant interest for the current study.

Moreover, Shilling (1993b) acknowledges the historical and ideological changes in the field of PE and the shifting focus on corporeal education which has at times been differentiated by class and gender, as contributing to the reproduction of certain inequalities. He subsequently argues that the ability to convert physical capital into other forms of capital is relative and he suggests that the most important factor affecting the relative values of physical capital at any one time is the “ability of the dominant class to define their orientations towards the body and lifestyle as superior, worthy of reward, and as, metaphorically and literally, the embodiment of class” (Shilling, 1993b, p. 70). In contemporary society it may therefore be more difficult for any one group to impose value on physical capital which may contribute to disagreement over what PE teachers teach and how they teach it and, more importantly, definitions of ability may come under even more scrutiny and debate (Shilling, 1993b); a further consideration for the current study.

In contrast to cultural capital, social capital is the “aggregate of the actual or potential resources” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248) linked to the membership of a certain group. This may be socially instituted or gained by having a common name or association to a group, for example ability groups in PE or sports teams. The amount of social capital possessed by an individual is reflected in the size of their network, the connections and the nature of their capital, collectively and individually. Although Bourdieu stresses that the social capital of the individual is never completely independent to that of the group as the resources and networks collectively are what add to the amount of social capital.

According to Reay (2004b) what Bourdieu’s different capitals all share is that “each requires, and is the product of, an investment of an appropriate kind and each can secure a return on that investment (p. 74). Reay emphasises that Bourdieu’s concern with capital is with its continual transmission and accumulation in ways that perpetuate social inequalities; because through the movement of capital some individuals and groups are included and others are excluded (Zembylas, 2007). This is due to the suggestion that all types of capital can take the form of symbolic capital which

Bourdieu describes as capital that is recognised and acknowledged within the related field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Symbolic capital is the theoretical proposition which underpins much of the work of Bourdieu and Passeron (1977). They emphasise that dominant ideas are consistently the ideas of the ruling class and, the “ruling ideas themselves reinforce the rule of that class, and that they succeed in doing so by establishing themselves as ‘legitimate’ . . . by concealing their basis in the (economic and political) power of the ruling class” (Bottomore, 1976, p. vi). Thus, the process of cultural reproduction, the major role of the education system, contributes to the maintenance of power by the dominant groups in that society (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). In the case of an individual within a certain field, agents who accumulate symbolic capital gain power and authority as they take onboard the culture (habitus) and as they acquire additional capital they become more powerful, gain more control and, hence, legitimacy (Zevenbergen et al., 2002), acting to reinforce and reproduce the structures of the habitus that generated them in the first place (Nash, 1999). As such, the power of an agent to accumulate various forms of capital is proportionate to their position in the social space (Thorpe, 2009). Both these examples of symbolic capital can be aligned to the field of PE, where PE has been defined in relation to various dominant groups and ideologies and, where ‘legitimate’ knowledge in PE, and therefore ‘legitimate’ ability, has been constructed and reinforced through policy as well as an agent’s practices (Brown, 2005; Kirk, 1988, 1992, 2002). This is an important consideration when attempting to understand how individuals experience PE with respect to their perceived ‘legitimate’ abilities and is a concept that will be explored through the analysis of the pupil experience.

Bourdieu’s model of capital accumulation serves as a sound framework from which to explore variances in experiences and the transmission and accumulation of life resources. However, it has recently been critiqued as failing to account for the accumulation of positive psychological states that can result from experiences that involve physical exercise (Stewart, Smith, & Moroney, 2012) and, as such, the notion of psychological capital has been introduced (Henry, 2004). Cognitive dispositions such as confidence and self-efficacy; hope, optimism and positive attributions; and resilience have been associated with psychological capital (Luthans, Avey, Avolio, Norman, &

Combs, 2006; Luthans, Vogelgesang, & Lester, 2006; Luthans, Luthans, & Luthans, 2004).

Henry (2004) frames such dispositions under the term cognitive capital which he suggests is the idea that one's mix of psychological dispositions operates as a system that can be thought of as an important type of resource that is, in his case, "gradationally distributed with social class level" (p. 375). In line with Bourdieu, Henry acknowledges that class can be summarised as a stratification system that is associated with a systematically unequal allocation of economic resources and constraints. However, Henry (2004) suggests that examination of class resources purely from an economic perspective misses the point that "class is a product of more complex social-psychological relations" (p. 378). A key issue for Henry is that no one particular resource type is, in itself equivalent to social class but rather that they operate as a system. This follows Bourdieu's idea of a "multidimensional field in which a person's coordinates are determined by the amount and composition of each type of resource (capital) that they possess" (Henry, 2004, p. 378). Henry therefore makes a case for psychological dispositions holding a type of capital for the individual where they constitute a critical resource for quality of life and the ability to cope and adapt. In other words, cognitive capital provides a capability to succeed and cope as well as contributing to an individual's overall identity, their social self and effectiveness (Demerath, Lynch, & Davidson, 2008). Exploring the amount and type of capital possessed by pupils in PE and the associated consequences may therefore be significant in terms of widening understanding of how PE is experienced and also managed.

3.4.4 Summary

In summary, it is the interaction of habitus, field and capital that generates the logic of practice for Bourdieu (1990). The position of a particular agent is the result of interplay between the individual's habitus, their place within a field and the distribution of the appropriate form of capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Postone et al., 1993). In other words, "the individual embodies the field and/or the field becomes constructed by the agreed-upon discourse of a group of individuals" (Hay & Lisahunter, 2006, p. 308). The habitus becomes active in relation to a field where the field can influence differential practices and experiences (Reay, 2004a) but also "the same habitus can

produce very different practices depending upon what is going on in the field” (Jenkins, 2003, p. 82).

In the context of PE, Hay and Lisahunter (2006) highlight that where the field of PE reinforces dominant perceptions of ability, it is only those students whose habitus matches the PE teacher’s notion of what is valued as ability who are rewarded and privileged, which acts to further consolidate their identification as able. This practice is engaged only with those who are “already adherents to the rules of the field” and “they continue to accrue physical and cultural capital that is rewarded symbolically” (Hay & Lisahunter, 2006, p. 307), and gain high attainment. Students who possess physical capital are therefore well positioned within the field of PE and become reproducers “who legitimize the nature of such ability in order to maintain their value at the expense of other possibilities” (Hay & Lisahunter, 2006, p. 309). This process can also result in the marginalisation of certain students, a process described in Bourdieu’s terms as a form of ‘symbolic violence’, whereby less able students implicitly accept the limits assigned to them (Edwards & Irvine, 2003).

3.4.5 Criticisms of Bourdieu

Whilst many have utilised Bourdieu’s concepts to underpin and explain social life he is not without criticism. For example, Jenkins (2003) suggests Bourdieu’s work is contradictory as it seeks to transcend the objectivist-subjectivist divide while remaining firmly rooted in objectivism where Bourdieu “vociferously rejects determinism while persistently producing deterministic models of social process” (p. 175). Furthermore, Shilling (2004b) suggests that Bourdieu’s analysis of social action is hampered by an “overly reproductionist analysis of human behaviour” (p. 474) whereby Bourdieu is unable to satisfactorily account for individuals who break free from the constraints of their background and training, suggesting a lack of acknowledgement of the degree to which people can exercise agency (Hills, 2006; Shilling, 1993a).

However, Reay (2004a) suggests that Bourdieu would argue that habitus can potentially generate a wide repertoire of possible actions. It has also been proposed that habitus is a “methodological construct that allows the researcher to understand the dynamic structure between social reality and the individual” (Zevenbergen, 2005, p. 609). Furthermore, Hunter (2004) highlights that Bourdieu’s concept of habitus is useful as it places an emphasis upon the “intersection of symbolic and material dimensions of

power on, through and by the body” (p. 177) and also highlights the relational importance between the concepts of habitus, field, structure and agency. This is particularly useful where the field of PE is described as consisting of a structured system of social relations between all those involved in PE such as, PE curriculum developers, teacher educators, teachers, students, health and sport professionals (Hunter, 2004).

In a critique of educational research, Tooley and Darby (1998) suggest that Bourdieu’s concept of habitus appears to have little to offer educational research as it removes the onus on the researcher to look for anything that could be of use for classroom practice. However, Nash (1999) suggests that Tooley and Darby’s argument lacks any real substance and, even though understanding Bourdieu’s concepts may take a long time, they at least force one to think, which is useful for those who are attempting to provide scientific accounts of social processes. Bourdieu’s ideas are also stimulating and are ‘good to think with’, particularly in emphasising the use of reflection upon the engagement processes involved in social life (Jenkins, 2003; Nash, 1999; Redelius, Fagrell, & Larsson, 2009). More widely, Bourdieu’s work is also considered to have made important contributions to the epistemology of sociology and anthropology (Jenkins, 2003).

Despite various critiques, Pierre Bourdieu’s (1990) concepts of ‘habitus’, ‘field’, and ‘capital’ provide a conceivable framework from which to explore how ability is constructed and experienced within PE, and how individuals within PE are defined through particular social processes. More importantly, what Bourdieu’s ideas help to reinforce is that to understand social life we need to understand what historical and “social conditions made possible the constitution of the system of institutions and agents” (Bourdieu, 1978, p. 820) and overcome dualistic perspectives such as those presented in Cartesian notions of mind and body and the reductionist view of ability. His concepts of field, habitus and capital facilitate a sociological perspective of ability through the proposed interactions and relationships between them. Thus, they are effective in supporting the case for a social construction of ability in PE.

From a social constructionist perspective, Zevenbergen (2005) helps to illustrate the importance for stakeholders to understand how ability-based practices and related expectations can impact upon the learner. Through investigating the field of

mathematics Zevenbergen (2005) identified ‘legitimate’ practices that position students within such practices and therefore constitute a habitus “predisposing them to think and act in certain ways” (p. 611). She argues that when the practice of ability groupings in mathematics is enacted it creates a learning environment that becomes internalised as a ‘mathematical habitus’ that either includes or excludes students from the subject. She found that ability groups perceived their learning environment in different ways: the high ability pupils claimed that they had the best teachers and were very positive about their learning environments which they perceived to be ‘better’ than working with pupils of lower ability; whereas the low ability pupils believed that teachers had limited expectations of them, their learning environment was ‘poor’ and limited learning took place, and pupils misbehaved.

Zevenbergen (2005) concludes that it is the structuring practices of the field, the ability groupings and the associated different experiences, as opposed to innate ability, that contribute to a different ‘mathematics habitus’. It is these differential practices that become “internalized as part of the student’s habitus which, in turn, frames how they see themselves in relation to the discipline” (Zevenbergen, 2005, p. 613). In that respect, their experiences contribute to their self-perceptions. Moreover, she highlights ability grouping as the most critical variable in the self-reports of the students. This may also be the case for pupils in physical education where self-perceptions of ability potentially lead to a cycle of behaviour that result in a self-fulfilling type prophecy, strengthening perceptions of inefficacy leading, in turn to even a stronger fixed conception of ability and self-perception on the part of the student (Ommundsen, 2001); this proposition requires further investigation (Trouilloud et al., 2002) and is one area of focus for this thesis.

3.5 Summary

This chapter has highlighted that defining ability in any context is problematic (Child, 2007; Freeman, 1998). Traditional notions of intelligence, associated with cognitive abilities, and physical performance in sport-models, have both contributed to the processes involved in the identification and education of G&T pupils (Von Károlyi et al., 2004) where practices in PE remain at best inconsistent and questionable (Morley & Bailey, 2006; Croston, 2013). In addition, the ability-based practice of setting pupils by ability continues to be a questionable practice which can influence outcomes such as

levels of attainment (Ireson et al., 2002) and a pupil's self-perception (Boaler, 2005; MacIntyre & Ireson, 2002).

Various perspectives have been highlighted in relation to notions of the self and identity and an emphasis has been placed on the importance of understanding these within their context (Jenkins, 1996; Marsh & Hau, 2003). In addition, in presenting a case for the notion that ability in PE is socially constructed contrasting theoretical perspectives, such as those from psychology and/or sociology, have been discussed. In considering this notion, Bourdieu's concepts have been used to suggest that it is vital to appreciate the context (the field) and the interrelated roles of concepts such as habitus and capital.

The next chapter examines the rationale for the methodology and the chosen methods.

CHAPTER 4 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The previous chapters have outlined the various ways that ability can be conceptualised within physical education as well as exploring how the field of PE has developed. This chapter begins by explaining the rationale for the investigation, followed by the frameworks and paradigms that underpin the adopted methodology. The third section outlines the chosen methods and the context of the investigation and the fourth concludes with a discussion of the data analysis.

4.1 Rationale for methodology

The purpose of this research was to explore the pupil experience in PE in relation to perceived levels of ability, and to examine the processes that contribute towards the construction of ability. Widening understanding of young people in a PE context has been a key driver in much of my own academic research and practice and consequently the primary intention of the investigation was to give voice to young people. Additionally, in order to enhance understanding of the context of those experiences it was also important to include the teacher perspective and provide them an opportunity to express their views. The teacher perspective was also essential in exploring how ability is conceptualised in PE. Research creates knowledge by setting questions that explore issues through actively engaging with the participants (Fraser, 2004) and this chapter discusses the considerations in providing a voice for both pupils and teachers but with a greater emphasis on research with young people.

Within educational research it has been acknowledged that there is an increased need to offer children the opportunity to define themselves (Grover, 2004) and, in the context of PE, there is a growing body of evidence where young people have been encouraged to share their experiences and voices (O'Sullivan & Macphail, 2010). Research with young people is considered crucial as it can advance understanding of how they develop and live their lives; contribute to theoretical discourse, and "its outcomes can impact directly or indirectly on the lives of those researched and others in similar situations" (Lewis, 2004, p. 3).

The importance of understanding ideology, the context and the history of physical education and ability-based practices, as well as contrasting perspectives that

can contribute to difficulties in a clear conceptualisation of ability within the field have been emphasised throughout the preceding chapters of this thesis. In particular, I have explored how the field of PE has been socially constructed (Kirk, 1992) stressing the importance of understanding the development of the field and appreciating the relationship between past and present practices (Penney & Evans, 1999) especially where PE has been influenced by dominant political ideology and social elements that have advantaged certain groups (Bailey et al., 2009a; Evans & Penney, 2008).

Additionally, Evans and Davies (2006) highlight that a sociological explanation of PE has at its core:

Interests in how formal and informal forms of physical education are implicated in social and cultural production and reproduction and how these processes of forming knowledge and identity contribute towards educational enhancement, progress, stability, innovation and change. (p. 115)

Their explanation helps to highlight the significance of acknowledging the perspective taken within an investigation which provides the lens through which research is conducted and also interpreted.

Furthermore, I have argued that psychological approaches to understanding ability often provide a reductionist perspective on the concept of ability, one which defines life in measurable terms rather than inner experience that fails to take into account the individual's standpoint (Cohen et al., 2007). In that sense, psychological perspectives on their own are inadequate for exploring ability as a set of relations that are actualised through dynamic interactions (Barab & Plucker, 2002). The notion that ability in PE is socially constructed has been presented by many (Evans 2004; Evans & Penney 2008; Hay & Macdonald 2010a, 2010b; Wright & Burrows 2006). This perspective facilitates an acknowledgement of the social context of the specific field, with an appreciation of how that field has developed where the concept of ability is perceived as a socioculturally dynamic construct and process (Evans, 2004).

Understanding the processes, interactions, interpretations and impact of ability-based practices, from the teacher and pupil perspective, were key objectives of this study and ability was positioned as a socially constructed concept. Additionally, identifying PE as a field made up of a structured system of social relations between stakeholders (Hunter, 2004) helps to underline the importance of social context for analysing discourse and practices and in exploring how ability is constructed and experienced. Subsequently,

this investigation is concerned with explaining human behaviour, how individuals think about, influence and relate to one another (Lirgg, 2006). There is an emphasis on trying to understand the impact that the social situation, in particular the processes involved in the social construction of ability that exist in the field of PE, have upon both the teacher and pupil.

Theoretical and methodological approaches influence the research outcomes and debates exist concerning questions of appropriate, preferred and useful theories for conducting and communicating research in education (Macdonald et al., 2009). Although a theory may be variably defined it generally provides a clear framework for conducting research. Bourdieu's framework has been useful in exploring the social construction of ability in PE (Evans, 2004; Evans & Penney, 2008; Hay & Lisahunter, 2006; Hay & Macdonald, 2010a, 2010b; Wright & Burrows, 2006) through facilitating acknowledgement and consideration of the culture where pupils' and teachers' notions of ability are configured, reconfigured, and experienced. In other words, Bourdieu's framework facilitates consideration of the context, the history of that context and the contributing structures, processes and agents. In supporting the case for a social construction of ability and providing a framework from which to explore how ability is constructed, and also experienced within PE, this investigation is underpinned by Bourdieu's ideas and concepts. In addition, this study also pays attention to certain psychology-based approaches and concepts in order to ascertain their usefulness for helping to understand young people's experiences of ability in the context of PE.

4.2 Methodology

The focus of the investigation was developed through the process of reviewing the literature presented in chapters two and three which resulted in the formation of the two research questions:

How is ability conceptualised within PE?

How do pupils of varying levels of ability experience PE?

My research questions required a methodology that would facilitate exploration of the subjective experiences of young people in PE and one that also allowed for consideration of the context. A further objective was to enhance understanding of the

ways in which individuals (teachers and pupils) create, modify and interpret the field of PE, and, in particular, how such processes contribute to the construction of ability. In addition, it was an investigation that intended to seek more than a description of facts, but rather to establish intellectual empathy in understanding the experiences of young people (Fraser & Robinson, 2004) especially with regard to their perceived levels of ability.

In relation to the objectives and context of the investigation, the research design can be described as a case study. Cohen et al. (2007) define a case study as a “single instance of a bounded system, such as a child . . . a class, or a school” (p. 289). In other words it is a very specific focus of inquiry investigated in a specific context (Armour & Griffiths, 2012). Cohen et al. (2007) suggest that adopting a case study design facilitates the reporting of “real-life, complex dynamic and unfolding interactions of events” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 289). Furthermore, a case study is said to have several strengths and hallmarks that align with the objectives of this study: it is concerned with a detailed description and analysis of events; it focuses on individual actors or groups and seeks to understand their perceptions of events; the researcher is fundamentally involved in the case (Cohen et al. 2007).

Despite certain strengths in adopting a case study design it has been criticised for lacking ‘validity’ and ‘objectivity’ especially where the researcher selects the case based on convenience which may result in leading the researcher towards interpretations that are based upon preconceptions (Armour & Griffiths, 2012). However, it has been argued that such considerations can apply to all research methods (Armour & Griffiths, 2012). Issues of validity and trustworthiness are essential considerations in any investigation and are addressed later in this section.

In addition, as one of the key aims of this study was to understand the nature of the pupil experience the methods employed were designed to support pupils in generating their own individual narrative. Although narratives can change as a function of age and the purpose they are intended to serve, narratives can be an “invaluable source of insight into what children think and feel, and also how they think and feel” (Engel, 2005, p. 210). Methods such as group or individual interviews and the keeping of diaries have been utilised to gain narrative accounts of young people in PE (Groves & Laws, 2003) and are also common methods employed within a case study design

(Cohen et al., 2007); these were therefore considered appropriate for the current study. In addition, interviews, a well established method of enquiry within educational research (Tooley & Darby, 1998) were considered an appropriate method in generating the teachers' perspective. Accessing experiences through the use of narratives is not without some considerations for practice and the methodological considerations are discussed in the following sections. Key areas of concern highlighted include my own beliefs, trustworthiness, power relations, and reflexivity.

4.2.1 Research philosophy and paradigms

We do not enter the research process as 'empty vessels', we carry a belief system that has been developed through life experiences via processes of socialisation (Sparkes, 1992). Any approach to conducting research will therefore rest upon a particular paradigm even if unconsciously held (Fraser & Robinson, 2004). Paradigms are frameworks that orient and represent particular ways of thinking (Tinning & Fitzpatrick, 2012) that subsequently influence methodological considerations. At the centre of this process is the engagement with assumptions regarding the nature of existence, truth and knowledge, also defined as epistemology (Jenkins, 2003). Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that is concerned with the nature of knowledge and truth which vary in relation to one's experiences and beliefs (Macionis & Plummer, 2005).

Traditionally, there are two views of knowledge, positivist and anti-positivist (Macionis & Plummer, 2005). Positivism is a logical system that bases knowledge on direct systematic observation, suggesting that scientific knowledge rests on empirical evidence (objective) whereas anti-positivism is associated with seeing knowledge as personal (subjective) (Cohen et al., 2007), one of the dualisms that Bourdieu (1990) attempted to overcome. A criticism of the positivist perspective is that it provides a reductionist view that assumes complex behaviour can be reduced, analysed and explained as parts that can then be put back together as a whole and understood (Thomas, Nelson, & Silverman, 2005) as in various psychological perspectives on ability. In contrast, anti-positivists highlight the importance of understanding an individual's frame of reference and suggest that interpretations of the world around them have to come from the inside, not the outside (Cohen et al., 2007). More recently, researchers have also identified the possibility of drawing on both paradigms and

highlighted distinctions and overlaps between belief systems such as those of a positivist, interpretive or critical nature (Tinning & Fitzpatrick, 2012).

Interpretivism has roots in branches of sociology and psychology where the need to understand and capture subjective experiences and meanings has been acknowledged (Greig, Taylor & Mackay, 2007). Contemporary influences in interpretive research can be associated with scholars such as Merleau Ponty who made the case for “the significance of meaning in the interpretation of lived experiences” (Macdonald et al., 2009, p. 373). Interpretive researchers adopt methods that help explore how individuals construct meanings of their worlds (Pope, 2006). Meanings are conferred upon people, objects and situations and the meanings that people give to their experiences and their processes of interpretation are essential and constitutive to what the experience is. Therefore, within this paradigm, to understand behaviour we must understand these meanings and definitions and also the processes by which they are formed (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007); the interpretive paradigm “strives to understand and interpret the world in terms of its actors” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 26). Thus, for this study, understanding of the social world is sought from the point of view of the person living in it, through interpreting and making sense of how individuals understand their experiences (Greig et al., 2007). The interpretive paradigm also aligns with my own belief systems as well as the two central themes of the investigation which were: to explore how ability was conceptualised; to make sense of the pupil experience in PE through exploring their own interpretation of events, as well as those of their PE teachers.

A range of research traditions can be located within the interpretive paradigm, one of which is symbolic interactionism (Sparkes, 1992). In addition to the underlying principles explained as part of the discussion surrounding notions of the ‘self’ in chapter three, Cohen et al. (2007) describe symbolic interactionism as having three basic postulates: firstly, human beings act towards things on the basis of meanings that they have for them and interactionists focus on the world of subjective meanings and symbols; secondly, giving meaning to objects through symbols is a continuous process; thirdly, the process takes place in a social context. Cohen et al. also suggest that these fit naturally into the school setting where investigating the pupil experience can be considered dependent upon the social group to which he/she belongs, as for example

within ability groups. Bourdieu's (1986, 1990) assumptions about social reality also align with those from a symbolic interactionist perspective.

Many social scientists have synonymously positioned symbolic interactionism with qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Furthermore, in relation to investigating young people's experiences, it is suggested that qualitative methods are better suited in capturing the full richness of their experience (Greene & Hill, 2005). In addition, despite the fact that research in education can utilise both quantitative and qualitative approaches, it is often qualitative and utilises a systematic method of enquiry that rarely establishes hypotheses at the beginning of the research process (Thomas et al., 2005). A qualitative framework for conducting research with and about children is based in the scientific activity of induction, the procedure for generating new theories and in which theory emerges from the data (Greig et al., 2007). This process is consistent with the view that the child is subjective in nature "and that his or her understanding, knowledge and meanings are subjective, and emerge in interaction with others in a given context" (Greig et al., 2007, p. 54). Subsequently, the qualitative framework entails a methodology in which theory is rooted in data such as observations, interviews, conversations, where the basic methodological tool is interpretation (Greig et al. 2007). A qualitative approach was therefore considered appropriate, one that incorporated methods of interviews, focus groups and informal observations.

This investigation focused on interpretive meaning and a view that human experience is mediated by interpretation, a perspective that is considered compatible with a symbolic interactionist perspective (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In addition, interpretivists assume reality to be mind-dependent, where the mind plays a key role in shaping or constructing reality (Sparkes, 1992) consequently, the mind and object cannot be separated. Furthermore, interpretive researchers support the notion of multiple truths where truth is seen as a social construction and "inextricably linked to the meanings of the study's participants" (Macdonald et al., 2009, p. 375) and in that sense a change in context, time or location also has a bearing. Where social reality is perceived as being mind-dependent, no data is free from interpretation (Sparkes, 1992) which raises issues of validity and trustworthiness.

4.2.2 Issues of trustworthiness

Within all forms of research issues of validity and reliability are essential concerns (Berg, 2009). However, there is some debate as to the appropriateness of these terms in relation to qualitative research where it has been suggested that issues of credibility and trustworthiness are more appropriate (Hastie & Hay, 2012). Credibility relates to “the extent to which the data are an accurate representation of the context” (Hastie & Hay, 2012, p. 87). An essential aspect of the research process is for the researcher to acknowledge their personal, political and professional interests which may affect any fieldwork or relationships with individual subjects (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). My own experiences and ideologies are revealed to some extent both in the brief narrative in chapter one and the theoretical and philosophical beliefs outlined in this chapter. Within interpretive research, the researcher is the instrument and therefore their interests, beliefs, purpose and research decisions impact upon the credibility of the research undertaken. In other words, the credibility “lies in the skills and sensitivities of the researcher, in how he or she uses herself as knower, and as inquirer” (Sparkes, 1992, p. 30). Furthermore, for an interpretivist, the basis of truth is social agreement, what is ‘real’ is based upon mutual agreement by those who participate. This is in contrast to a positivist approach which relies upon logical systems that base knowledge on direct systematic observation and objective empirical testing and evidence.

Sparkes (1992) provides a useful example of interpretive research conducted within a PE setting where one of the subjects initially disagreed with Sparkes’ interpretation of events but retrospectively altered his view to that of agreement. Sparkes raises important questions about the credibility of the initial interpretation and whether the agreement or disagreement by a subject of the researcher’s interpretation reduces or enhances its credibility. Sparkes concludes that his interpretation as researcher “stands as simply that; an interpretation of a set of events” (p. 32); neither view should be seen as more ‘credible’ than the other as both can be considered as ‘valid’ from each respective view point; this point alongside the acknowledgement that differences in interpretation can also take place within a community of scholars are important matters in considering notions of credibility in interpretive research. The potential for multiple interpretations should therefore be acknowledged however, for the interpretivist, judgements of ‘truth’ are always relative to a particular framework,

paradigm, or point of view (Sparkes, 1992), hence the importance of acknowledging the framework and paradigm within which this investigation took place.

Subsequently, in the current study there is awareness that any ‘truth’ is influenced by my own beliefs and experiences and the methodology and processes that were employed. Incorporating several different methodologies can assist researchers in gaining a more substantive picture of the area under investigation and can act as a means to verification (Berg, 2009). This process can also assist the researcher in avoiding jumping to premature conclusions and may also support congruency within the data (Berg, 2009). In that respect, interviews, focus groups and informal observations were employed in order to gain insight from pupils and teachers.

In considering the processes involved in the interviews and focus groups I attempted, as far as possible, to keep the data rooted in the experiences of the participants themselves by drawing on how they interpreted their own events to inform and extend the gathering of data as opposed to my pre-conceived ideas and experiences such as a PE teacher and/or a teacher trainer. For example, there were several occasions where I observed variable teaching practice, which in my opinion was not always conducive to an ‘effective’ learning experience for all pupils, where some pupils appeared disengaged:

25 March Letitia Observation

Groups are all mixed. Is lots of standing around though and not much engagement or excitement about the drills. The teacher added a defender, still the same enthusiasm and isn't really that challenging for any of them. Letitia has very little engagement only when it is her turn, the other girls aren't that interested.

In my previous role as a teacher trainer this would have been cause for concern however I was mindful that my role in this instance was not to critique the teacher but to facilitate the pupil narrative from their perspective. It was also not appropriate to explore as part of the teacher interviews. I therefore made a conscious effort not to initiate exploration of critiquing pedagogical practices during the focus group and interview process; it was only pursued if the participant(s) raised it.

Trustworthiness or confirmability refers to “the degree to which the research results and interpretations can be corroborated by others” (Hastie & Hay, 2012, p. 88). In that respect the reporting of qualitative data must address how the data were checked and re checked throughout the study (Hastie & Hay, 2012). Two particular processes

were included during the collection of the data that addressed issues of trustworthiness. One process was the checking of data during the interview or focus group and extracts from a pupil (Melissa) and a teacher interview (Mary) provide examples:

I - Was PE more enjoyable when there was a more equal mixture [gender] in terms of your group for example?

Well it's pretty much the same thing, we've always been with, put with the same group of people it would just be nice if there were some girls that were better.

I - So you'd actually like more girls in your group is that what you're saying or is it more girls with a particular attitude or ability?

Yeah with more ability, I mean there are loads, well some, but it would be nice if there were more (Melissa, Study group 1 [G1], interview 1).

I - So you think identifying potential is quite hard then?

I think it is . . . I think very occasionally you do get students who you know you can just see it and you just know that they're gonna be . . .

I - So you're saying . . . so what is it that you can actually see, is it an attitude?

Yeah it's an attitude and it's a, again that thing about them wanting to make progress (Mary).

I regularly incorporated the checking of my understanding throughout interviews and focus groups by asking participants to confirm my interpretation. The second process that was adopted to support trustworthiness was the revisiting of data at a later stage. In relation to the pupil data, their initial responses were returned to during the next opportunity and my interpretations of their previous responses were checked by asking them to confirm these interpretations and often extend them. Sparkes (1992) acknowledges the importance of the researcher discussing findings with participants in order to check accuracy of words and events, a process that allows the researcher's interpretation to be enriched and extended and one that also provides an opportunity for reflexive elaboration; subsequently, there are specific examples of how this was conducted in the later section on reflection.

It should also be noted that interpretation of any narrative can only be developed through information offered by the person themselves where the researcher has to rely on the assumption that they are telling their 'truth' (Groves & Laws, 2000).

Furthermore, narrative accounts have an element of temporality where a person may identify an event that happened previously as affecting their experience 'today' (Groves & Laws, 2003). In that respect, it was important for me to take into account that a reinterpretation of certain events could take place. In terms of credibility, Groves and Laws (2003) suggest that this in itself is of significance as "it is that perception that

determines experience now” (p. 164). Employing different methods and several opportunities in the collection of data was one way that I attempted to address and also explore the possibility of a reinterpretation of events by the participants.

In addition, the level of familiarity can influence how the young person (Engel, 2005) or adult (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) relays aspects of their own narrative. In that sense, I was dependent upon the relationship and level of trust that I was able to build with all participants. There are additional considerations for the methods that were employed and these are explained in the research methods section.

4.2.3 Power relations

In conducting qualitative research it is important to consider the dynamics of the interviewer and interviewee, especially where the researcher may be in a position of power (Berg, 2009; Lewis, 2004). Power has been defined as:

The ability of individuals or groups to make their own concerns count, even when others resist. Power sometimes involves the direct use of force, but is almost always accompanied by the development of ideas (ideologies) which justify the actions of the powerful. (Giddens, cited in Robinson & Kellett, 2004, p. 81).

Power can therefore be about the amount of freedom an individual feels that they have in communicating during the research process and how much they are able to contribute towards the creation of knowledge (Robinson & Kellett, 2004). In terms of observing and interviewing the teachers, I was aware of how my ‘expertise’ in teacher training and pedagogy could impact upon their perceptions and feelings during such interactions. Teachers may have not wanted to share certain opinions or experiences with me during the interviews, and may have also been concerned with how I might perceive them during observations of their lessons. I made an effort to make them feel at ease before lesson observations began by stressing that I was not there to observe or comment on their teaching, something that I did not do throughout the study. I also tried to address the potential power imbalance during interviews with them through aspects of self-disclosure (Berg, 2009) where I would share personal information with respect to some of my own PE teaching experiences:

I- It comes back to your areas of specialism and expertise?

It’s probably wrong in that none of the male teachers teach dance . . .

I - I took dance off the curriculum when I was head of PE, that was when you could though, you could either do dance or gymnastics, or outdoor ed actually. (Jack).

The intention here was to help create a non-hierarchical research relationship where teachers could hopefully relate to me as their 'equal' where similarities existed in some of our related experiences. I believe this strategy enhanced my rapport with the teachers, a relationship that I also tried to develop during my informal observations; a point that is expanded upon during some of my reflections on the process in a later section. It is however important to acknowledge that most interview situations do require the interviewer to maintain a level of intentional control over the process (Berg, 2009) which I believe I did.

In researching young people's perspectives the power relationship between them and the researcher has a bearing on the research process (Lewis, 2004). There is a suggestion that power relations are reinforced by general cultural notions that exist between adults and children in society. More specifically, there is a belief that adults have superior knowledge due to their 'life experiences' and cognitive development however, where the area under investigation is concerned with the experience of the young person, the subject in question arguably has the most 'valid' perspective (Grover, 2004). The way in which researchers view children are therefore "pivotal to the power relations that ensue between researcher and participant" (Robinson & Kellett, 2004, p. 85) and it is generally accepted that children do have a valid perspective worthy of inclusion especially when the subject matter is about them. Consequently it was essential to perceive young people as having an autonomous status and to view them as social actors in their own right (Grover, 2004, Robinson & Kellet, 2004).

The ways that young people have been identified in research vary from: "the child as object, the child as subject, the child as social actor and the child as participant/co-researcher" (Robinson & Kellet, 2004, p. 85). Where they are perceived as an active participant they can contribute to the research process and the balance of power can shift from researcher to participant (Robinson & Kellet, 2004). Furthermore, an important consideration is the degree to which children can exercise freedom of choice in relation to agreeing to participate in research. In relation to both considerations, the contribution of pupils' voice was supported through the use of semi-structured questioning where their responses informed later areas for discussion. In addition, pupils were given opportunities to give their verbal and oral assent before

commencing the investigation and were also reminded that they could withdraw at any point. The research methods section explains the related procedures in greater detail.

The location and context of the research can also influence the power relationship between researcher and those researched. In a school environment the balance of power has been suggested as being heavily skewed towards adults where they control “children’s use of time, occupation of space, choice of clothing, times of eating – even their mode of social interaction” (Robinsons & Kellet, 2004, p. 91). Furthermore, children can have certain expectations of what is required of them when interacting with an adult in a school setting and their responses in focus groups and interviews within this context may reflect these expectations (Westcott & Littleton, 2005). This balance can influence the nature and outcomes of school-based research. It was therefore essential to clarify expectations with all participants at the beginning of the research process. This helped to make interviews and focus groups meaningful for all parties and facilitate an environment where participants are “more likely to freely participate” (Westcott & Littleton, 2005, p. 149). The richness of data is perhaps an indication that most participants appeared to speak with an amount of freedom.

4.2.4 Reflexivity

Qualitative researchers are inevitably part of the study that they conduct as they actively construct the collection, selection and interpretation of data (Finlay, 2003). Employing methods such as interviews and focus groups for gathering data therefore bears a uniqueness that stems from the researcher’s beliefs but also the relationships and interactions that unfold through these processes (Roulston, 2010). It is suggested that researchers should critically consider their theoretical position throughout the research process by employing reflexivity (Roulston, 2010). Reflexivity can be understood in a multitude of ways according to the aims and functions of the exercise and the theoretical or methodological traditions embraced. In terms of the aims of this research, reflexivity can be understood as:

A confessional account of methodology or as examining one’s own personal, possibly unconscious, reactions . . . exploring the dynamics of the researcher–researched relationship. Alternatively, it can focus more on how the research is co-constituted and socially situated, through offering a critique or through deconstructing established meanings. (Finlay, 2002, p. 224)

Reflexivity therefore involves thoughtful and self-aware analysis and critical self-reflection examining how the researcher and intersubjective elements impinge on, and even transform, research (Finlay, 2002). The researcher's ability to self-consciously refer to herself in relation to the production of knowledge about a research topic implies an understanding that they are part of the social world that they investigate (Berg, 2009; Roulston, 2010). Reflexivity is also considered fundamental in supporting the status of a sociological approach to the deconstruction of knowledge (Jenkins, 2003).

The subject of employing reflexivity in qualitative research has a history where it has been influenced by beliefs, paradigms and methodologies (Finlay, 2002). Discourse indicates that there is an acceptance that reflexivity has become a defining aspect of qualitative research where we no longer question the place of reflexivity but rather how to do it (Finlay, 2002). The functions of reflexivity can shift from employing it to situate the research and the researcher to using it as a tool for interpretation (Finlay, 2002); both were employed in this study.

Being reflexive is challenging as it involves self interrogation about personal and professional practice (Finlay, 2002, 2003). In my study I mainly incorporated introspective and intersubjective reflection which I actively engaged in throughout the research process and recorded in a research journal, a practice which is suggested to support the act (Johnston, 2006). The keeping of a research journal was intended specifically to support the act of reflexivity rather than contribute towards any collection of empirical data. My research journal supported my ability to reflect upon my personal experiences where I recognised that I brought various 'selves' to the field: a learner who had been identified as 'less able'; a confident and knowledgeable PE teacher and teacher trainer; a sport psychologist; a developing researcher who identified strongly as a practitioner but who has gained more recent experience of being involved in funded research and publications. I attempted to evaluate how my various identities impacted upon the research process. For example, my experiences as a sport psychologist had the potential to influence what questions I asked and also my interactions with the pupils; with the talented pupils I was drawn towards wanting to discuss strategies to support them in managing their high levels of training outside of school and expanding on their support networks. I made a conscious decision however that this was not the reason for my being there despite my belief that I could perhaps enhance some of their

experiences. I also sometimes made assumptions about pupil's ability through my own observations, which were informed by my own PE teaching experiences, as highlighted in two journal entries:

25 March

I might question Chris's all round ability in terms of being talented, he has the right attitude and motivation and behaviour but I think I've seen others with more physical talent not in study group 1.

20 May

Dwayne's partner has less ability than him, he is bored very quickly, although his badminton isn't that great, probably about a level 4 on the NC.

I was able to acknowledge that I may hold my own assumptions about their ability in PE and was mindful that this could also influence how the research was situated and the nature of questioning. One strategy that I employed to try and avoid this was to focus on asking the pupils to talk about their own perceptions of ability and not to challenge these, either through questioning or gestures and facial expressions, if they did not fit my own interpretations.

In addition, there were times when I experienced my own tensions between me as the practitioner and me the researcher. I could see practical constraints that existed for teachers in PE however they sometimes conflicted with my research agenda and timetable and my own frustration with the possibility of not collecting data:

21 January

Been in to observe today, pretty frustrating, PE dept seem very busy, over worked, staff absent, fights etc, tried my best not to need too much and just kept myself to myself, think I can recognise when to do this . . .

However, I do feel that due to my ability to empathise with the challenges of PE teaching I was able to use this positively and employ certain strategies that actually helped me develop relationships and rapport with the PE teachers:

21 January

Took Jack a cup of tea in the park, it was freezing. Despite certain constraints I feel that I have a good relationship with most of them as I talk during changing time and observations and if I am walking through the school. I am quite aware of my presence in lessons and try and keep myself invisible especially when some teachers are having difficult moments!

This proved beneficial during the teacher interviews at the end of the investigation where they appeared quite at ease with me and discussed their experiences and opinions with a level of ‘openness’.

It was important to recognise the challenge that introspective reflection posed and not to use it as an end in itself but rather as a springboard for interpretations and general insight (Finlay, 2003). I felt that my own experiences enabled me to have a level of empathy towards some of the pupils who had similar experiences to mine in school and, as such, supported my generalised understanding and interpretation of the pupils’ narratives. Furthermore, the development of a rapport with the pupils was integral to the gathering of ‘rich’ data from each of their narratives and I often reflected upon my practices that I hoped would support this process:

21 November

Went in today with the hope of seeing Melissa, Keisha, and Dionne. Melissa and Keisha who are in the same PE group were out on a trip. Dionne was in a lesson but with a supply teacher. I didn’t want Dionne not to feel important, I spoke with her briefly on her way to her lesson, to remind her that I hadn’t forgotten about her and that I would be coming in to talk to her soon and that I probably wouldn’t come and watch her lesson as it was going to be a cover lesson - she said that was fine.

11 November

I spoke briefly with Chris on the way to the astro-turf, we discussed the group – they had done JSLA last year, he wasn’t quite sure what I wanted and had made some notes in his diary. I emphasised it was up to him and tried to reassure him that I wasn’t assessing him in any way. He also said that the others in group 1 said that they liked the group interview and would rather have that than individual interviews, I said that I would do this again after Xmas but that I needed at least a short individual interview with them, he seemed very agreeable.

These types of reflections made me feel that I was able to reassure pupils as to why I was there and what it was that I expected from them. I believe this process helped to develop our rapport over the course of the investigation. I also reflected upon the various interactions which I felt helped me keep the focus of the research very much on the pupils as well as highlighting any changes that I could make to the next time we met:

27 November

I did my first individual interview today, it went better than I expected just because he [Leon] wasn't very talkative in the group. I think I should give him more time to talk and leave room for him to think rather than feeling like there always has to be someone speaking.

I incorporated this strategy the next time that I interviewed Leon and found that giving him more time to answer did, on some occasions, allow him to respond with a greater level of detail than during initial meetings; I also felt that he was more 'comfortable' with being interviewed by me although I do acknowledge that this was my own interpretation of events.

Doing reflexivity "should facilitate greater insights into personal and social experience . . . it helps to situate the research project and enhance understanding of the topic under investigation" (Finlay & Gough 2003, p. 1). The way that researchers employ reflexivity varies, however what is key is that whatever form it takes, the challenge is to do the reflexive analysis well (Finlay, 2002). I believe that I employed reflexivity to the best of my ability throughout the research process.

4.3 Research methods

Data were collected over the course of one academic year, from September 2008 to July 2009, within one PE department in a mixed North London secondary comprehensive school (11-18). The school was purposively selected which allowed for the inclusion of individuals with certain attributes (Berg, 2009); in the case of the current study, this was to ensure that the sample included teachers and pupils who had experienced ability-based practises such as the G&T programme in PE, the identification of talent and ability levels, and the use of ability groups. The school had approximately 1300 pupils. During the time of data collection there was a full PE programme in operation for KS 3 and 4 with no PE provision in the sixth form except for a small Advanced level PE class (four pupils); the school was also going through major building works.

4.3.1 PE in the case study school

The PE department consisted of seven full time teachers, four male teachers (one Newly Qualified Teacher [NQT] and one acting head of department), two female teachers, and one female dance specialist (covering maternity leave). Within the PE curriculum, activities changed approximately every half term and were varied to cover

the requirements of the NCPE. The PE teachers stated that activities in KS4 were more games orientated. Additionally, Year 7 experienced an 'alternative' curriculum, as one off lessons every few weeks which introduced them to different sports such as Gaelic football, swimming and orienteering. There were two GCSE PE groups in year 10, one in year 11, and two groups who were taking it early in year 9, as a trial for the top ability sets. There were also BTEC, JSLA and GCSE dance groups at KS4.

The department set pupils into ability groups for all KS3 classes. The department had experimented with how much time to assess pupils for before putting them into ability groups; for example, one year group were not put into sets until after their first year, having PE in their form groups for the whole of year 7 (the current year 8 participants); others had been 'set' after a four week period (the current year 7 and 9 participants). Additionally, there was a mixture of single-sex and mixed gender groups across all years. The PE department had a G&T register, its own G&T policy document and one teacher had specific responsibility for G&T within the department. They ran a wide variety of extracurricular clubs and activities.

4.3.2 Initial procedures and the participants

The head of PE (acting for the year) was contacted during the beginning of the summer term of 2008 and initial informal discussions were held. The outline of the project was verbally explained and agreed by the school, orally and through written consent (Appendix A). The head of PE was asked to identify 16 pupils from years 7 to 11 representing four equal categories as defined by the investigator, to create four study groups: group 1 - successful talented pupils; group 2 - unsuccessful talented pupils; group 3 - pupils with potential talent; group 4 – pupils with no talent. It is important to note that there are no absolute criteria for identifying talented pupils in PE and schools will draw upon a range of strategies (Morley & Bailey, 2006). This was the case for the current study and definitions and perceptions of ability in PE are a focus of the discussion chapters.

In relation to defining the study group categories, the following were utilised in the selection of participants: Groups 1 and 2 - 'talented' pupils who were on the G&T register; Group 3 - 'potentially talented' were pupils who were considered as having levels of ability that matched the appropriate attainment targets, but for other reasons had not attained the expectation levels and were therefore not identified as talented and,

as such, were not on the G&T register; Group 4 - 'not talented' pupils were defined as those who were below the respective attainment levels; 'successful' pupils were defined as those who had remained on the G&T register (Group 1); 'unsuccessful' pupils were defined as those who had, at some point, been removed from the G&T register, but still had the possibility of being added back onto it (Group 2).

I was introduced to potential participants during the end of the summer term, 2008, in two mixed ability and gender groups, one from KS3 and one from KS4. The purpose of this initial meeting was to explain the project, begin to develop a rapport, and to give pupils an opportunity to ask questions to help them decide whether they would be interested in participating. I met the pupils in a large sports hall in view, but not hearing distance from other adults. There were no members of the PE department present. Where pupils expressed an interest in participating they were given an informed consent form to take home to be signed by their parent/guardian (Appendix B). Completed forms were returned to the head of PE. Additionally, prior to the initial meetings with participants, I attended a borough G&T day in which some of the potential participants took part. This provided an opportunity to meet and interact with them and to conduct informal observations on the working relationship between pupils and the PE department.

A total of 15 pupils agreed to participate in the study. They were assigned a pseudonym and were a mixture of ability (study groups 1-4), age (11-16 years old), and gender (4 girls and 11 boys). The pupils had also experienced variable groupings in PE in relation to ability and gender. Their demographic and grouping information is summarised in Table 4.1 and expanded upon in Appendix C. It is also important to note that Keisha and Melissa were in the same GCSE PE group, a group that Darren was also in for the first half of the year of study; Greg and Leon were in the same year 9 GCSE PE group and Letitia was in an equivalent but different year 9 GCSE PE group.

Table 4.1

Pupil participants and PE group experiences

Study group & pupil pseudonym	Description	Ability & gender group history	PE group during investigation
Group 1 (G1)			
Melissa	Female Year 10	Consistently in top PE set. Mixed gender	Top ability set, GCSE PE group, mostly boys
Ben	Male Year 7	Consistently in top PE set. Mixed gender	Top ability set, mixed gender, split for rugby
Chris	Male Year 11	Consistently in top PE set. Mixed gender	Top ability set GCSE PE & JSLA. Mostly boys
Greg	Male Year 9	Consistently in top PE set. Mixed gender	Top ability set GCSE PE even gender split
Group 2 (G2)			
Darren	Male Year 10	Top PE set for all of KS3. Mixed & single sex groups	Moved from GCSE PE to JSLA upon request, & BTEC. Mixed ability & mostly boys.
Letitia	Female Year 9	Short time in middle set, moved to top set. Mixed gender	Top ability set, GCSE PE. Even gender split
Dwayne	Male Year 10	Transitioned in & out of high ability group. Mostly all boys groups	Top ability core PE all boys group. JSLA mostly boys & mixed ability.
Peter	Male Year 9	Consistently in top PE set, Mostly all boys groups	Top ability set, core PE, all boys.

continued

Study group & pupil pseudonym	Description	Ability & gender group history	PE group during investigation
Group 3 (G3)			
Keisha	Female Year 10	Middle ability group & mixed ability. Mixed & single sex groups	Top ability set GCSE PE group mostly boys
Dionne	Female Year 10	Middle ability group & mixed ability. Mixed & single-sex groups	GCSE dance mixed ability, all girls
Leon	Male Year 9	Transferred in year 8 initially placed in low set, moved to top. Top set in previous school. All boys & mixed gender.	Top ability set GCSE PE Even gender split
Cole	Male Year 9	Top set moved to middle set. Mixed gender	Middle ability set. Even gender split
Group 4 (G4)			
Jeff	Male Year 10	Consistently bottom PE set KS3. Mixed gender in Year 7, then single-sex.	Mixed ability core PE all boys.
Syeed	Male Year 8	Consistently bottom PE set. Mixed gender in Year 7, then single sex.	Bottom PE set all boys.
Marlon	Male Year 7	Consistently bottom PE set. Mixed gender then single-sex.	Bottom PE set all boys.

Teachers were also asked to provide written consent to participate (Appendix D) and a total of six out of the seven PE teachers took part due to the dance teacher leaving before the end of term, as she was covering maternity leave. Their demographic information is presented in Table 4.2 and elaborated upon in Appendix E.

Table 4.2

Teacher participants

Teacher pseudonym	Teaching experience	Specialist areas	Extra curricular
Jack Head of PE Male 28 yrs old	Four years in current school	Football Rugby	Boys' rugby
Alison Ex- head of PE (extended sick leave) Female, 50+ yrs old	32 years teaching. Eight years in current school.	Hockey Cricket Gymnastics Badminton	Girls' cricket
Kieran PE G&T Co ordinator Male 27 yrs old	Four years in current school	Football Basketball Rugby Badminton	Boys' football Mixed gender badminton club.
Danny NQT Male 24 yrs old	First year of teaching.	Invasion games	Girls' football Boys' cricket Boys' football
Mary Head of girls' PE Female 28 yrs old	Four years in current school	Netball Trampoline SEN pupils BTEC & GCSE	
Hue Non QTS (from Australia) Male 26 yrs old.	Six months in Australia. Four years in Current school	Football Physiology Striking & field.	Boys' basketball Boys' football Covered girls' basketball.

4.3.3 Generating Data

The methods employed to generate data were pupil focus groups and individual teacher and pupil interviews. The intention was for pupils to provide a narrative of their experiences in PE. The addition of the teacher perspective was to support understanding of the pupil experience and to also explore how ability was conceptualised within PE. Informal observations were incorporated to enhance an overall understanding of the

context of the pupil experience and to assist in prompting and supporting questions during focus groups and interviews.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were conducted with the pupil participants only and are considered a suitable method of data collection for use with young people in an educational setting (Vaughn, Shay Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996). They are defined as discussions “involving a small number of participants, led by a moderator, which seeks to gain an insight into the participants’ experiences, attitudes and/or perceptions” (Hennessy & Heary, 2005, p. 236). They offer certain advantages over interviews in collecting qualitative data, such as: participants can feel safer in a familiar peer environment; they are much more likely to respond with openness; there is reduced pressure for one participant to respond; and, it may help to redress the power imbalance between adult and child (Hennessy & Heary, 2005). Conversely, focus groups can be difficult to transcribe, especially if the group is quite large where it may be difficult to identify individuals; they can also lead to group effects biases and can be researcher driven (Greig et al., 2007). Furthermore, focus groups have the potential to elicit strong emotional reactions where participants may be upset or offended by others’ comments and/or feel uncomfortable with other members of the group (Hennessy & Heary, 2005), hence the need for careful planning, monitoring and moderation. There were no incidents of this nature in the current investigation. Additional potential concerns related to focus group interviews are covered in the procedures and ethics sections.

Despite some disadvantages to using focus groups they were considered a suitable method for developing an initial rapport with the pupils in an environment where I was an ‘outsider’. My role in the focus groups was to act as a moderator in facilitating this process where questions were semi-structured similarly to those in the interviews. Many of the procedures and considerations for practice were similar across the focus group and individual interviews and further detail of how they were conducted is presented in the next section that discusses the procedures.

Interviews

Interviewing is one method of enquiry linked with a qualitative approach that attempts to gain an insight into an individual’s point of view (Berg, 2009; Travers, 2001) and, in that respect they were appropriate for gaining the perspectives of the

pupils and teachers. Interviews were semi-structured which allowed for a number of initial predetermined questions to be incorporated which was important in addressing the research questions but also facilitated a degree of freedom in which to explore the pupils' and teachers' responses (Berg, 2009). The degree of freedom permitted a level of individuality to emerge as part of each individual's perspective. In addition, the use of semi-structured interviews also allowed for comparability across all the responses and this was essential in exploring both research questions.

There are some general considerations that can apply to conducting interviews with adults and young people. Opening interview questions should be fairly easy for the subject to answer and not of a 'sensitive' nature. Initial introductions and demographic lines of questioning are one way to begin to develop a rapport between both parties (Berg, 2009). Opening discussions from Danny's (teacher) and Dionne's (pupil) interviews provide two examples of how these considerations were incorporated:

I - So if we just start off with getting to know a bit about your background, so just tell me a little bit about your training, how you got into PE teaching, how long you've been teaching?

Ok so since I was at secondary school I wanted to be a PE teacher . . . (Danny).

I - Hi again, so Dionne is that how you say your name?

Yeah.

I - And you're in year 10?

Yeah.

I - How old are you now?

15.

I - Ok great, so yeah just to remind you that everything is confidential with what we talk about, you're ok with that?

Yeah.

I - So how is school is at the moment? (Dionne, G3, interview 1).

In addition it is important for researchers to be able to communicate effectively when conducting interviews, in a manner that will motivate and encourage the participant to respond. In particular, the language must be comprehensible (Berg, 2009; Travers, 2001) and the researcher and participant must utilise vocabulary and conceptions that both parties can understand (Fraser, 2004). This was especially important in terms of understanding young people in their environment as Fraser (2004) suggested that conceptual issues in interviewing young people are often left unaddressed where meanings and procedures are assumed implicitly. Subsequently, during the teacher and pupil interviews, I hoped that my past experiences as a teacher and as a teacher educator

supported my ability in being able to understand the environment, facilitated levels of communication between myself and all the participants, and contributed towards the development of a rapport. However, I was also mindful that my familiarity with the teaching domain could also impact on the interview process where I might have made assumptions about responses. It was therefore important to acknowledge and reflect upon how this may have affected any fieldwork or relationships with individual subjects, considerations that have been highlighted in the methodology section.

In relation specifically to young people, interviews are considered a method of exploring narratives where they can be engaged in conversations that lead to the telling of stories about their experiences (Engel, 2005) and as such can provide a voice to pupils. In this context, Kellett and Ding (2004) provide some support as to the appropriateness of the interview as a method. However, they do stress the potential for a power imbalance between the adult interviewer and the young interviewee, a consideration that has been discussed in the methodology section.

Research should not just focus on the outcome but on the “moment-to-moment co-constructive processes through which meaning is negotiated, renegotiated and contested” (Westcott & Littleton, 2005, p. 144). Consequently, participants should be given the opportunity to explain their responses in interviews and this was the case in my investigation, either at the time or during a later interview where the participants had time to reflect. Examples of opportunities for the teachers and pupils to reflect during interviews have been highlighted previously in the methodology section. However, the opportunity to revisit themes at a later stage was only available to the pupils as the teachers were only interviewed on one occasion. In the case of the pupils, Darren’s final interview provides an example of how earlier themes were revisited where he was asked to comment on an initial and consistent theme of his perception that he was talented:

I - So coming back to the whole talented thing I just wondered if you could describe, so how do you know that you’re talented, I know you said you went to a gifted and talented day in primary school, but since you’ve been in secondary school kind of what things reinforce your belief, do you understand what that means?

Yeah.

I - That you’re talented, so why do you keep thinking that you’re talented if I can ask?

Cos I get picked for like lots of sporting activities to represent my school (Darren, G2, interview 2).

Asking Darren to reconsider why he continued to believe he was talented was one way that I attempted to allow him to reflect on earlier comments.

Observations

Informal naturalistic observations of lessons were made during the investigation with the intention of understanding the context for teachers and pupils, and to gain further insights into how different pupils perceive and interpret events, how they behave in different contexts and how they interact with others (Simpson & Tuson, 1995). They were also intended to support interviews and focus groups especially where prompts were needed to help participants consider certain situations in a PE lesson. For example, when asking pupils or teachers to reflect on an experience within a specific ability group, my notes could sometimes support my level of understanding this context and I could also ask them to elaborate on a specific event that I had been able to observe.

The observations were informal in the sense that they were not structured around specific behaviours or interactions although there was an acknowledgement that I would bring my own 'biases' to the research process; they were simply designed to aid discussion in the focus group and individual interviews and to provide greater understanding on my behalf on the context of the pupil experience. The observations also served to support the development of building trust and rapport with all the participants and attending many of their lessons also facilitated some informal discussions at different times preceding and upon completion of each lesson.

Development of semi-structured interview and focus group questions

The semi-structured guides for the focus group and the individual pupil interviews followed a successive design throughout the research process. In order to address the research questions but to also allow for the development of pupil generated themes, areas for discussion in both contexts were formed from a combination of cognate literature, themes and individual responses from pupils, and informal observations in lessons.

Initially, semi-structured questions for the first focus groups consisted of general PE related themes developed from cognate literature as well as my own pedagogical experiences in PE (Appendix F). The aims of these discussions were to begin the development of a rapport with pupils, provide a space where they felt comfortable speaking about their experiences in PE, and to generate themes for further exploration.

Consequently, the initial areas for discussion were fairly broad, open ended questions which allowed for pupils to provide demographic information and to also comment on general aspects of their PE experience. The intention was to gain an early insight into how PE was structured in the school but to also facilitate the development of pupil generated themes for subsequent areas for discussion. Responses were coded after each data collection point which supported the inclusion of pupils' responses into further areas for discussion and these, combined with cognate literature associated with the research questions, progressively formed the basis of additional semi-structured questions. This process was also considered essential as it has been highlighted that researchers can learn from looking back at their own interview practices as it helps to frame questions for future interviews and engages the interviewee in the unfolding, interpretive process (Narayan & George, 2002). These were important considerations in analysing the data, the processes of which are explained in the data analysis section. All interview guides were also supported by lesson observations.

In relation to addressing both research questions it was important to include areas for discussion that focused specifically on ability, how it was perceived, defined and experienced by the range of pupils. These areas were integrated into individual interviews and the second set of focus groups. Furthermore, it was considered important to have developed a rapport with individuals before carrying out more 'sensitive' lines of questioning; in that respect questions that focused on the individual's identity, self-perception and deeper exploration of their PE experiences were considered most relevant for the final sets of individual interviews where it was hoped that pupils might be more at 'ease' with discussing these areas. The development of themes for discussion can be seen within the semi-structured outlines for the first (Appendix G) and second (Appendix H) individual interviews, and the second focus group (Appendix I).

The themes that emerged from all the observations and pupil data contributed towards areas for discussion for the teacher interviews (Appendix J). These were also supported with areas from cognate literature pertaining to the construction and experience of ability in PE. The semi-structured nature of their interviews also supported a level of freedom for the teachers in exploring their perspective.

Summary

In applying methods such as interviews and focus groups, certain power imbalances were considered in my interactions with both the teachers and pupils, and they have been discussed in the methodology section. In addition, it was important for me to try and provide opportunities to empower young people where ever possible (Greig et al., 2007). For instance, there were some occasions where pupils discussed negative experiences and it was made clear to them that they had the choice of what I did with that information. Some pupils wanted me to relay some experiences back to the PE department with the potential for implementing some type of change others were happy to discuss their experience with me but did not want them to go any further. In that way I hoped that they had some sense of empowerment; part of Keisha's second interview provides one example:

The good people normally get to choose teams and things like that, it would be nice I think the most logical thing to do would be to get the girls to do it.

I - I think I asked you this before I just wondered how you felt about speaking to me because I won't tell anyone what we talked about, is there another girl in the group that you could tell or anyone else in the group that you could tell. It's difficult I know because they're your teachers, I understand.

It's very hard and I don't want to feel bad but it would be nice.

I - How would you feel, because the teachers will ask me about the project and I won't ever say anybody's name but I might say something like some of the girls, so it could be any of the girls that I've spoken to . . .

Yeah (laughs)

I - Some of the girls have raised the point that picking teams is not necessarily a good thing, would that be an ok thing for me to say to them?

That's fine.

I - I could do it that way.

I think if you say that it will help (Keisha, G3, interview 2).

The suggestion that I could relay some of Keisha's concerns back to the PE teachers without specifically identifying her seemed to be one way that she had an input into potentially changing her experience.

Overall, it was essential for me to develop a good rapport with all participants, both in terms of research protocols but also as something that was a valuable practice to me as an individual. Throughout the study I was aware of how pupils and teachers might perceive me and I made every effort to show that I had an understanding of physical education by using strategies such as agreeing or acknowledging certain experiences that they all shared with me. I reinforced that I was not there to intervene in

lessons or to make any judgements about their experiences. I tried to make sure that the pupils and teachers felt that their own opinions were important to me whereby they hopefully saw me as someone who was genuinely interested in their experiences. I shared my background and interest in their experiences at the beginning of the research process and throughout the study, clarified my role during the investigation, and carried out informal conversation with teachers and pupils whenever this was appropriate, for example walking to and from lessons. In addition, if I saw pupils during a visit to the school I would always say hello and ask how they were and also began every formal meeting with an expression of general interest in how school and PE was going. The development of a rapport with all participants was central to gaining rich data and was therefore something that was important within all the interviews and focus groups.

4.3.4 Procedures

At the beginning of the new academic year (2008/09) a proposed timetable for the project was discussed with the head of PE. Teacher consent (Appendix D) and parental/guardian consent for pupils (Appendix B) were gained. The head of PE had agreed that it would be acceptable for me to speak with pupils during school time. He scheduled and organised all the interviews and focus groups and arranged a suitable room for discussions to take place. The first part of this section details the procedures in collecting data from the pupils across the academic year. The latter part of this section explains the procedures in gaining the teacher perspective which was sought near the end of the investigation where they took part in one interview. The rationale for interviewing teachers at this time was to avoid any influence on how I perceived and interpreted initial data from the pupils, and it was assumed the data from the teacher interviews would be richer due to the development of a working relationship over the academic year.

Procedures with pupil participants

All pupil participants were met for the first time in focus groups which consisted of their designated groups for the study (1 to 4) and took place in a classroom or media suite. Pupils were reminded about the guidelines, purpose and expectations of the project and were asked to reconfirm their assent to participate by verbally agreeing and signing an assent form (Appendix K). The following guidelines (Hennessy & Heary, 2005) for facilitating all the focus groups were followed: Groups consisted of no more

than four pupils at a time; they lasted no longer than 45 minutes; the development of a rapport was facilitated and I emphasised that my role was not to judge or discipline the pupils but rather to act as a moderator. Furthermore, the dynamics of the groups are a factor and a consideration for researchers (Kellet & Ding, 2000). Various forms of homogeneity are considered appropriate ways to form focus groups (Berg, 2009) and they were therefore carried out initially in groups of similar perceived ability and subsequently in the same genders and similar ages for the second focus groups. Pupils were also asked not to disclose group discussion to non-participants (Hennessy & Heary, 2005).

Most pupils took part in two focus groups. An overview of data collection is summarised in Appendix L. At no point were pupils informed of the group that they had been allocated to by the researcher, although they were quite aware of their perceived ability in PE, for example in my notes regarding the first focus group with group 1, I commented that:

2 October

They did already know each other they said through sport and PE at school.

In relation to the development of an early rapport with the pupils, most did appear to be fairly at ease with me and others in the group as they did share and discuss their PE experiences. There were however, some instances of pupils displaying signs of being nervous such as giggling:

My name is Cole [other year 9 boy, Leon begins to laugh]

I - It's not a funny name [laughing]

Exactly, is Cole a funny name? . . . I'm in year 9, I like music [Leon still laughing]

I - He'll get over it in a minute I'm sure . . .

I like football [laughing still]

I - Come on gigglers, right so Cole likes football and he makes his mate giggle.

Ok so who are you then. . . I won't be able to hear you if you cover your mouth with your gloves.

My name's Leon, I'm in year 9, I like to laugh.

This proved challenging particularly in this group where there were two year 9 boys who knew each other, and two year 10 girls who knew each other and I was conscious of trying to make of them all feel at ease but setting clear boundaries for discussion. My strategy here was to let them laugh without coming across as overly strict while creating

an environment where they felt comfortable speaking about their experiences in front of me as well as their peers.

All pupils contributed to discussions during the first set of focus groups but there were some who appeared more confident in speaking than others. Where this was the case I tried to make sure I invited all pupils to contribute to different topics but also stressed that there was no pressure on them to speak. Study group 1 were perhaps the most talkative and this may have been due to the fact that they did all seem to know each other. In addition, all pupil participants were encouraged to record their perspectives and experiences during PE lessons in a diary, which they were given towards the end of the first focus group. It was intended to draw upon these in later interviews, however, very few managed to record anything so they were not utilised to any great extent. Potential reasons for a limited level of engagement in this practice may have been that pupils were too busy to write anything in them, they forgot or did not see any benefit or relevance to writing in them. I did not want pupils to feel like they were compelled to do something that they appeared to have little interest in so I did not pursue or enforce this practice.

During the first focus groups pupils were asked if it was acceptable for me to observe them in their PE lessons, they all agreed. The pupils were not given prior notice as to when these observations would take place in the hope that they would be a 'true' reflection of their day to day lives in school. However, it should be acknowledged that pupils and teachers may have altered their behaviour once they were aware of my presence. General points were noted during observations in relation to the content and structure of the lesson. A total of approximately 24 hours worth of observations of pupils and their PE lessons were carried out (Appendix L) initially after the first focus group interviews and before the first individual interviews with pupils. They were intended to enhance my understanding of each pupil's context and contribute to the interview process. For example some instances provided me with possible areas to explore in an interview:

I went to observe Melissa in the GCSE group and Darren wasn't there. I asked the teacher if Darren was still doing GCSE he said that Jack (head of PE) had given him a list of pupils who were no longer doing GCSE and Darren was one of them - Ask him about this in his individual interview.

They also gave me an indication of the types of relationships that I was beginning to form with some of the pupils:

We chatted as we walked over to the centre, asked her [Keisha] about her work placement as I remembered that she was very excited about it, still is, we just chatted about the group saying that it was quite small today. I asked if they had done badminton before, they had in key stage 3. She seemed relaxed to talk to me which was nice.

They were split into two halves and were working on shooting, Letitia looked bored and the teacher commented on this, she replied 'I don't like football', worked with her hands in her pockets. She has very little engagement only when it is her turn, the other girls aren't that interested. She is on her mobile for a short time and she sees me looking at her and gives me a half smile, so I smile back!

The notes on Letitia are also an indication of how pupils were able to see me as someone different from a teacher and in that respect these types of relationships contributed towards the rapport that I was able to develop with pupils.

During observations I was mindful of potential perceptions from non-participants. At no time did I intervene during lesson observations. If I was asked to explain my presence, non-participating pupils were informed that it was purely in an observational capacity. Participants were not identified to others although it did eventually become apparent who was part of the project due to their interactions with me.

The next occasion that pupils were interviewed was during January and February. These were individual interviews and, as previously highlighted, questions were based on my reflections on themes from cognate literature, themes that had emerged from the first focus group interviews and informal observations of their PE class (Appendix G). Semi-structured interviews allowed me to further explore the research questions and to also deviate in order to probe beyond the answers (Berg, 2009) and ask individuals to expand on their own experiences. Before conducting each individual interview I reviewed what that individual had said in the focus group and where relevant added individual questions to the general and emergent themes. For example, Peter had initially commented in the focus group that he thought behaviour impacted upon a pupil being moved down ability groups. This highlighted a general theme for all on 'transitioning ability groups' but I also wanted to ask him to expand on why he thought this during his individual interview:

I - you know we talked about some people who were in the lower group, I think I wrote a couple of things, you seemed to recognise that behaviour was a factor that maybe impacted, could you just expand on that?

Yeah cos there was like one person who was called Robbie who was in our class but then he swore at Mr ... [Jack] then he got moved down to bottom set.

I - Right, do you know if he came back up again?

I think he's in second set now but he isn't back in our class.

I - So you think behaviour's quite important as well?

Mmhmm, yeah (Peter, G2, interview 1).

Thus, it was essential to be able to explore individuality within experiences of PE but to also address the main aims of the investigation and, in that respect questioning developed along both general and individual themes. Interviews ran to timetable except for a few occasions where they had to be rescheduled due to absent pupils. Most pupils participated in two individual interviews (Appendix L). All interviews were held in accordance with the appropriate ethical considerations (explained in the final section) and were digitally recorded with participant assent.

During the spring term, April and May, further focus group interviews were held but with the groups formed by gender and age rather than their assigned study group classifications. These focus groups consisted of: year 10 and 11 boys; all the girls; year 7 and 8 boys; year 9 boys, respectively. The rationale for changing the focus group structure was based upon gender related themes that had emerged from previous interviews (ability focus groups and individual interviews). I therefore felt participants might prefer to discuss gender related themes in gender groups, which would make them feel more comfortable but also potentially produce richer data than if they were in mixed gender groups. For example questions centred on:

Can you explain your experiences of having PE in either a girls/boys' only group and mixed gender groups?

Do you think there are/were any specific activities that are more suitable for boys or girls?

How would you identify talent in PE for a girl and then for a boy? Are they the same thing?

The full set of questions can be found in Appendix I. Again, all pupils at some point contributed to discussions during this round of focus groups. It is not possible to say if the change in structure enhanced discussion more or less than if they had remained in their ability focus groups but there were different group dynamics that potentially

contributed towards the amount that individuals felt comfortable in sharing. For example in the all girls' group I commented in my notes that:

Three year 10 girls all seemed comfortable with each other; the year 9 girl was quiet and didn't really speak much.

Letitia did not know the other three girls and this may have contributed towards her limited input to this group discussion. I did however feel that in this group pupils did appear to be at ease discussing their PE experiences with boys and elaborating on certain discussion points. For example, Keisha and Dionne highlighted some of their 'negative' experiences that were within a mixed gender PE environment:

There was once where there was two teachers, they mixed us up and then we were playing a football game you know boys and girls and then the boys just took control of the game (Keisha).

I - So why do you think that happened then?

I dunno, they think they're better (Keisha).

I think it's to do with competition (Dionne).

I - So we are back to the competition thing?

Yeah (group).

And probably showing off in front of girls (Keisha).

There was agreement on this point across the group, a theme which the girls may have been less comfortable exploring with boys present.

Further observations were carried out before the second individual interviews. Some pupils were observed on more than two occasions due to some classes containing more than one participant (Appendix L) and I continued to try and make the pupils feel at ease with my presence. A final set of individual interviews were conducted during June and July and responses here gave the most depth probably due to the development of a rapport with the pupils over the course of the year. The interview questions were again developed from reflections on relevant research and previous themes and discussions from each individual to date (Appendix H). Structuring the final set of interview questions in this way supported the progression of pupil themes and also the development of a theoretical approach. The final sets of interviews were also specifically designed to explore the individual's beliefs and feelings about their 'selves' in relation to their ability and PE experiences which were considered perhaps the most sensitive area of the investigation. At the end of the final interviews all participants were thanked for their time and cooperation and given a small token of thanks, such as sports badges, pins, and sports covered diaries. For two of the girls who were

particularly interested in women's basketball I gave them a DVD of an international women's game as they had commented in our discussions about the lack of media coverage of women's basketball.

Despite careful planning, the daily life of school often imposed constraints on how I was able to conduct discussions with pupils. There were times when pupils forgot they were seeing me and I had to get the PE teacher to collect them, rooms were sometimes double-booked or we were sometimes interrupted, and occasionally there was disruption and noise due to the building works. The focus groups and interviews were varied in terms of how much pupils were willing to share with me and the depth of their responses; the rapport that I was able to develop with pupils was a key factor. I was also mindful of my exit and hoped that setting clear expectations and boundaries at the beginning and clarifying my purpose would help ease the exit process.

Procedures with teacher participants

The PE teachers were interviewed towards the end of the academic year with the intention of gaining an insight into how ability was conceptualised within PE in the school and to also provide support for understanding the context and their perspective of the pupil experience in PE. Although teachers were not interviewed until the end of the investigation they were observed throughout the year. At the beginning of the investigation teachers were informed of the purpose of the observations and agreed to them taking place. It was acknowledged that teachers may have felt uncomfortable about being observed and consequently may have altered their behaviour. In order to make the teachers feel more at ease I made sure that I spoke to them during an 'appropriate' time within the lesson. This appeared to make them feel comfortable with my presence and also contributed towards the development of a rapport.

Similar to the pupil procedures, the teacher interviews were held in accordance with the appropriate ethical considerations (explained in the final section). The teacher interviews took place during late June, 2009. The first teacher interview also served as a pilot and highlighted limitations of some questions which were subsequently deleted. It also gave an idea of the length they would take; this was important when negotiating the best time for teachers to be interviewed as their working days were always very full.

The teacher interviews took place at a time that was convenient for them and in a quiet but comfortable place on site and were digitally recorded. The semi-structured

questions were devised from the progression of pupil themes, lesson observations, and cognate literature. Areas for discussion focused on: their background; how PE was structured and worked in the school; their experiences and opinions of ability groups; processes for identifying talent in PE; their own definitions of talent and ability; pupil perceptions and identification with ability; the perceived impact of ability-based practices on pupils; and their overall view of the purpose of PE (Appendix J). I felt that the teachers were very open with me in their interviews and were more than happy to share their thoughts and experiences. From my perspective there were not really any moments of tension or unease. I hoped that this was due to the development of a good rapport over my time in the school.

In addition, the PE department held a sports day at the end of the year, by which time I had completed the collection of data so I felt that offering my assistance on the day was a nice gesture and would not interfere with any aspect of the study. During sports day I was able to make some final general observations and notes on how their ethos was expressed through an event such as this but also comment on how the school as a whole supported and participated in a PE related occasion. My overall view was that the day was very much about participation for all but with some competitive elements, which interestingly helped to consolidate some of the pupils' narratives. For example, one of the findings of this investigation is that predominant notions of ability in PE remain centred around physicality however, the teachers were very conscious of how certain ability-based practices could have a negative effect on young people. What was interesting from my observations at the sports day was that physicality was celebrated but it was also important for the department to be able to focus on the importance of participation:

14 July Sports day notes

Competition in sport seems to have limited emphasis, it is more so on the participation, although it was seen as important to be 'good' coming down the home straight, the better ones were celebrated and races were made exciting, others seemed a little embarrassed about how they were finishing. I wasn't aware of any single pupil who was especially celebrated for their talent. There was no singling out of individuals on the day with the results, etc but I believe that they have an achievement assembly tomorrow which is the pupils' last day, where they announce the results.

This provided additional insight into the context of the pupil experience.

Summary

By the end of the investigation, I hoped that both pupils and teachers had been empowered in the sense that they had been given an opportunity to voice their experiences to an individual who was outside those experiences where I made it clear that I was not there to judge or comment on their experiences. For the pupils, I was able to relay some of their issues back to the head of PE in a sensitive and confidential manner during an informal discussion at the end of the project. We discussed my general overview of the findings which centred on: positive acknowledgement of the job that PE teachers do in the school; ability-based practices that did not always work for all pupils nor did pupils understand some of the related processes; the structure of the lesson could be enhanced; and greater opportunities and external links would be welcomed (Appendix M). My intention here was to highlight practices that were received favourably by pupils as well as potential changes that teachers might consider implementing. The head of PE thanked me for my comments. I did intend to conduct a more formal presentation to the department however finding a suitable time to do this towards the end of the year proved difficult. I did take them in a token of my thanks for their participation in the study.

4.3.5 Ethics

Certain ethical considerations have been highlighted in previous sections of this chapter where they have corresponded with specific methodological concerns. This section explains the remaining ethical issues that were addressed before and during the investigation, initially in relation to teachers and pupils and then more specifically in relation to research with young people. The study was approved by the relevant University Research Ethics Committee in May, 2008. Ethical research “involves having a regard and concern for the interests and needs of participants and those upon whom the findings of the research might have an impact” (Fraser, 2004, p. 19).

For all participants, the home school agreement for the school was checked and followed at all times in addition to gaining school, parental/guardian consent, teacher consent, and pupil assent (Appendices, A, B, D, K). The purpose and procedures of the investigation were verbally explained by the researcher to all potential participants before any data collection began, confidentiality was assured, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time explained. The investigation also conformed to the British

Educational Research Association (BERA) (2004) guidelines which correspond to the above. In the reporting of the data, all the participants were given a pseudonym. All interviews took place in a comfortable and quiet environment and I was aware that certain content had the potential to be sensitive in nature and it was always made clear to participants that they did not have to answer any questions with which they did not feel comfortable.

In relation to conducting research with young people there are specific ethical considerations that were addressed throughout the research process. In particular, they should be active participants who are willing to take part in research that has flexible methods, semi-structured interviews with scope for detailed personal accounts, exploring topics through focus groups and diaries. Children are unable to give legal consent therefore the term assent was used to refer to their decision and agreement to participate in the proposed research (Harcourt & Conroy, 2005). Furthermore, as I was aware of some potential power relations it was considered important that pupils especially were given time to think and digest the information before committing to the project and giving their assent.

I gained appropriate CRB clearance and felt that my previous experiences of teaching PE and counselling enhanced my ability to conduct interviews appropriately as well as possessing a good understanding of young people and PE teachers in an educational context. For the pupil participants the interviews took place in view, but not hearing of other adults, either in a classroom or a small media suite with a glass window. In addition, it was emphasised to the pupils that confidentiality may be broken if they wished for the information to be shared, or, I believed that they would come to harm if the information was not shared with an appropriate other.

I was aware of ethical considerations throughout the investigation and anticipated the possibility that pupils and teachers may not want to discuss certain experiences with me. This did not particularly surface although on reflection where participants gave me a yes or no answer could have been their way of not discussing a particular topic in detail. Furthermore, there were occasions where I had to consider what I should do during lesson observations where pupils were potentially placed at risk, for example when watching a lesson taken by the school's supply teacher:

28 March observation of Peter

The group had . . . [female teacher] who is a supply teacher at the school and I think that she takes some of the girls' basketball in extracurricular. She was on the G&T day last year. She does not appear to be PE trained!

The equipment wasn't set out and there was no beginning to the lesson, the group just sat on the benches while a few put out badminton courts to play volleyball on. Peter just sat quietly talking to others next to him whilst others swung on the basketball rings and made lots of noise. No structure or organisation to the lesson at all, Peter is nowhere near as badly behaved as most of the group . . . They picked teams in between the disruption. One boy was sent out for pulling down another's pants in front of others.

Teacher had to get another teacher [Hue] to come in and tell the group off – they were a bit better after this. Don't think they knew what they were doing or what rules they were playing to.

There were times during this particular lesson where I was close to confronting the pupils, especially when the supply teacher was not in the room. I had to make a judgement about whether their disruptive behaviour was a potential risk to pupils and to weigh this up against Peter altering his perception about me and my role in the investigation. Fortunately the situation was resolved eventually by one of the more experienced PE teachers and no one was physically hurt.

4.4 Data analysis

A total of 28 individual pupil interviews, 8 focus groups, and 6 teacher interviews were conducted (Appendix L), digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. I conducted the process of transcription as I felt this would support my ability in beginning to draw some type of meaning from the data. This resulted in me listening to each transcript in detail rewinding and typing slowly in order to capture the content and any inflexions or inferences from each participant. I also tried to make sure that they were completed as soon as possible after each had taken place. An example of a pupil interview transcript can be found in Appendix N.

After the first round of focus groups, and from then onwards, all responses were entered into NVivo (©Sage, version 7) which is a software programme that is not intended to supplement the process of learning from data but provides a mechanism to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of such learning (Bazeley, 2007); this programme is more effective if used right from the beginning of the data collection process (Johnston, 2006). There are five principal ways in which NVivo supports analysis of qualitative data: Managing the data; managing ideas; querying data;

providing graphic models; providing reports from the data (Bazeley, 2007). I utilised it mainly for managing and coding my data and my ideas and interpretations.

How one interprets text is dependent upon the theoretical orientation of the researcher (Berg, 2009) and those with an interpretive perspective such as symbolic interactionism, are “likely to organise or reduce data in order to uncover patterns of human activity, action and meaning” (Berg, 2009, p. 339). Interpretive researchers focus on the individual and set out to understand their interpretations of the world where theory should not precede but follow it (Cohen et al., 2007). Furthermore, investigators work directly with experience where the data yielded will include meaning and purpose, and the researcher attempts to understand the participant’s reality at specific places and times. Thus the theory becomes a set of meanings which yield insight into understanding of people’s behaviour (Cohen et al., 2007). Key questions posed in interpretative research focus on what is happening in the here and now and also what meanings do events hold for the people engaged in them (Macdonald et al., 2009). In order to remain within the interpretive paradigm and understand each individual experience, a narrative analysis was employed (Macdonald et al., 2009).

Narratives are a medium in which individuals convey their own sense of past experiences to another and, as such, a careful analysis of the topic, content, style and context should, in principle, provide researchers access to the teller’s understandings and meanings (Cortazzi, 2001). Narratives can also be analysed as a socially interactive process of “jointly constructing and interpreting experience . . . a means of examining participant roles in constructing accounts” (Cortazzi, 2001, p. 384) which can inform reflexive analysis. It is also vital that narratives are analysed within context, and this was supported by the teachers’ responses at interview as well as my own lesson observations.

Analysis is defined as “working with the data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, coding them, synthesizing them, and searching for patterns” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 159). In beginning the analysis, early coding was conducted whereby each response was placed under one or more theme. Appendix O illustrates the initial coding and data themes. As previously explained, the data collection began with some themes deduced from cognate literature and my own pedagogical experiences upon which initial questions were based and these initial themes were also used to

group early responses. Early management of the data was important in making some 'sense' of each individual's experience as well as exploring potential commonalities and differences between the study groups. I was mindful at this point of not reducing the data too much but rather organising it as I did not want to lose the essence of each individual pupil and their experience.

Researchers attempt comprehension by using deductive reasoning, inductive reasoning, and, a combination of both (Cohen et al., 2007). It has been suggested that qualitative researchers tend to analyse their data inductively as "abstractions are built as the particulars that have been gathered are grouped together" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 6). This was the case as the investigation progressed and new themes were inductively generated from the range of experiences that were described by the pupils. This process also contributed to the development of further semi-structured questions and to the organisation of the data.

Data analysis was ongoing and each pupil's narrative was built upon throughout the year. The NVivo programme facilitated the formation of 'case files' for each individual where all coded data that corresponded to each individual was contained in one place. The software programme enables the researcher to view and create links from any theme back to any individual, as well as the transcript from which it is taken and, in that respect, it facilitates analysis of a theme but also an appreciation of the context. I found this application particularly useful in helping me to interpret the individual pupil narrative and experience as I was able to 'move around' the data either via a theme or an individual. I believe this process supported the analysis of a large amount of data especially where the coding became more complex and levels were added within a general theme or new themes became evident. The themes that emerged from analysing all the data are shown in Appendix P. Throughout the analysis, themes became more complex. For example, Figure 4.1 shows how the theme 'experiences and views on ability groups in PE' became more complex.

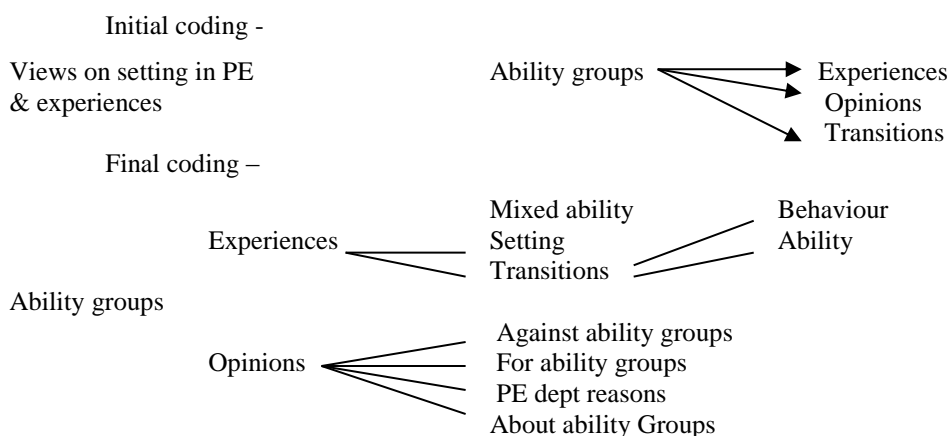


Figure 4.1 Development of one data theme

Having a combination of themes, that facilitated data reduction and organisation, in conjunction with case files, and the ability to identify each pupil or ability group within each theme proved very useful in analysing their ability group but also their individual experiences. For example, all pupils at some point discussed how they perceived themselves in terms of their ability and all such responses were grouped together. However, as many of them experienced very different contexts in PE, in analysing this data it was important to return to other things that they had discussed as part of their experience in order to make sense of their overall narrative. Hence the analysis involved a process of moving between themes, case files and ability levels. I also found it useful to write up and collate a summary of each pupil based on some of my main themes which was useful in constructing my own narrative of each individual.

In addition, I also searched for extracts and specific themes that illuminated events and feelings of experiences that were related to how pupils were perceived in terms of their ability. For example, all pupils commented on their experiences within ability groups where it became evident that those in the top sets had been there consistently whereas others had experienced transition or had remained in the lower groups. Subsequently, it was important to consider each context when analysing and reporting on their individual experiences. This procedure also allowed the data-gathering process to be data driven so that subsequent interviews could expand the knowledge already gained (Morse & Richards, 2002). It also contributed to reorganising the focus groups on the second occasion, as noted in the previous section.

As an overall process, my analysis and narrative themes emerged from both a sustained engagement with the interview material, but also from my later deployment of the theoretical perspective and conceptual framework (Bourdieu) that I chose to work with. The coding process became progressively focused by expanding, questioning and combining codes that were very much underpinned by Bourdieu's ideas of field, habitus and capital and the social construction of ability and also those that fell under the area of the potential impact upon the individual experience in PE. This can be seen to some extent in the final transference of themes in relation to my two research questions:

How is ability conceptualised within PE?

How do pupils of varying levels of ability experience PE?

This process was facilitated by the later inclusion of the teacher's perspectives and a final recoding of data in relation to Bourdieu's concepts for both the pupil and teacher responses under the themes of: construction of ability; consequences of ability (Appendix Q).

4.5 Summary

This chapter has explained the rationale and theoretical perspective adopted by this research in addressing the research questions. The methodology has been examined, the methods outlined, and an explanation of the data analysis has been provided. The next two chapters, five and six, present and discuss the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 5 THE CONTEXT OF THE PUPIL EXPERIENCE: THE CONSTRUCTION OF ABILITY IN PE

The purpose of this investigation was to explore the pupil experience in PE in relation to perceived levels of ability and to examine the processes that contribute to the construction of ability within PE. This chapter addresses the research question: how is ability conceptualised within PE? It serves as an introduction to views on ability and the key associated ability-based practices and policies within the school; it is divided into two sections. The first explores how ability and talent were defined and considers the importance of distinguishing between the context of PE and sport. The second section explores how talent was operationalised through the G&T register and PE groupings. Collectively, this serves to help outline the ways that ability was constructed and enacted within this context and underpins the following chapter which addresses the research question: how do pupils of varying levels of ability experience PE? Chapter six therefore analyses how young people experienced and interpreted the meaning of ability in their own lives.

Bourdieu's (1978, 1986; 1990) ideas help to reinforce the premise that to understand social life we need to understand the historical and social conditions that constitute the system of institutions and agents within it. They provide a basis for challenging the Cartesian notions of mind and body and reductionist views of ability that are very much a part of the field of physical education. Consequently, Bourdieu's concepts allow for consideration of broader discourses that shape the construction and experiences of ability within particular contexts. Furthermore, an exploration of the construction of ability and the individual experience in PE is facilitated through analysing the proposed interactions and relationships between his concepts of field, habitus and capital. As it has been acknowledged that the field of PE is a site for social interaction where relationships, practices, values and beliefs about ability are situated, established and reinforced (Hay & Macdonald, 2010a) ability is positioned in this research as a socially constructed concept that acquires meaning through interactions between individuals. Exploring processes and interactions is therefore essential in terms

of increasing our understanding of the ability related experiences that young people have in PE.

Physical education has been shown to be influenced by particular forces, events and ideologies (Kirk, 1988, 1992; Macphail, 2004; Phillips & Roper, 2006) that have advantaged certain groups (Bailey et al., 2009a; Evans & Penney, 2008). This study tries to account for the way that students who have been defined as more or less able may have differing perspectives and experiences of physical education. This chapter focuses on the ways that teachers articulated their understandings of how ability is defined and operationalised and also provides a comparison of how definitions may be shared between and across pupil and teacher groups. Ultimately, this chapter provides an analysis of the context for the pupil experience and serves to support the following chapter which focuses on the pupils. This chapter presents the findings under two sections: defining ability and operationalising ability.

5.1 Defining ability

Defining ability in PE is a complex and dynamic process (Evans 2004; Tranckle & Cushion, 2006). The findings from this research highlight the challenges of articulating what ability is and how it should be used within the context of PE. The teachers and pupils tended to use the terms talent and ability interchangeably. The conflation of the two concepts may have been influenced by the G&T programme at that time. Talent was the term used within the G&T policy and therefore initial questioning utilised this term. Teachers and pupils tended to use the word ability when responding and both terms tended to be used as synonyms by the participants. It therefore seemed artificial to try to distinguish between the two concepts when discussing the findings in this thesis.

5.1.1 Teachers' understanding of ability

Defining talent and ability

The teachers broadly agreed on their understanding of what constitutes a talented pupil in PE:

Um someone whose skill level is quite high in a range of sports, who has good knowledge of tactics in a range of sports so you know your striking and fielding, your invasion games and all that sort of stuff, netball, um someone who is able to pick out either tactics or skills and how they can improve (Hue).

Someone that's like an all-rounder and is able not just to perform well but also like explain what he's doing, answer questions, even if it is a mixed ability

group, like have the ability and the confidence to help others and sort of move into a coaching role (Danny).

In addition to possessing all round physical skills, Danny and Hue both emphasised the importance of knowledge, confidence, and analytical and tactical skills. This is an indication that the teachers could associate talent in PE with both physical and cognitive abilities which is in contrast to previous findings where talent in PE has been predominantly associated with physical abilities (Bailey et al., 2009b; Croston, 2013). Another teacher acknowledged the common definition of talent as referring to an all-rounder, but suggested that the notion may need to be re-conceptualised to reflect expertise in a particular sport:

I think the difficulty is that sometimes people are looking for a talent across a whole range of subjects within PE whereas perhaps sometimes I think it might just be the one area and they should be looked at as well . . . where I think when it first started [G&T programme] you were looking for them to be brilliant at everything from gymnastics to games (Alison).

Acknowledgement of the potential for young people to be specialists within a particular sport provides a critique of the current definition of talent as it potentially excludes students who excel in a smaller range of activities. The contrast between discourses that value the specialist versus the all-rounder provide one indicator of the potential for talent to be defined in different ways which may contribute to a lack of clarity and consistency in defining students as able. However, the teachers mostly agreed that talent incorporated physical and cognitive skills and knowledge in a broad range of physical activities.

Deciding who is talented

Teachers reported a range of indicators that they used to identify talented pupils in PE including: representation in extra-curricular or external sports; assessment via the NC level descriptors; attainment of the criteria on their G&T policy; their own interpretations of talent. These indicators were significant as they formed the basis for selecting students for the G&T register and setting students in ability groups.

Four out of the six teachers agreed that one indicator of talent was whether or not a pupil participated in a representative sport:

When we done our football trials in year 7 I had them all write down their names and previous clubs played for and things like that and as soon as I saw there was a boy who played for Charlton I assumed that he was going to be strong (Danny).

One implication for using this type of information as a talent indicator may be that PE teachers are more likely to hear about young people who play on school teams, or more popular sports in the community. It may also mean that certain sporting skills are over-represented in more able groups contributing to a more narrowed understanding of the skills associated with sporting talent that could serve to limit the engagement of young people interested in more alternative sports.

Additionally, all of the teachers discussed how they utilised policy in the form of the NC level descriptors to help them identify talent and compare pupils' ability levels:

We definitely use the National Curriculum levels as a guide, um and obviously they're based on you know the skills that the kids can do, the knowledge that they have (Hue).

Someone who would possibly excel beyond their peers . . . certainly achieving at least a level 5 in the National Curriculum (Jack).

The teachers' use of official guidelines may support levels of consistency in defining talent and assessing ability in PE and is in contrast to Bailey et al. (2009b) who reported only minimal use of NC levels as a talent indicator. In addition, comparing pupils against one another and identifying individuals as above the level of their peers was an important variable for the teachers in assessing ability either through team representation or the NC levels. This practice also highlights the potential for excellence in a particular sport as a talent indicator.

In contrast, the majority of teachers did not specifically mention use of their school's own G&T policy. Kieran, the G&T co-ordinator, was the only teacher who explicitly discussed it:

I - Is there any other type of guide that you might use for G&T?

It's all from the PE department policy and which is, you know, developed from the whole school policy (Kieran).

Other teachers, such as Danny and Mary did not highlight the policy as a resource for talent identification but, when asked, acknowledged that although they were aware of it they did not access it:

I - Are you aware of your policy?

What at school?

I - Here yeah.

Mmm I obviously know it; I know where it is, sorry . . .

I - But would you say you've looked at it at all?

No, only like the first few weeks (Danny).

I - So coming back to the criteria are there any other guidelines that you use to help you identify talent?

No not really, just, like we do have a policy I don't know what most of it is I'll be quite honest (Mary).

The fact that teachers made limited use of their G&T policy reflects previous studies (Bailey et al., 2009b; Croston, 2013) which have raised questions over the consistency with which G&T policy has been applied in PE. Although the reasons for its limited use were not fully explored the lack of concern with and attention to the policy suggests that it was not systematically being used. This could represent a barrier to changing or refining practices associated with identifying and supporting talented pupils.

In addition to highlighting certain indicators of talent, the teachers suggested that they primarily relied on their own perceptions of talent and ability:

I - Do you use any guidelines at all to help you ID talent in PE?

Er no, just personal experience (Hue).

I suppose what I have is sort of like a knowledge and an understanding of where students should be at . . . I haven't looked at the department policy (laughs) for so long I can't remember what the gifted and talented one is (Alison).

Both Hue and Alison emphasised their reliance on their own experience, knowledge and understanding of what talent in PE is. In exploring individual perceptions further, the teachers indicated a dependence on the assessment of physical characteristics:

I - It's mostly based on physical attributes or do you think It's based on other qualities that kids may have?

I think physical attributes mainly (Mary).

I - Do you think you predominantly look at physical skills?

Yes.

I - Do you look at any other skills?

We don't, um myself, especially at year 7 if I was setting them, I don't, I wouldn't look at the tactical side of it as much as the skills side because I think the tactics are easier to teach than the skills (Hue).

These comments suggest that the PE teachers perceived physical ability to be a key indicator of talent in PE. This finding corresponds to previous research (Bailey et al., 2009b; Croston, 2013) and also provides a contradiction within the teachers' own discourse about how they defined talented pupils.

During further discussions about their own interpretations of talent, the teachers acknowledged that they found it easier to identify talented pupils within their own areas of expertise:

I - Do you find it easier to identify talent in some activities over others?

Yes because my knowledge is better in some sports or some activities more than others.

I - So which ones would you find it easy to identify in?

Um, football, basketball and . . . well they'd be the two easiest for me (Hue).

I - Do you find it easier to identify talent in some activities over others?

Yeah I think the activities that I'm sort of more confident with I can sort of look at a pupil and say oh yeah they're good at that one.

I - So more of the games activities?

Yeah (Danny).

In the sports that I do as well I find it easier so with netball you can see, like sometimes there's the odd girl and you think they're a natural netball player just because it seems like second nature to them . . . often um and again with trampolining because I know what I'm looking for (Mary).

I think personally I find it quite easy to kind of spot a talented kid in PE, I think if you have experience yourself of playing at a high level or watching at a high level, or being involved in coaching at a high level, you can kind of, you know what the standards are to be able to play at a top level so you can see the kids that have that natural skill, that flare, that technique for a certain sport, and you can kind of spot that at a young age (Kieran).

Whilst it is expected that teachers would use their own expertise in supporting their identification of talent in PE, and arguably be more comfortable in the context of familiar activities, Jack emphasised the need for appropriate teacher training and the development of expertise across a range of activities:

I - Do you find it easier to identify talented kids in some activities over others?

No, no, not really I mean if you've got a decent subject knowledge which you should have after four years of PE teaching and four years of studying sport then you should be able to by now identify a kid no matter what the sport is (Jack).

Jack's response highlights the expectation that a PE teacher should be able to identify talent across the whole of the PE curriculum. This is important for parity if, as many of the current teachers suggested, talent in PE is defined by being a good all-rounder.

The stated practices of teachers, therefore, seem somewhat inconsistent with their broader definitions of talent supplied in the interviews (Morley & Bailey, 2006). There is a clear sense that students are identified as talented primarily in relation to their

capacity to display prowess in the range of activities associated with PE and, possibly, their reputation in a particular sport. The identification of talent initially, however, may necessitate the ability to recognise sporting potential. Alison suggested that she used physical attributes to identify individuals who may have particular sport-related skills.

Having the physical ability yes is important, being able to see possibly within a student that potential is there um and trying them on things which would perhaps suit, be it their body type or ability, being as I say I've picked up a lot of great cross country runners that's just basically looking at their body type (Alison).

I mean it's like when a class walks into a gym for the first time you can tell the kids that have done ballet and you know that they're going to be your gymnasts within that group just from their stance and poise (Alison).

The capacity for some students to display particular forms of physicality may allow them to be chosen for further sports experiences. These individuals are endowed with a type of recognisable physical capital which is represented by a particular body shape, physique, and capabilities (Shilling, 1991). It has been argued that an individual's embodied dispositions (*habitus*) can be perceived as abilities defined by the values and attitudes prevalent within a given field (Evans 2004; Shilling, 1993a). Wright and Burrows (2006) also suggested that ability in PE is a loaded concept that has been shaped by the social and cultural aspects contained within the field of PE. Within the current context, physical capital was associated with prowess in either the range of activities within the PE curriculum or in a particular recognised sport. The physical capital associated with this social field was situated in a relatively narrow range of recognised activities. However, appearance may also contribute to the valorisation of particular forms of physicality within the PE setting. Those students who 'look the part' may also receive more opportunities for participation than their peers. The conceptualisation of 'ideal bodies' within PE has been documented, and within this study there is a suggestion that the possession of an 'ideal body' can potentially lead to increased opportunities for participation and skill development (Hay & Lisahunter, 2006; Hay & Macdonald, 2010a; Hunter, 2004). This concept is fully explored in the next chapter and is integral to the pupil experience in PE.

In addition to physicality, natural ability was highlighted by two of the teachers in relation to perceptions of talent in PE:

It's to have that ability to . . . one is a natural and innate ability, but two it's the ability to work on that talent they have got um and to be able to recognise it themselves (Alison).

I think a lot of kids, once they've got ability they'll always have it, um you're kind of born with ability (Jack).

Both Alison and Jack suggested that being talented consists in parts of possessing innate abilities. Alison particularly emphasised the importance of working on this ability in order to fully achieve any potential. It has been suggested that research on talent has been overly focused on discussions of nature versus nurture which contribute to an ongoing lack of consensus on what constitutes talent (Tranckle & Cushion, 2006). The comments above indicate an awareness and belief that talent is innate but also acknowledge the importance of nurture (Bloom, 1985; Côté, 1999) suggesting that these debates remain. Although not all the teachers focused on nature when discussing ability, their comments indicate a sense that some individuals are naturally talented. This is reinforced by their belief that natural talent is recognisable. They all felt quite confident that they could spot a talented individual, even one who may not have reached their potential, particularly in the context of sports where they had been participants themselves.

The teachers' discussions of talent identification demonstrated that the practice of defining ability is a relatively informal process which relies heavily on teachers' judgement and experience with reference to NC and possibly pupils' sporting success in other environments. In this respect, teachers were highly confident in their ability to identify talented and 'potentially' talented individuals. Their levels of confidence can be supported through Bourdieu's (1990) conceptualisation of 'feel for the game' which refers to the ways individuals, through their habitus, can almost effortlessly embody forms of capital associated with a particular social field.

Bourdieu (1990) uses the example of an experienced tennis player who knows the rules of the game and can perform the required actions without thought. Thus, individuals with 'a feel for the game' have the requisite practical mastery of the field, a deep understanding of its purpose and knowledge of what is at stake; it is an example of a practical sporting sense that is produced by experience of that game. Furthermore, Bourdieu suggests that this 'feel for the game' is developed within, and in relation to, a defined context, a field, that is governed by its own set of rules, a taken-for-granted

world that flows from practical sense. Consequently, his concept, gives an idea of the encounter between the habitus and a field where ‘doxa’ portrays the ‘legitimate’ presuppositions in a given context. In the case of the current PE teachers their practical experience and mastery in their own areas of specialism, which are predominantly in team games, forms their habitus and/or doxa and as such, informs their perceptions of talent and ability.

It has been suggested that team games are associated with ‘legitimate’ values in PE. In particular, Evans and Penney (2008) highlighted how the curriculum can be ‘coded’ in terms of ‘legitimate’ values which continue to reflect historically class-based and gendered struggles (Wright & Burrows, 2006; Kirk, 2002). The PE curriculum has been criticised as reflecting many sport-based practices (Bailey et al., 2009b) and being biased towards games activities (Penney & Evans, 1999) which, are ‘traditionally masculine’ (Penney & Evans, 1997). Subsequently, it can be argued that the formation of the current PE teachers’ habitus has taken place, and been influenced by certain ‘legitimate’ assumptions about ability, from their experiences as a player and a teacher of PE. It is also an example of where the habitus and field contribute concurrently to the teachers’ perceptions of ability in PE.

Differentiating between talent in sport and PE

One illustration of the discursive power of the field in influencing perceptions of ability in PE is that all of the PE teachers made a clear distinction between talent in PE and sport.

I - Do you think there’s a difference between being talented in sport and talented in physical education?

Um, yeah, yeah I think so because I think in sport implies a lot more competitiveness so you know to be good at sport sometimes you have to do things a bit differently, um in PE, I feel PE is about involvement, enjoyment and trying to work on improving their physical abilities but not as competitive (Hue).

Hue made a distinction between the competitive nature of sport and the inclusive ideal that he associated with PE. Jack also distinguished between both:

I - Is being talented in physical education the same as being talented in sport?

Um no it’s not, it’s different cos physical education now is not just the ability to play something, it’s ability to observe, analyse, offer feedback for improvement, it’s knowledge of health and fitness um diet, all of these things now fall under the national curriculum guidelines of what we have to be teaching the kids um and certainly when you assess them you have to take into consideration their ability to offer feedback to their peers etc, and being talented at sport you can

throw a kid a football he can go and run rings around you, or put a girl in at centre and she can dominate a game but she might not know the first thing about health and fitness and how the body works and why you need to warm up and all of that so I think that's where the major difference would be (Jack).

Jack acknowledged a difference between PE and sport where he emphasised the importance of an able pupil in PE being required to meet the NC levels. He also showed that he was in agreement with the other PE teachers who defined talent in PE in relation to possessing a range of both physical and non-physical skills. He expanded on the differences further:

Obviously you'd like them, those that are talented in sport, to know that as well but I know fine well that we've got quite a lot of kids that I can think of in a year 10 team who might not be able to tell you, there's one kid in particular that I can think of in the year 10 team who probably wouldn't be able to tell you an awful lot but he's an exceptional footballer.

I - So is he talented then, because he can do stuff, do you consider him talented?
I consider him very talented because he can play the sport but in terms of physical education lessons where it's education um . . . he is talented in his ability to perform a lot of sports and activities however he won't get as high a grade as somebody else who can actually articulate what they are learning as well (Jack).

Jack maintained his belief that talent in PE and sport were separate, however, he also stated that a pupil may be identified as talented and placed on the G&T register, despite not being considered competent in relation to the NC levels. In other words, talent in sport was recognised by placing a pupil on the G&T register but talent in PE was not acknowledged in the same way. There are other comments from Jack that lend further support to this notion:

Our gifted and talented register for example is completely on their ability levels to play the sport um . . . and if someone is intelligent then they don't go on our gifted, well if they're only level 5 because they can articulate something particularly well but really as a performer they're not quite level 5, they're level 4 maybe, and they wouldn't necessarily go on our register, it's mainly school team players and high level club players that play out of school that will go on our G&T register (Jack).

Jack's comments indicate the complexities involved for PE teachers in working towards a clear definition of what talent, and therefore ability in PE is. Furthermore, this raises an important question for all stakeholders: do the related processes and practices involved in talent ID in PE help to raise educational objectives and standards for all, or does it serve to support the focus on elite sport development, which, arguably, can

undermine attempts to develop a more participatory teaching that works towards developing physically literate individuals? Indeed, educationalists (Kirk 1998; Penney & Evans 1999) have noted the pervasiveness of an elite sport ethos in PE that serves to privilege skill, competition, and winning and there is some evidence of this in the current study through certain talent ID practices. The presence of this ethos provides support for the suggestion that the field of PE continues to privilege competencies associated with organised sport which, subsequently contributes to the reinforcement of 'legitimate' notions of ability as opposed to those pertaining to a wider concept of talent in PE such as the NC level descriptors.

The apparent merging of PE and sport, in policy and practice, reinforces the association of talent with physical performance which has re-catalysed debates on whether this is an appropriate way to conceptualise talent within PE (Croston, 2013). This may help explain why the PE teachers are able to distinguish between talent in PE and sport but also merge notions of talent and ability through their talent identification processes. Subsequently, it can be argued that questions about appropriate indicators of talent in PE seem to centre persistently on debates about whether and how to distinguish between PE and sport (Kirk & Gorley 2000; Murdoch, 1990). In this respect, it should be acknowledged that the context and the wider field of PE play a significant role in informing and reinforcing understandings of ability.

The teachers' own views of talent and ability tended to be relatively consistent. However, a key tension within the field was the contrast between teachers' broad definitions of talent and ability in PE, incorporating physical and cognitive skills, as opposed to conceptualising sport-based talent, comprised of demonstrated skill in particular sports activities, with or without the associated knowledge. A second area of interest in defining the field was the tendency for teachers to rely on their own perceptions of talent in order to classify students. There was a sense of shared knowledge amongst the teachers about what talent looked like and their capacity to see potential as well as realised talent within students. In addition to their own experience teachers drew on the NCPE and their knowledge of pupils' success in particular sports outside of PE. Teachers, however, rarely use their school G&T policy to identify talent in their students. This suggests that these teachers perceived themselves as having 'a

feel for the game' in their capacity to recognise talent. The next section compares pupils' understandings of talent in PE.

5.1.2 Pupils' understanding of ability

Many of the teachers' perceptions about talent and ability were replicated in the responses from the pupils. For example, all the pupils highlighted that to be deemed talented in PE an individual was required to be a good all-rounder:

I- If I said you have to identify someone as talented what sort of things would you look for?

If they were doing well in lots of different sports (Melissa, G1, girls' focus group).

Being able to do a range of sports at a decent level (Chris, G1, focus group 1).

They're good at all sports, every single one of them not just one or two, all of them (Cole, G3, interview 2)

Similarly, the pupils also described talent through a range of physical descriptors:

They are competitive, they're going to do things (Keisha, G3, Yr 9/10 girls' focus group).

Someone that can do like all the sports quite well and is quite active (Leon, G3, Yr 9 boys' focus group).

They'd be like fast at running or good at football (Syed, G4, interview 2).

Furthermore, pupils also associated ability with physical appearance:

When they are doing it, when they're doing the activity, you can see that they are very good.

I- You mean they can physically do it?

Yeah, they're physically very good, um they're probably very muscular and healthy looking (Ben, G1, interview 2).

Pupils therefore perceived physical qualities as important indicators of talent. Ben's perception of talent corresponded with Alison's sense that talent was in part associated with appearance; in this case he highlighted health and muscularity. The pupils also highlighted the importance of non-physical skills:

But also if you're intelligent so you know about theory now as well, then you'll be in the top group too (Greg, G1, interview 1).

If they can play the sport right, if they know like the fouls and stuff, like say basketball like if it's back court and stuff like that, cos I knew, in it, I knew everything (Letitia, G2, interview 1).

They'd have to be good at most stuff, both practical and theory and GCSE (Keisha, G3, interview 1).

Pupils from all study groups included knowledge in their definition of talent. This may relate to the fact that a number of the pupils were taking GCSE PE where the importance of understanding related theoretical concepts may have contributed to their perceptions of ability.

Explanations for how individuals become talented suggested that while students acknowledged the potential for 'natural' talent, they felt that effort was also required.

I- Do you think people are born talented or do you think some people can work really hard and become talented?

I think it's a bit of both cos like if you have your higher sets that are really good at the sports then you'll generally be good at it especially if they encourage it and that, also if you like a sport and you want to get better you'll just have to work really hard, some people have to work harder than others (Melissa, G1, focus group).

I think it's mainly nurture I don't think it's anything to do with nature because you know, you're not born with a particular talent you just have to kind of find it . . . so you have to keep training to get better at it (Keisha, G3). (Yr 9/10 Girls' focus group).

I- Do you think people are naturally gifted?

To a certain point they are, it's in their genes but you still need to train (Greg, G1).

Yeah some people are naturally active and sporty yeah but you can train, you can get someone who's not naturally active to train and become good at something (Leon, G3). (Yr 9 boys' focus group).

Although Melissa acknowledged that some individuals have to work harder than others to achieve, collectively the comments emphasised a perception that having an innate ability was not enough to reach your full potential but that hard work and effort was essential in developing ability and potential talent; effort was also acknowledged but only by one of the PE teachers (Alison). The fact that effort was acknowledged across ability levels could suggest that students who do not achieve are not working hard which creates a particular vulnerability for low achieving students or it could be viewed more encouragingly, as a sign that all pupils feel that, through effort, they can develop their skills. Effort has previously been associated with pupils receiving high grades in PE (Redelius & Hay, 2009), although this was only in relation to high ability pupils.

Students recognised that teachers used membership on school or external teams

as an indicator of talent when setting groups.

In year 7 they look for the people that are in teams, like the football team and the tennis team, basketball team, and if you're in one of those then you're into the top set (Greg, G1, interview 1).

I don't know if they knew but like I used to play for London in basketball, I don't know if they knew but like, I think they . . . Everybody says that they knew my dad and erm, which I don't know if it's true or not, so yeah that's probably one of the reasons why they put me in that class [top set], they knew what my background was (Darren, G2, interview 1).

Furthermore, Darren's quote highlights assumptions that he felt people made in relation to his father who was an experienced and highly respected basketball coach. This corresponded with some of the teachers' notions about talented pupils that were based on outside knowledge as opposed to a direct assessment of their ability which may, to some extent be an 'unfair' and exclusionary practice.

The ways in which the teachers and pupils described talent indicates a level of shared understanding of how talent was constructed within PE. There was an acknowledgement that a range of physical and non-physical skills played a role in defining talent, with an emphasis on physical capabilities. There was also, however, a sense from the pupils of not being exactly sure how talent identification worked as indicated in some of their responses:

I- Do you think the teachers would describe you as talented in PE?

Probably because there's like that gifted and talented thing which I don't really understand the whole thing but um probably (Chris, G1, interview 2).

I don't know how they work it out really, it must just be, well they can't really base it on a certain sport so it must just be basic skills like, basic to me, like hand eye coordination and catching and throwing, that kind of stuff (Chris, G1, interview 1).

I- How do you think people decide who is good at PE and who isn't?

They have a computer that tells the grades (Syeed, G4, focus group).

I- How do you think the PE teachers decide who goes into the top group, what sorts of things do they look for, for people to be able to do?

That's like in year 7 they look for the people that are in teams, like the football team and the tennis team, basketball team, and if you're in one of those then you're into the top set, but then after, they assess you, they're looking for athletics and what sport you are good at but also if you're intelligent so you know about theory now as well, then you'll be in the top group too, also it's

flexible, if you're flexible then you'll probably get into the top. You have to be fit, like in you can cope with hard intensity training (Greg, G1, interview 1).

Oh I dunno, they assess you, I dunno, cos it was different, in year 10, just kind of random and the teacher goes oh alright say we'll do this and this, but say before it was like six weeks of basketball, six weeks tennis, six weeks badminton and they'd give us an assessment for each and a level based on goodness knows what and then probably based on all those levels then they'd decide where people are, I'm not exactly sure (Jeff, G4, interview 1).

So, while pupils could see that successful marks encompassed physical and cognitive skills, and that teachers might draw on reputation, there was still an element of uncertainty about the process. Exploring how ability was operationalised will help to explore these discourses and practices further.

5.2 Operationalising ability

The previous section has highlighted the ways that teachers and pupils within the school defined the concepts of talent and ability in PE. Their perceptions were based on a combination of factors drawing on educational policies, local practices, and individual experience, training and knowledge. This section explores how these understandings of talent and ability were operationalised in two key practices: placing students on the G&T register, and setting ability groups. Key emerging issues relating to setting groups include the practice of placing students in groups, the potential for students to transition between groups, and the relationship between gender and ability.

5.2.1 The G&T Register

In order to meet the requirements of the G&T programme the school identified talented pupils in PE and placed them on their G&T register. In previous years, teachers had placed students who excelled in at least one sport on the G&T register. This practice resulted in a large number of students being defined as talented and subsequently the definition of talent was increased from excellence in one sport to two which reduced the number of pupils who were defined as talented. Pupils who met the criteria were nominated by the respective PE teacher:

We have a chance to nominate every year, students who we think should be on the gifted and talented list which we um, we keep our own list . . . they do it percentages wise so in terms of the official school G&T register I'm not sure how many of them make it on there (Mary).

Mary's comments highlight a number of issues related to the processes of defining G&T. The G&T register in PE had to comply with whole school percentages which potentially resulted in some talented pupils not making it onto the register. In addition, being on the PE G&T register did not necessarily equate to being on the whole school G&T register. The definition of talent used for the G&T register was also at odds with the teachers' stated beliefs about how talent should be defined in PE as it focused more on specialism in two particular sports rather than on the ability and knowledge associated with talent in PE. The G&T processes at the school therefore illustrated further inconsistencies in the practice of defining talent within the department.

In addition to formal nominations, the teachers reported using informal processes to identify G&T pupils:

I think word of mouth amongst us is probably the greatest thing we use, identifying gifted and talented pupils for example what happens a lot is at the end of a lesson we'll all come back to the changing rooms and another member of staff will quite often come up to me and say 'get him to rugby training he's a good little player' . . . and there's been quite a lot of kids identified through that, through the PE lessons themselves (Jack).

Jack highlighted the integration of informal processes of talent ID. His comments also help to stress the importance of the teacher's habitus/doxa, and their 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu, 1990) which was reflected in their confidence in their own and others' judgements of talent in PE. It also supports the suggestion that teachers' expertise is an integral factor for perceptions of talent and ability (Bailey et al., 2009b). Additionally, the associated responses from the teachers underline a sense of harmony and shared approach in their identification of talented pupils within PE, this level of consistency may serve to support pupils in their development within PE.

With respect to the composition of the G&T register, the teachers noted that it reflected an imbalance in relation to gender, the type of activity, and to a lesser extent, the class of the individual. All the teachers agreed there were a higher number of boys in comparison to girls on the register which may simply indicate that there were more talented boys than girls. However, it may also signify that the teachers had prevalence for masculinised 'legitimate' abilities. Furthermore, the gender imbalance on the register may have served to reinforce gendered notions about ability and activity type:

I- Do you think there's a gender imbalance with who is on the talented register?
 Yes, there probably is because a lot of the gifted and talented kids we have play football and rugby to a high standard and the majority of them are definitely boys I would say (Jack).

Jack acknowledged that the register consisted of a large number of boys who played rugby and football. Other comments highlighted the prevalence of games players on the register:

I -With your talented cohort as a whole do you think there are more pupils identified in the games activities than there are in like the dance and gymnastics?

Yeah um . . . definitely there are, I would say that 75% on the G&T register are team sport players yeah, there are a few who really stand out in individual sports like athletics, gymnastics and dance but yeah the majority of the kids are team sport players (Kieran).

Both comments suggest that the register was dominated by team games which had a greater representation from the boys. This is no surprise as games continue to be a focal point within the PE curriculum (Kirk, 2004) despite efforts to make the NCPE (QCA, 2007) less prescriptive.

In relation to differences in pupils' class, Mary indicated that their whole school G&T register privileged the middle classes:

I think the school does do gifted and talented things but I think from my perspective since I joined the school if I looked at the gifted and talented lists that they produce as the overall one, there's lots of middle class double barrels on it (Mary).

Class has been previously highlighted as a contributing factor towards pupil recognition and access to resources and support within education (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Evans, 2004). However, Mary was the only teacher who raised this point.

In short, the G&T register may reflect a preference towards 'legitimate' skills and qualities which are perhaps also linked to an individual's class and gender. Where gender and activity type influence the constitution of the register it provides support for the suggestion that 'legitimate' notions of talent prevail (Bailey et al., 2009b; Evans & Penney, 2008; Kirk, 2002; Penney & Evans, 1997, 1999; Wright & Burrows, 2006). This has implications for those who may have talent or 'potential' talent that is consequently not recognised as 'legitimate'. Furthermore, it is an example that supports

Bourdieu's ideas on reproduction as the practices of the institution and agent served to reinforce notions of ability. In this case the teachers were often in agreement with each other and their informal and formal practices tended to associate certain forms of sporting capability with G&T. It also supports the suggestion that PE teachers are key agents in the construction of talent, and therefore, ability (Hay & Lisahunter, 2006; Hay & Macdonald, 2010a). There were also examples of inconsistencies between teachers more holistic definitions of talent and the more sport-based definition that was used in practice as well as the changes imposed on the formal criteria for inclusion on the G&T register. There are other practices within PE where notions of ability were reinforced, for example, how the pupils were grouped.

5.2.2 Grouping in PE

The PE department utilised ability groups across all years. This practice was set within the G&T programme with the expectation that ability groupings should be used as part of accelerated learning for the more able. The PE department's rationale for grouping pupils was based on attempting to meet a variety of different needs in relation to perceived levels of physical and cognitive ability. Consequently, each year group was structured slightly differently in terms of ability and gender which resulted in varying experiences for the pupils in the study (Table 4.1).

Ability groups

The grouping of pupils by ability within the English education system has a long and controversial history that is associated with political ideologies and assumptions about ability (Gillard, 2009; Hallam & Ireson, 2005). As a pedagogical approach it has been the subject of much debate and, despite government policy and directives many would argue that there is no consistent evidence to support the notion that it has a positive effect on attainment (Boaler et al., 2000; Gillard, 2009; Hallam & Ireson, 2005; Ireson et al., 2002; Kerckhoff, 1986). This point is particularly pertinent for the current study which took place during the government strategy of early identification and support for G&T pupils and the expectation that setting by ability would be the norm in schools. Whilst an abundance of literature exists on the practice of ability groupings it has generally been conducted within classroom based subjects and, as such, limited research exists for the context of PE (Fletcher, 2008). This has contributed to a lack of

consensus on how to group pupils in PE and the most effective strategy in supporting the diverse needs associated with a range of abilities (Chanal et al., 2005).

The PE department utilised ability groups across the whole of KS3 and retained elements of it at KS4. All the pupil participants had therefore experienced being in an ability group and some of them had experienced transitions between groups (Table 4.1). The responses from the participants highlighted various opinions, assumptions and practices within PE that focused on ability groupings which, in some instances, were seen to contribute to the reinforcement of notions of ability, but also to challenge them.

In deciding how to group pupils in relation to their ability, the PE department had experimented with two strategies. One was to assess core skills at year 7 over the first four weeks and then place them in ability groups, the other was to teach them for the whole of year 7 in tutor groups (mixed ability) and then allocate ability groups; the latter was considered more effective but both involved early identification and judgements about ability in PE. The change in strategies was mostly due to variations in resources. Regardless of how they made ability groups, all of the PE teachers were in favour of having them. The justification was based on the fact that it was the most effective way of extending pupils as they could work with others of a similar ability:

We have ability groups so that we can extend the more able pupils and not have to sort of cover the same ground where we would if there was less able pupils in the same group (Hue).

In order for kids to progress at whatever level they're at they need to be either challenged at the level that they're at, to get better if they are high level performers or they need to achieve something even if they're a low level performer, and I feel that they best do that playing against people that are able to challenge them (Jack).

Both quotes highlight the importance of challenging pupils in order to extend them irrespective of their perceived level of ability and/or normative standards. Having ability groups was therefore seen as an effective way to meet certain individual needs, particularly as the department was quite flexible in their approach to allocating groups across each year group:

The thing that I like about the ability groups here is that to me it's not just ability it's tailored in a different way because for example in year 9 although it's ability the top three sets are mixed and then there's a girls and a boys whereas in year 8 we have a top boys and a top girls and then a mixed in the middle so it actually

suits the year group as well as being just about their ability so it's trying to make the best of whatever those students are like (Mary).

This flexibility is an example of how the PE teachers consciously worked towards meeting individual needs. It was also considered by some to make life easier for the teacher:

I prefer to teach like either all the low set or all the high set, I prefer to teach just one standard then it's easy for planning and stuff (laughs) (Danny).

Grouping pupils by ability was therefore perceived by the teachers to be easier in terms of delivery and planning and also as an effective way to support all pupils. These findings are similar to those suggested within a classroom context (Hallam & Ireson, 2005). As most of the teachers were very positive about ability groups they were asked to consider any shortcomings:

I - Do you think there's any disadvantages to them?

I think that there are a few little things, I think the kids in the top group think 'oh I'm in the top group, so I don't have to try as hard cos I'm already in the top group', and the kids in the bottom group might think 'I'm crap at sports, so you know why bother trying?', but I think that also has a lot to do with how you present it to the kids as well (Hue).

Yeah um, a disadvantage could be and probably is in some cases, is that the kids know that they're not in a top set, I think it's more, I don't know if it's a disadvantage to the kids that are in the set, I think it's a disadvantage to the kids who maybe realise that they aren't, but at the same time some of the kids in the middle set do try to impress with the hope that they can move up into the top set and I suppose it's probably not nice to label kids at that age 'oh I'm in the bottom set in PE', um, and that might have a negative effect in terms of how they're gonna participate in sport (Kieran).

Hue emphasised how ability groups may impact upon levels of motivation. Kieran acknowledged the potential impact of labelling pupils in relation to their perceived ability and the prospective consequences for future participation. The teachers indicated a collective awareness of the potential impact of having ability groups in PE, particularly on pupils' assumptions about their own and others' ability. This notion has been explored where many have highlighted the importance of grouping pupils and the subsequent social comparisons that are made within groups (Chanal et al., 2005; Margas et al., 2006; Marsh & Craven, 2006; Marsh & Hau, 2003).

Despite showing a prompted awareness of certain disadvantages to ability groups, the teachers were very much in favour of having them. Additionally, having ability groups was considered effective as long as the teachers got the balance right:

If they're in the low group I think they can feel a bit down, a bit why bother then, I'm only in the low group, and I know that I've had kids say that to me and it is about your attitude towards them and what they're doing and what is achievement, um so the top group, I think some of them get a big head and you know . . . 'but I'm in the top group and 'I'm amazing' or you know 'I play for the football team, I don't have to try as hard'. Again it's about how you present that to the kids, it's a difficult balance to make because obviously you don't want to de-motivate the kids by saying well actually you're not as hot as you think you are, but at the same time, you know everyone likes to do things that they think they are good at so yeah, it's finding that balance where they need to be motivated to get better but also knowing that they are talented and they are good and they should keep doing it because success breeds success (Hue).

Hue stressed the importance of defining success for a range of abilities. He also emphasised how pupils' perceptions that were linked with their ability group could potentially impact upon their levels of motivation. Additionally, the teachers indicated that they tried to take individual factors into consideration in relation to assigning ability groups. For example, Hue emphasised that in order to extend the more able girls in year 9 they needed to be placed in a top ability group that contained boys, whereas he felt that girls of a lesser perceived ability might be better placed in an all-girls' group:

Yeah, Letitia, Nikita and Samira, those girls are very talented and they're not fussed whether they're playing against boys or playing against girls, and actually they're that good that they need to be playing against boys because other girls in there, for example [names] would be in an all-girls class but a higher ability girls class because they're more able than a lot of the other girls however they get a bit frightened when there's a boy running at them or that sort of thing, so when we sit them down and we group them we say do these girls need extending by playing with boys of similar ability or do these girls need to be in a group that's just girls and feel more safe in that environment so that we can extend them more, because as you probably know with [names] those girls they don't really get the extension because they're actually not that, they're not confident enough to get involved with the boys and therefore they get de motivated (Hue).

Hue showed that he was aware of the needs' of pupils and the importance of providing an environment that extended the most able girls in year 9 and one that was supportive of the less able girls in the same group. Alison provided a similar viewpoint:

I had some girls in the top ability group [mixed gender] because they weren't getting the competition they needed in the all-girls groups, so [name] was one, fantastic footballer but good at everything, I mean I've seen her on the astro-turf

put not only a boy goal keeper over the goal line, from the half way line, she was superb. So it meant that if she played with the girls' group she got the ball and everybody else stopped.

I - So it was to extend some of the more able girls?

Yeah the more able girls, and it did, because within a girls' group, the other girls are not tackling, they will actually think about tackling some of these girls, they were that good so it gave them that option to actually play and compete (Alison).

The comments from Hue and Alison can be seen as being responsive towards attempting to meet the needs of these pupils which, in an educational setting is paramount for learning to occur. The related ability-based practices can therefore be seen as a strategy that potentially challenged 'legitimate' notions of ability by not making assumptions about all pupils. However, they may also indicate underlying hegemonic notions of ability that are inextricably linked to gender and the associated characteristics (Kirk, 1992; Evans & Davies, 2004; Wright & Burrows, 2006). Gendered assumptions about ability remain evident in PE (Hay & Macdonald, 2010b, Hills, 2007) and Wright (1996) provides an explanation by suggesting that because PE is centrally concerned with 'work' on the body there is a focus on bodily performance, which is likely to reinforce gender ideologies (Evans et al., 2007). This corresponds with the teachers' and pupils' associations with physicality in PE.

Pupil opinions about ability groupings were similar to those of the teachers, but were varied in relation to their own levels of ability and experiences. In particular, the higher ability pupils were very much in favour of ability groups:

People get annoyed for having crap people in their group and they're not doing nothing, so you're playing football and you're going for the goal and you pass it to them and they'll lose it and you have to start all over again, it's annoying (Darren, G2, Yr 10 & 11 boys' focus group).

Well it's better for the people that are good at PE because they can get more out of it than if they were people that don't generally do PE (Melissa, G1 focus group).

Darren expressed his frustration over working with pupils who were less able and Melissa believed that the more able pupils benefited the most from ability groups. Melissa's beliefs may be associated with the suggestion that high ability students are often taught by the best teachers and are extended the most by the content that is covered (Boaler et al., 2000; Hallam & Ireson, 2005; Zevenbergen, 2005). Both their comments may also imply that the more able pupils have a particular need to be

challenged. Additionally, the high ability pupils demonstrated limited awareness of any negative aspects associated with having ability groups, perhaps because they had not had any related experiences. Opinion from the lower ability pupils was slightly more mixed. How the focus groups were organised could have impacted responses as Marlon, a less able boy, indicated that he agreed more with having ability groups when he was asked to comment within the all boys' focus group (mixed ability):

I'm for, I'm very much for, the way it definitely is in this school is like they don't point it out so much like, oh you're in the bottom group, blah, blah, blah, but they do like make it clear to you, it's quite clear (Marlon, G4, Yr 7 & 8 boys' focus group).

Yet he expressed greater disagreement over ability groupings when he was in focus group 4 (the not talented group):

Yeah if you do it like with mixed ability it, I think it would be good because like if you have someone who is not so good and someone who's quite good they can learn from each other so that's why I don't really agree with having set groups cos like if you are in the bottom group you won't really learn anything from anyone (Marlon, G4, focus group).

Marlon's two contrasting comments may be in response to his perceptions and feelings of fitting in with others in each focus group. There was one reference from the more able pupils in relation to how a mixed ability group could enhance the experiences of those who were less able:

The good reason is because you can help them like, the people that aren't so good, the people that are good at sports could go help them and um make them get better so then to make PE more enjoyable (Darren, G2, interview 1).

Interestingly, leadership skills have been highlighted by pupils as important characteristics for more able pupils, as a form of cultural capital in PE where leading, supporting and including pupils of lower ability can be acknowledged by teachers as an indicator of high ability (Redelius & Hay, 2009) and, as such, to some is a desirable and worthy skill in PE. Although Darren could see the potential for the more able supporting the less able in a mixed ability setting, he stated that he preferred to be challenged in a group that consisted of his own, and more able peers.

Despite inconsistent views over ability groups, participants in study groups 3 and 4 could see the advantages of having ability groupings for PE as they acknowledged an awareness of certain detrimental experiences of lower ability pupils within a mixed

ability environment:

Because like just say yeah there's a boy yeah and he was like wicked and there's like say Joel who's really rubbish and say you're playing football, and say Joel is goalie and he misses the ball then like obviously they're going to start shouting at him cos he's so rubbish, I don't know it's like cos they kind of lose their confidence, cos if you have more higher people than really low people then it's just really silly (Syeed, G4, Yr 7 & 8 boys focus group).

Some people can get put down when you have a group of people you know in this group and low people in that group they get put down (Keisha, G3, Yr 10 & 11 girls' focus group).

Both Syeed and Keisha emphasised how being in a group that constituted pupils who were much more able than others could result in the less able being singled out which potentially reduces levels of confidence. In this respect, having groups set by ability was considered a good thing by the less able pupils, which was consistent with the teachers' and the more able pupils' opinions:

I think that's good [ability groups] because just say you're really really slow and if you're in the top group and there's really fast people they might like you know like take the mick out of you, like oh you're slow or you shouldn't play, if you're playing football and you pick teams and like they're slow so you wouldn't want to pick them, but that's why, if all levels, if you're all the same like oh I'm slow you're slow it's the same thing.

I – Ok so you think having ability groups is a good thing?

Yeah (Syeed, G4, interview 1).

Syeed showed an awareness of the potential consequences of a mixed ability group.

Collectively, the comments indicate that there is an assumption that PE is, and should be, concerned with ability-based learning which is best achieved through ability groups. There is little evidence that integrated and differentiated learning, which can be facilitated through the use of mixed ability groups, is valued in the same way. Mixed ability teaching has received contrasting reviews and there are various suggestions as to best practice within this context (MacIntyre & Ireson, 2002). For the current school, there was almost an acceptance that teasing would take place if pupils work in a mixed ability environment and the pupils did not seem to challenge this notion. Additionally, the respective comments suggest that having PE in ability groups can act to confirm ability labels for the pupils, and as such, helps to reinforce notions of ability. This process contributes to previous findings (Evans & Penney, 2008; Hay & lisahunter,

2006; Hay & Macdonald, 2010a; 2010b; Wright & Burrows, 2006); pupils commented for example:

They've streamed it so that all the good ones are all like in group 1 and the not so good ones are in group 5, so then you can tell that the talented people are going to be in group 1 and group 2. So the people in group 5 probably wouldn't be talented (Ben, G1, Yr 7 & 8 boys' focus group).

I - What do you mean by top and lower groups?

Like in PE class you could be low or middle or high, like I'm in the middle one and some people are in the high and some are in the low.

I - Ok, what does that mean do you think?

That some people are rubbish and some people are alright.

I - You mean in terms of being good at PE?

Yeah (Syed, G4 focus group).

Ben and Syed were different levels of ability and they were both aware of the ability groupings which they consequently associated with a particular ability label. This emphasises the need to question this pedagogical practice in terms of how it functions in supporting all pupils.

Overall, there was a general agreement that having PE in ability groups was effective for all levels of ability. However, there was awareness of how identifying and labelling some pupils as more able than others impacted negatively upon self-esteem, levels of confidence and motivation, and possibly limited some pupils from achieving their full potential; this is explored in chapter six. As PE was delivered predominantly in ability groups, the participants were asked to discuss experiences and opinions of transitioning groups.

Ability group transitions

The PE teachers indicated that once pupils had been assigned an ability group there was limited movement to other groups. This lack of transition has also been found to occur in other school subjects that use ability groups (Ireson et al., 2002; Zevenbergen, 2005). The teachers' responses highlighted a number of reasons for this, for example, Mary emphasised that the consistency of the groups was important:

You know, it's quite difficult to separate them sometimes and after some years there's some you want to move up and some you want to move down but then you're changing the consistency and it's like what's more beneficial is it keeping the same group actually, which I think for girls is really important. I think if you don't change anything as they go through the school in terms of who they're doing PE around that makes a bigger difference than the fact that they're set by ability (Mary).

Mary stressed that this was especially important for the girls in PE and is another example of teachers being responsive to the perceived needs of the pupils. Additionally, there was some belief that ability levels did not alter a great deal; Alison reported that:

It's not ability, I think it's behaviour, effort, participation, it's going to be something along those lines, it's not going to be because their ability has disappeared (Alison).

Alison highlighted a number of reasons for transition but suggested that ability did not disappear and, in order for potential to be realised, pupils needed to have the right attitude to work on their ability. This links to earlier comments from Jack and Alison on talent being innate and contributes to wider debates on ability within education (Barab & Plucker, 2002; Child, 2007; Feldhusen, 2001; Freeman, 1998; Horn, 2004) and the related assumptions that ability in PE is stable (Hay, 2005). Jack's earlier comment is presented here in full:

I - Does your opinion of a child's ability ever change over the course that they're in school if you like, over the years that they are here?

Good question cos I think a lot of kids once they've got ability they'll always have it um you're kind of born with ability, you can improve certainly like certain skills but so I think probably not once you identify them as having ability you know that they've got the ability but like I said it's the other factors that come into play in terms of social life and home life and family life and . . . attitude towards school, attitudes towards training and the lessons in general (Jack).

Jack highlighted that once he had formed a perception that a pupil had ability this was unlikely to change and, similarly to Alison, he emphasised that reaching potential was down to a range of factors. Additionally, there was particular reference to a lack of transitional opportunities from the bottom up once the groups had been set:

I - Have you seen kids come from the lower groups that have ended up in the top group?

No I can't actually think of anyone who has moved from the low ability group right through to the top, I'm not aware that's happened (Kieran).

Kieran's comment is important to consider in context where the PE department allocated groups that, in some instances, were based on early and short assessments in year 7. This raises questions over the practice of early talent identification and equal opportunities. Those who demonstrated initial, and perhaps 'legitimate' ability in year 7, were placed in the top group where they would potentially stay until they left school;

thus denying any late developers opportunity and resources that may come from being on the G&T register or in a top set. This has previously been raised as a concern in the domains of education (Ireson et al., 2002; MacIntyre & Ireson, 2002) and PE and sport (Bailey et al., 2009b; Howe et al., 1998; Martindale et al., 2005) and, remains a contentious issue in terms of reaching any pedagogical consensus on how to best support all pupils in PE in reaching their full potential.

In contrast, the teachers provided some examples of where they had altered their perceptions of pupils' ability which resulted in group transition:

I think generally they do tend to stay quite the same, they are maybe from year to year I would say, in the classes that I've taught there's been three to four changes, either going out or coming in from another group, based on how they are performing with me, if it wasn't up to standard they'd be moved down, um and you know people in the middle groups being moved up (Kieran).

Because we can clearly see that they're not excelling in the group that they're in, they've maybe gone stale for whatever reason they're just cruising and we feel that they'd achieve more potential . . . if they moved up or even down, even down . . . we feel that moving down they'll achieve more being in a lower group, and whether that's to sort of make them realise that they need to work harder to warrant staying in a top group or whether it's that they'll actually achieve, they're with people who are of similar intelligence levels in the lower group, could be either or (Jack).

Kieran and Jack highlighted the importance of motivating and challenging pupils by the ability of the group that they were in. In addition, behaviour was highlighted as a variable for group transition by the teachers and the pupils:

I am for having ability groups as long as it's ability by ability and not behaviour cos I think that is the danger of having ability groups is that automatically the badly behaved students get pushed into lower ability groups when actually if you look at numbers . . . it's those kids that end up doing better at PE and therefore they should be in the top set so as long as that doesn't come into it then I'm for it (Mary).

I think with lack of effort, lack of motivation, sometimes behaviour which I suppose can be linked to motivation and whether they're interested in what they're doing or not, but certainly there have been pupils moved down for poor behaviour which has led to poor performances in their sports as well (Kieran).

I- Why do you think some people do change groups?

Their behaviour, cos I remember last year um one of my teachers that I had, he was like, it depends on your behaviour to get into the top group because you're just talented at that but you're not enthusiastic about it, you're not likely to go in the top group cos you won't persevere (Dionne, G3, girls' focus group).

Well like they've gone down cos they're not behaving (Ben, G1, Yr 7 & 8 boys' focus group).

There was a boy who used to be in the top group then he started to like swearing at Mr . . . [Jack] then he got moved to the bottom (Peter, G2, interview 1).

Kieran and Dionne particularly associated behaviour and attitude with levels of motivation and performance and in this respect was their justification for transition. However, collectively, the comments indicated that bad behaviour could be punished by moving a pupil down to a less able group which, as an educational practice, Mary raised caution over. Where there was group transition, some teachers were aware of the implications:

I could move a kid up and put them off PE for the rest of their life and I've just got them to a point where they're enjoying it . . . I think we need to be careful about just moving numbers around cos that kid who's done really well in that group, it could destroy confidence, it could destroy everything that they've you know, by moving them, they deserve to be there . . . there's no easy answers but the opportunity has got to be there which is why sometimes I'll go via the route of extracurricular (Alison).

Alison highlighted the potential negative impact on confidence and levels of motivation on pupils moving to higher groups. Other research has also discussed the potential for transitions to lower ability groups to impact negatively upon student's self-concept and motivation to continue learning (Boaler 2005). The implications of transition from the pupil perspective are explored as part of their PE experiences in chapter six.

In summary, the teachers' responses demonstrated that in general they were thoughtful in how they grouped and/or moved pupils in relation to their ability; a practice that should be commended. There are however, some concerns in terms of assuming that ability levels did not change and using behaviour as a reason for group transition, factors which have also been identified in research within the classroom setting (Ireson et al., 2002). Additionally, the PE teachers' views suggest a need to more fully understand the impact on young people in order to effectively support their experiences in PE.

Gender groups

The PE teachers stated that a variety of activities were offered to all pupils and they were often taught in mixed gender groups. There were other occasions where activities were taught in single-sex groups, for example, rugby at KS3 (all boys) and

dance at KS4 (all girls), although this was not consistent across all year groups. Additionally, the majority of pupils taking GCSE PE and BTEC in year 10 were boys and both the GCSE dance groups were all girls. Delivering PE through single-sex groups remains commonplace in coeducational schools (Hills & Croston, 2012; Lines & Stidder, 2003). It is a traditional practice that is based on perceptions of differences between boys and girls (Lines & Stidder, 2003). Having some activities in single-sex groups was justified by the head of department where judgements were made about which groupings were best for pupils in a variety of circumstances:

I do admit, it is not being sexist but we do have sort of single-sex classes we know the kids and we know what will work and whether if we have combined sex groups then if they will just mess about or whether they will be focussed enough to do what we want them to do (Jack).

Jack believed that grouping pupils by gender was sometimes essential in supporting pupils' learning needs. Additionally, Alison highlighted the positive effect that gender groupings had on some of the girls:

I think when I first came here it was mixed groups as well [gender] and the girls, the level of girls' PE was appalling um, one because there were far more boys in the school when I first came here, there were all boys forms and um, I would say the boys outnumbered the girls probably two thirds boys, one third girls if that, and in PE, especially some of the Turkish girls they really had a major problem participating with the boys, so therefore they didn't. By making all girls groups it transformed girls PE in this place (Alison).

Alison emphasised how single-sex lessons could provide a supportive environment for girls, a strategy that has been highlighted as increasing opportunities for girls' participation and interaction (Derry & Phillips, 2004; Hannon & Ratliffe, 2007). Furthermore, Alison also stressed the importance of considering cultural differences in addition to gender. Both comments highlight the teachers' efforts to make PE an environment that was conducive to learning for all their pupils. However, it can be argued that structuring some activities in gender groups could serve to reinforce rather than challenge traditional ideas about 'legitimate' activities for boys and girls (Cockburn, 2001; Lines & Stidder, 2003; Paechter, 2003). This can be seen in the current study where some of the boys indicated that they continued to associate certain activities with a specific gender:

Girls activities would be something like art, um girls' football, um gymnastics and dance, I can't see a boy going 'yes dance!' (Ben, G1).

That's more girls (Marlon, G4).

I - So you think they are more kind of traditionally stereotyped?

Yeah, yeah, stereotypes (Ben, G1). (Yr 7 & 8 boys' focus group).

Yeah gymnastics, it's really hard, say you were a professional gymnast and you were a boy, it's definitely a lot harder to get started than if you're a girl (Marlon, G4, Yr 7 & 8 boys' focus group).

It's difficult being a boy gymnast cos people always take the piss, it's not even funny (Ben, G1, Yr 7 & 8 boys' focus group).

I - Are there any type of activities that you think are better suited to boys or girls?

football and netball.

I - Football and netball for who?

football for boys and netball for girls (Cole, G3).

I - Ok any other activities?

Tennis (Cole, G3).

Rugby, for boys (Peter, G2) (Yr 9 boys' focus group).

The boys' comments suggested that their perceptions of certain sports had not been completely challenged in relation to gender. Whilst it is not possible to say exactly where these perceptions originated, it can be suggested that where activities are only offered to certain genders and/or taken in gender groups, this can serve to reinforce beliefs about the gendered appropriateness of specific activities which is in line with previous research (Cockburn, 2001; Lines & Stidder, 2003; Paechter, 2003). The girls made comments that indicated some agreement with those of the boys:

I - Would you say that there are certain activities that people think of as girls' activities and boys' activities?

Yeah it's still like that (Dionne, G3)

Football and stuff (Melissa, G1). (Yr 9/10 girls' focus group).

There's obviously some sports linked with boys and some sports linked with girls (Keisha, G3, interview 2).

The girls were however less explicit than the boys in identifying particular activities.

In addition, there was an acknowledgement that both boys and girls were able to excel in activities. This is similar to Hay and Macdonald (2010b) who reported that, on the whole, pupils did not believe that there was a gender difference in the potential to achieve in PE. This was a general observation that was provided by some of the older pupils in the current study and is summarised in a comment from Chris:

There's definitely a girls' football team, but if the boys see a girl's really good at football they'll definitely think, they're not gonna think 'oh she's good at football' and walk away kind of thing, they'll think 'damn she's good at football', and it's like there's no difference, they might not, they'll probably want to play with her a bit but they won't want to be in the team with her because it's just different boys and girls mixed together but they can still appreciate if she's good (Chris, G1, interview 2).

Chris highlighted that boys could acknowledge able girls in PE. However, he also indicated that boys would not want to be on the same football team as a girl and this perhaps is an indication of existing underlying hegemonic assumptions that are related to ability (Evans et al., 2007). There are further comments by the pupils that lend support to this notion. In particular, most of the pupils considered boys to be much more competitive than the girls:

I- How much emphasis is placed on competition and winning in your PE lessons?

I think there's a lot, especially with the boys, they're so competitive, honestly, you have to do this, you have to do this well (Keisha, G3, Yr 9/10 girls' focus group).

Like they [girls] don't like playing against the boys as much, cos they think the boys are more competitive (Chris, G1) . . . definitely with football boys are really competitive and girls like just don't care (Jeff, G4) (Yr10/11 boys' focus group).

Definitely boys are more competitive, even girls will say that (Marlon, G4)
Boys are more competitive (Ben, G1) (Yr 7/8 boys' focus group).

The notion that boys are much more competitive than girls was apparent across a range of pupil responses. Furthermore, there were other pupil responses that emphasised associations between gender and ability:

Girls are basically more intelligent but boys are more sporty (Ben G1).
Exactly, you see boys doing the more rowdy subjects like PE, they're more interested in it . . . girls, they're like aaww, do I really have to do PE (Marlon G4) (Yr 7/8 boys' focus group).

Boys are good at most sports (Letitia, G2, Yr 9/10 girls' focus group).

I- So do you prefer it with just boys?

Yeah cos the girls just stand on the pitch and they don't want to play and everyone starts shouting and then gets frustrated (Cole, G3. interview 1).

These responses are an indication that some assumptions existed about boys and girls interests and ability in PE. Additionally, some of the pupils were seen to comment on physicality and gender:

Like a rugby player, you can just imagine is really strong and hard, when a ballet dancer would be very soft and light.

I- Ok and you associate those characteristics with boys and girls?

Yeah cos you can't really imagine a girl being really hard and strong (Ben G1, interview 2).

Yeah cos like some girls aren't as physical, they prefer to like sit . . . I think it's different yeah because if a boy's really good at PE yeah people are like he must be quite strong yeah and quite good at stuff (Leon G3, Yr 9 boys' focus group).

Ben and Leon highlighted how they linked physicality with boys and ability, a notion that corresponds to the earlier observations on the importance of physical appearance and capital (Hay & Lisahunter, 2006; Hay & Macdonald, 2010a; Hills, 2006; Hunter, 2004). There are further comments that indicated a relationship between ability and male characteristics:

I- Is a girl who is good at football or rugby considered talented?

Um . . . yeah, but then some people would just go 'oh she's tomboyish' (Dionne, G3, interview 2).

You see other boyish girls who are like PE is all right (Marlon G4) (Yr 7/8 boys' focus group).

I- Would that be seen as a cool thing and a good thing to be good at sport?

Yeah but the boys think aaww she's manly (laughs) but I don't care.

I- Oh all right, interesting, so if a girl, so explain, so if a boy's good at sport . . . He's cool, but if a girl's good at sport she's manly (Letitia, G2, interview 1).

These comments highlight an association between being able in PE with male characteristics. This finding provides support for the suggestion that aspects of PE continue to exist in a masculinised form (Kirk, 2002) where qualities, such as strength, power and competitiveness are valued and assigned capital. This is of concern as Evans and Penney (2008) emphasise that the experiences for girls and boys in PE are likely to reflect, and reinforce, stereotypical images, behaviours and attitudes that also reconfigure 'legitimate' notions, and experiences, of ability. It also suggests that the field of PE has not been able to completely divorce itself from historical perceptions of masculinity and femininity and their associated places and positions within PE (Evans

& Penney, 2008). This notion is further illustrated by a comment from Hue whose perceptions of ability differed in relation to the gender of the pupil:

I tend to mark differently based on if they're a boy or if they're a girl just because I think that maybe the physical attributes of the person are different as well . . . If I was marking a boy and I was going to give them a level 5 I would need to know that they understood the tactics and I'd also need to see that their skills are generally fluent, linked together well, and they can do a range of skills. If I was marking a girl and I knew that they were tactically aware and I can see that they know how to do a range of different skills but against a boy they're not as fluent, but against girls they're, you know, you can see that they're above the level of someone else then I would give them a level 5, so I sort of mark the girls against the girls based on the fluency of their skills and that sort of thing.

I - So if I've understood correctly what you just said then you're a bit easier with the marks for the girls and a bit harder on the boys if you like?

Yeah.

I - Cos you're comparing them against their own genders?

Yes (Hue).

Hue believed it would be unfair to compare boys and girls together when assessing their ability levels due to their physical differences. This corresponds to Hay and Macdonlad (2010b) who reported on a high ability pupil's belief that higher standards were set for boys over girls in relation to achievement potential. Several other teachers in the current study provided a similar perspective to Hue, and Mary provides one explanation:

It's one where I get a little bit, what's the word, I get defensive if you like again because of the, in the department that if we're looking for a level 6 in a boy should a level 6 in a girl be exactly the same thing or should we be taking into account the balance because I think when we don't take it into account and then we get to when we do our end of key stage 3 assessment it's like 'what are you telling me only four girls in the whole of year 9 are a level 6'. I wouldn't agree, just even at a guess of what they're all like that they will have done more to prove that they should be at that level, however if we're looking for them to match every time then we're stopping them from getting that level (Mary).

Mary highlighted the importance of fairness and argued that it may be more equitable to consider boys' and girls' ability on different achievement scales. The teachers' and pupils' discussion of gender groupings and the relationships between gender and sporting experience indicate the ways that perceptions of gender relate to understandings of ability which subsequently inform teaching practice and impact pupil experience (Evans & Penney, 2008).

In contrast to the various processes that have been suggested to reinforce 'legitimate' notions of ability, in this research and previous studies (Evans & Penney,

2008; Hay & Lisahunter, 2006; Hay & Macdonald, 2010a, 2010b), there are occasions within the school where these notions are, to a certain degree, challenged. For example, many respondents highlighted a particular group of year 9 girls as having high levels of ability in PE:

We've got a year group in the school and the girls are much, much stronger than the boys . . . like our year 9 girls are really, really strong at sport and all different types of sport (Danny).

All the teachers acknowledged the high ability of the girls in year 9. Danny described the girls as strong and by doing this he emphasises the physical component of ability (Evans et al., 2007; Hills 2007). Furthermore, many of the girls are highlighted as being successful in extracurricular teams, particularly basketball, which helps to assign them further symbolic capital as voiced by a range of pupils and teachers:

The girls don't have a football team! They don't play much football, the boys get like further than the girls, they pay more attention to the boys, but the basketball they pay a lot of attention to the girls in basketball than the boys (Cole, G3, Yr 9 focus group).

Also you've got the year 9 girls basketball, who are, and they're just good at everything (Hue).

Due to their high levels of ability they hold symbolic capital where being physically skilled also confers social value in the context of PE (Hay & Macdonald, 2010b; Hills, 2007). An example of Letitia's 'legitimacy' and acceptance as part of a more able group can be found in her positive experiences within a mixed gender PE environment:

I - So how do you feel then, are you quite happy that you've always been in a mixed group, is that good, bad?

I find it good cos I learn more.

I - Yeah, how do you mean?

Cos boys are good at most sports yeah and then I want to become good like them, so I'm more determined (Letitia, G2, Yr 9/10 girls' focus group).

Letitia highlighted how she felt challenged to learn in a mixed gender group where she wanted to emulate the ability of the boys which also contributed towards motivating her. Letitia's experiences are in contrast to others where it has been reported that girls can achieve and enjoy PE more in a single-sex environment (Derry & Phillips, 2004; Olafson, 2002) and, therefore contributes to debates on how best to group pupils in PE in relation to gender (Hannon & Ratliffe, 2005, 2007; Hills & Croston, 2012; Lines & Stidder, 2003). Interestingly, despite holding symbolic capital there was some indication

that the opportunities and teacher/pupil interactions of the two talented girls could differ to those of the talented boys:

Girls' cricket is always like at lunch and it's a bit annoying because like you want to eat lunch and like it's, lunch is so, such a short amount of time that maybe it would be better to have like an after school session cos boys are always after school in the nets and the girls weren't (Melissa, G1, interview 1).

I- So who takes you now then?

Mr ... [Hue]

I- Ok so you've not had many matches.

He pays more attention to the boy's team cos he's normally their coach (Letitia, G2, interview 1).

Letitia and Melissa believed that they could be given less priority and time in comparison to the boys and this belief supports the suggestion that teacher treatment and expectations of pupils in PE can differ in relation to a pupil's gender (Berg & Lahelma, 2010; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Nicaise et al., 2006; Wright, 1996); it is also an indication of the complexities involved in a clear conceptualisation of ability in PE.

In addition, one of the PE teachers discussed how this group had received particular support:

I teach a year 9 group which were the first year group where we started doing that and it's a top set and it's mixed and it's quite frightening how good they all are and, particularly the girls, the group is 50/50 girls and boys, and the girls are, I would say as a whole, probably better overall than the boys which is quite unusual, and having that group, now they're in year 9 they've been in that group since year 7. The consistency . . . they're really confident in their ability and I can't see them losing that over the next year because I think it's really built up the fact that they know they should be there and they're quite happy to compete on that playing field.

I- And you think that's helped the girls?

Yeah I think that if they hadn't have been in that, if they'd have been in an all-girls top set where inevitably the standard might not have been as good but it would influence you know maybe their dropping out or dropping their interest in PE and actually I think it's helped them sustain it (Mary).

What is interesting from Mary's explanation is that this group of girls had received consistent and very positive messages about their levels of ability which may have been a contributing factor to their sustained high levels of ability and confidence. This highlights the importance of positive messages and experiences in PE and supports the notion that where initial assumptions about ability are 'correct' and appropriate support and pedagogical strategies follow, this has positive results; it emphasises the importance

of recognising the needs' of individuals early. It is also an example of how the PE department successfully experimented with groupings in order to support the more able pupils and is an example of ability groupings working for these particular girls. This is in contrast to the research that exists in other subjects where mixed ability grouping is championed as the most beneficial system (Gillard, 2009). It also indicates how the PE teachers have been able to challenge some of the stereotypes about girls' ability in PE. There are other comments that can be seen to reflect this type of ethos within the PE department, for example, teachers and pupils considered a talented boy and talented girl to be no different:

I- Would you say that your description of a talented person in PE would be different for boys and girls at all?

Um no, not really, just because they've got the attributes that make them good in a sport or a range of sports, it's like the same (Danny).

I think there's no difference there [gender] um on what talent is (Alison).

I- Do you think there's a difference in terms of how you might identify a boy as talented and how you might identify a girl who is talented, do you think they would be different things that you would look for or do you think they would be the same?

The same (Jeff, G4)

Pretty much the same. . . . (Chris, G1). (Yr 10/11 Boys' focus group).

I- Do you think it has the same status if you're a girl or a boy who is good at PE in this school, do you think they are looked at the same?

Yeah.

I - There's no differences whether you're a boy?

Not really . . .

I - Is there a sports girl of the year award?

Yeah . . . I think they would both be thought of as the same even if it's different sports (Greg, G1, interview 2).

I - Would a girl be considered talented if she was good at football or rugby for example?

Mainly football, there's a lot of girls in our school that are good at football, a lot of girls in my year as well, probably not a lot of girls in my year . . . but there is a lot of girls in younger years and stuff that are good . . . I wouldn't mind having girls on my team, it doesn't make much of a difference to me, all playing sport (Darren, G2, interview 2).

Collectively, these comments indicate that the teachers and pupils are able to view ability separate from gender highlighting that notions of ability are not always

configured in relation to gender (Evans et al., 2007) and that, in some instances, a reconfiguration is possible.

The above examples show that the school has integrated certain processes that have enabled 'legitimate' notions of ability to be challenged as well as reinforced in relation to gender. Key ways in which perceived gender differences impacted ability groupings included: the ways in which the pupils were grouped in terms of their ability and gender; the constitution of those groups; and who was placed on the G&T register. The existence of a group of skilled girls, and girls who enjoyed mixed lessons, also served to challenge traditional gender-based practices. The teachers' comments on gender indicated a sense of importance and belief in being responsive to the needs of their pupils which could differ in relation to perceptions of girls' skills, attitudes and interests. Gender-based notions of ability remain evident within the field of PE that continue, at times, to be based on biologically determined differences, social expectations, and perceptions of embodied capacities (Wright & Burrows, 2006). This is an indication of the power of the reinforcement processes within the wider field of PE, despite challenges to the status quo; suggesting that inconsistencies and associated debates remain.

5.3 Summary

This chapter has outlined the ways that ability was constructed and enacted within PE. There is strong support for the idea that ability is a socially constructed concept that acquires meaning through various interactions, between individuals and also between individuals and the field. Understandings of ability and associated ability-based practices are often seen to reinforce 'legitimate' notions of ability but there are also occasions where they can be challenged.

Notions of ability were fairly consistent and incorporated physical and cognitive aspects however the more common perception was one that associated ability with physical prowess. The related tensions contribute to discourse and practices within the field of PE that have evolved from previous, and continuing, debates on the distinction between PE and sport. The teachers were particularly confident in their ability to identify talented individuals which they based on a range of factors drawing on educational policies and local practices. However, it is their experiences and areas of

expertise (*doxa*) that make a significant contribution. Contrastingly, the pupils were not completely clear on how talent identification worked.

Understandings of talent and ability were operationalised in two key practices, placing pupils on the G&T register and setting ability groups. Many related processes served to reinforce 'legitimate' notions of ability where gender emerged as a factor influencing these notions and consequently some ability groupings. This is an indication of the power of the reinforcement processes within the wider field of PE. There were also some examples of where these notions of ability were challenged.

This chapter provides the context for the pupil experience which Hunter (2004) emphasises is crucial as it allows for an acknowledgement of the relational positioning of the individual within PE. The context here is very much based on pupils working in ability groups which remains a contentious pedagogical issue (Gillard, 2009; Hallam & Ireson, 2000; Kelly, 1978) in relation to levels of attainment (Boaler et al., 2000; Gillard, 2009; Hallam & Ireson, 2005; Ireson et al., 2002; Kerckhoff, 1986), self-esteem, access to opportunities and differential expectations (Boaler et al., 2000; Hallam & Ireson, 2005). Furthermore, a wide variety of factors appear to influence the placement of pupils into ability groups which can result in scope for pupils being misplaced (Ireson et al., 2002). This combined with a lack of transition (MacIntyre & Ireson, 2002) and inaccurate initial placement may have damaging consequences for young people, particularly where pupil attainment is influenced by their ability group (Ireson et al., 2002). These are all important potential consequences for the current pupils who experience PE in ability groups.

What follows is an in-depth analysis of the ways that pupils of differing abilities are affected by these pedagogical discourses and practices and how it impacts their sense of their own physical identities and their capabilities to succeed. The defining features of the field highlighted in this chapter act to reinforce, and occasionally challenge, the processes already operating within the field. Therefore, in gaining greater insight about a pupil's identity in PE, it is vital to understand the context (the field) and the interrelated roles of habitus and capital.

CHAPTER 6 THE PUPIL EXPERIENCE IN PE

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has highlighted ability-based practices that emerged within the research. Teachers' understandings of ability and talent were constructed in relation to particular notions of sporting bodies with a distinct emphasis on physicality within team games. These views were shown to influence how ability groups were formed and experienced. Previous research has indicated that PE can be conceptualised as a social field that bestows value on particular bodily forms, activities or performances that create a category of physical capital. Within PE physical capital is related to other forms of capital (Shilling, 1993a) but can differ within particular social fields. Understanding the discourses and practices that help to define physical capital in a particular social field (Bourdieu, 1986) provides one mechanism for understanding the ways in which particular resources are acknowledged, or rewarded and acquired within the current field of PE (Hay & Lisahunter, 2006; Purdy, Jones & Cassidy, 2009).

Furthermore, Bourdieu's concepts have been shown to be particularly useful in understanding the ways that social discourses and practices serve to reproduce existing hierarchies and forms of organisation in schools. Where inequalities do exist, Bourdieu's explanation of a differentiated society assists in conceptualising the possible unequal ways in which pupils of different abilities experience PE. However, his concepts may be less useful in terms of explaining how individuals exercise their own agency (Shilling, 1993a). The implications of this are less well understood and this chapter helps to explain how ability-based practices can influence how pupils interpret and experience ability in PE and their views of themselves as physically active individuals.

In this study, hierarchical understandings of ability influenced teaching practice and the allocation of ability groups which subsequently formed the basis for the pupil perspective and experience. Overall, the pupils in the top and lowest PE ability groups remained in their respective groups throughout their secondary school experiences. These pupils formed study groups 1 (Melissa, Ben, Chris, and Greg) and 4 (Jeff, Marlon, and Syeed). Some of the other 'talented' pupils, study group 2 (Darren, Letitia, Dwayne, and Peter) predominantly experienced PE in the top sets but had some experience of transition. In contrast, pupils in study group 3 (Cole, Leon, Dionne, and

Keisha) were less clearly positioned in relation to ability and had more experience of transition between groups and greater ambiguity in how ability impacted their experience and attitudes.

The ways that pupils of differing abilities were affected by such pedagogical practices and related ability discourses that permeate the social field are the focus within this chapter which specifically addresses the question of how do pupils of varying levels of ability experience PE? Perspectives associated with ability and schooling such as those presented by Bourdieu, are employed in the analysis of the individual narrative. A further intention is to link broader social discourses and practices with individual subjectivities and social psychological approaches that explore teacher-pupil relationships and interactions (Chanal et al., 2005; Jussim, 1991; Kolb & Jussim, 1994; Marsh & Craven, 2006; Marsh & Hau, 2003). As this investigation was mainly concerned with the pupil experience the teacher perspective is introduced when contextualisation is required. This chapter analyses the findings under two sections: shaping ability-related identities; ability-based practices and the consequences for young people.

6.2 Shaping ability-based identities

This section begins with an overview of how the pupils perceived and identified themselves in relation to their understanding of ability and proceeds to explore how PE contributed to the shaping of their ability-related identities. Pupils were asked to rank their current performance in their PE group on a scale of 1 to 10. The intention was to gain an insight into how pupils perceived their levels of ability in comparison to others in their group rather than to ascertain any absolute values for comparison across all the study groups. They were also asked to expand on these in later interviews and rank themselves across different activities. Pupils tended to identify with the ability perceptions held by others; however, the pupil narratives reveal the complexities involved in the formation of ability-related identities where the social context was influential, for example the type of activity or the group they were in. In exploring various contexts, processes and interactions, this section underpins the final section, which raises considerations for stakeholders' existing practices in PE and the implications for young people.

6.2.1 Pupils' identification with ability

The talented pupils (study groups 1 and 2) consistently described themselves as talented, irrespective of the fact they had been defined as 'successful' or 'unsuccessful' for the purpose of the study:

I would describe myself as talented in PE (Ben, G1, interview 2).

I've been talented, I've been gifted and talented in PE since primary school (Letitia, G2, interview 2).

Yeah . . . always thought I was talented (Darren, G2, interview 2).

They also ranked themselves as the highest in comparison to others in their PE group:

I- So in the group that you're in for example, let's say the best person in that group is a 10 and the worst person in that group is a 1, what number would you give yourself in the group that you are in for the moment in PE?

A 10, amazing. . . . I'm not modest at all (sarcastic) (Greg, G1, interview 1).

I - What number would you give yourself?

In PE overall?

I - Yeah.

9 or 10 (laughs) (Chris, G1, interview 2).

All the talented pupils gave themselves between 8 and 10 for their overall performance in PE. In addition, they identified as being recognised by others for being good in sports and for possessing a range of skills associated with sporting prowess:

I'd always say sporty, that's one of the first things I would say . . . people know me as the one who's kind of good at sports (Chris, G1, interview 2).

I'm a sporty person (Darren, G2, focus group 2).

I'm a practical person . . . self-motivated (Darren, G2, interview 2).

I can communicate, I like sports . . . hard working . . . Yeah team work, yeah I can work in a team (Letitia, G2, interview 2).

They identified as sporty, hardworking, motivated, and possessing practical and social skills. The talented pupils' comments help to illustrate the consistent nature of their perceptions of their own ability which accords with their experiences of being in the top ability groups.

In direct contrast, those in study group 4 also portrayed themselves in a fairly consistent manner however they perceived themselves to have very little ability in PE:

I wouldn't say I'm talented but I'm probably more talented in other subjects, it [PE] is one I like but I wouldn't say my strongest (Marlon, G4, interview 1).

Um I'm alright but [PE's] not my talent, no I'm good at it, I'm not talented . . . I'm really bad at tackling and um the running one in athletics (Syeed, G4, interview 2).

I'm not very skilful but I can tackle . . . I'm not amazing at it but I'm not so terrible, I can kick it, the ball . . . I'll try and I have a go, and do it for fun . . . I'm not the most skilful person . . . I'm not a particularly sporting person (Jeff, G4, interviews 1 and 2).

Pupils in this group did not identify as talented, 'sporty' or particularly skilful in their PE lessons. However, their descriptions of their PE capabilities were more complex than simply defining themselves as less talented. For example, some pupils identified sport-related capabilities such as effort, specific skills, and attitude. Interestingly, these could be qualities that indicate engagement with, and enjoyment of PE, but do not always feature in traditional definitions of success in PE. They did not feel that sport was part of their broader identity and ranked their current overall ability as the lowest out of all the participants scoring themselves between 4 and 6.

I'd probably be like a 5 cos like I'm not good but I'm not bad (Syeed, G4, interview 1).

Probably a 4 or 5 because I know there are loads of people who are really good, I'm not saying I'm not good but I just know a few people are better than me (Marlon, G4, interview 1).

Despite providing the lowest overall scores, Syeed and Marlon appeared to position themselves in the 'middle' of their respective PE groups where they considered themselves to be neither 'good' nor 'bad'. Overall, the self-assessments of ability provided by pupils in study groups 1, 2 and 4 aligned with those held by the teachers.

In comparison, pupils in study group 3 seemed less sure of their position; in their own initial descriptions they were quite clear that they were not talented, 'just average':

I - Do you think you are talented in PE?

No, I think I'm just average (Cole, G3, interview 1).

I think I'm good at basketball, running you know, but I still have a lot to learn as well, so I wouldn't say I'm talented just yet . . . I think I'm just average (laughs) I think just a good old average (Keisha, G3, interview 1 and 2).

Keisha identified some activities that she could do but her overall perception was that she was average. Pupils in this study group ranked their overall ability between 5 and 8, for example:

I'd give myself a 6 because I don't want to say that I'm the best one cos I don't think I am, but then I don't think I'm the worst, I'd say I'm roughly in the middle (Dionne, G3, interview 1).

Dionne placed her ability somewhere in the middle of her dance group. The experiences of this study group particularly serve to highlight the dynamic nature of ability-related identities. Unlike other participants who portrayed fairly consistent views of their ability, pupils here highlighted various changes in their ability-related identities. In particular, Dionne, Leon and Keisha, all identified as more able in primary school:

When I was in primary school I was quite, I would say I was more physical back then than I am now cos I used to play football with the boys (Dionne, G3, interview 2).

In primary school I think I was more talented (Leon, G3, interview 2).

I - Do you think you were thought of as talented at primary school?
Talented at running certainly I think that's why they picked me [for school teams] (Keisha, G3, interview 2).

Dionne highlighted how she was more physical in primary school but since then, all three pupils identified changes in perceived ability and these variations highlight the complex nature of ability perceptions and the significance of social context.

Furthermore, in comparison to the other three study groups, pupils in this group had the widest experience of groupings, both in terms of ability and gender (Table 4.1).

Subsequently, their ability-based practices are the most variable and, as such, their experiences are a particular focus within this chapter.

The context for many pupils during the research was a homogeneous PE ability group (top, middle or bottom) and yet pupils scored themselves hierarchically across the study groups where pupils in groups 1 and 2 were the more likely to incorporate sport into their broader identity; this finding indicates that the majority of pupils could identify and position themselves within the field (Hay & Lisahunter, 2006). The ways in which pupils ranked themselves was similar to how they were perceived by the teachers and where pupils were capable of 'correctly' positioning themselves supports the notion that the 'self' can be derived from seeing ourselves as others see us (Cooley, 1902/1964;

Hogg & Vaughan, 2005). However, individuals identified their sporting capabilities in very different ways which may be associated with their diverse and complex PE experiences. The remainder of this section explores young people's experiences of ability in more detail.

6.2.2 Context and ability-based identities

The influence of context is central to assumptions on identity formation (Harris & Parker, 2009; Jenkins, 1996). In particular, peer comparison has been shown to be an important process that can inform young people's definitions of themselves and their abilities (Harter, 1998, 1999). Consequently the composition of the group and the type of activity that the pupil experiences in PE can influence ability-related identities. The current findings build on previous research in developing understanding of how such practices in PE shape and inform identities and the student experience.

Group composition

Contrasting views exist on how to group pupils for physical education, in terms of ability (Hallam & Ireson, 2005; Ireson et al., 2002) and gender (Hills, 2007; Hills & Croston, 2012). The pupils predominantly experienced PE in ability groups however there were variations in ability and gender groupings across different participants (Table 4.1). Across the various group structures, all pupils highlighted how they often drew upon peer comparison within their PE groups to assess their own levels of ability:

I just think I'm all right at everything because everyone else in my group is really good (Leon, G3, interview 2).

I - Do you compare yourself to other people in the group as well, to work out how good you might be at PE?

Er yeah, if there was a boy who couldn't run and if he got the same level [NC] that kind of shows me that I can't run cos you know, I got the same level (Syeed, G4, interview 2).

Leon and Syeed's own ability perceptions were informed by their perceptions of others' ability within their PE group. Furthermore, talented pupils commented on their perceived status within their PE groups:

I - Who would you say is the most talented in the group that you're in now?

In my group there's like three people, there's me, some boy called . . . and . . . that's probably the best talent in our class, there's others that are talented but just not like our standards (Darren, G2, interview 2).

Darren also used peer comparison to negotiate his understanding of ability. The related comments highlight the influential nature of group comparison in reinforcing ability beliefs.

Where group experiences challenge self-perceptions, as in the case of three of the ‘potentially’ talented pupils, careful consideration should be given to the impact of such pedagogical practices, as for these pupils, their capability to clearly position themselves was affected. For example, Leon transferred to the case study school, where, due to class sizes, he was initially placed in a low ability group. This indicates the restrictions that resources can sometimes place on the PE department in meeting the needs of pupils. It may also denote a lack of PE teacher’s use of transitional information in identifying talent (Bailey et al., 2009b; Croston, 2013). Being placed in a low ability group on joining the case study challenged Leon’s perception of his sporting identity as he interpreted the change as relating to his ability rather than the organisational factors:

When I was in the lower group it was a bit disheartening, I thought it was just, first of all I thought it was cos like I couldn’t be as good at PE in this school so they had to put me in the bottom (Leon, G3, interview 1).

Leon was aware that he got moved up into the top group in year 9 because he was out performing the others in his group and this was recognised by his PE teacher:

I was getting higher grades compared to like the others in the class so Mr . . . [Jack] moved me up to the top like where I would have more competition, like so I have to push myself and stuff (Leon, G3, interview 1).

Leon emphasised his awareness of needing to be challenged in his PE class (Epstein, 1989) and acknowledged the importance of being placed in a top ability group and how this informed his own ability perceptions:

I think they must think I’m doing something right because I’m in the top group and I used to be in the bottom group so they must think I’m all right at it (Leon, G3, interview 2).

Leon’s narrative helps to illustrate the complex and fluid nature of ability and how varied group experiences and understandings of ability can influence variations in ability self-perceptions. In his final interview, Leon further demonstrated how he used group comparison against the ‘very able’ to assess his own level of ability and continued to believe that he was not amongst the more talented within his group:

Like it’s not really, I don’t really judge myself if I’m talented I just think I’m all right at everything because everyone else in my group is really good . . .

I - In comparison to the group that you are in at the moment . . . what would you put yourself on?

Erm a 6 or 7 (Leon, G3, interview 2).

Interestingly, the importance of the group context on ability perceptions and levels of confidence was commented on by one of the teachers who, in Leon's case, acknowledged the impact of placing Leon in a top ability group and the apparent increase in his confidence in PE:

Leon has moved into the top set this year and um definitely he's puffed his chest out a little bit you know now that he's in with the likes of the other boys that are in the group and you know his best pal is the national tennis player and certainly he's gained something . . . I think he's more confident, he's better behaved and I think he's actually, you know, he's ok with doing GCSE PE because everybody else is, it might not necessarily be his opinion but it's definitely helped him get along with it (Mary).

Although Leon himself did not comment, Mary's observation illustrates the powerful impact of positive messages about ability that can be transmitted via ability groupings and the associated challenges and expectations that are placed upon the more able (Hay & Macdonald, 2010a).

In addition, Keisha's ability perceptions were influenced by her various PE groups. She indicated that she felt 'quite' able in a mixed ability all girls' PE group:

I - In the group that you are in for the moment . . . what number would you give yourself?

5, yeah 5.

I - Ok, and what number would you have given yourself in your girls' group in year 9?

9 [laughs] I was one of the best, I wouldn't lie about that (Keisha, G3, interview 1).

I'd been in a girls' group and we'd been playing football and I was really good at it, I was really active, doing it, and when we were with the boys I just didn't want to play because they were really good (Keisha, G3, interview 2).

However in her PE group during the time of the study, Keisha indicated that she felt 'less' able. Her group at the time was a year 10 GCSE PE group which consisted mainly of talented pupils and was predominantly boys. Keisha elaborated on this:

How do I know how good I am? Probably if I'm not [laughs] surrounded with the best people you know . . .

I - I was going to ask if you compare yourself to other people?

Sometimes you know, I look at how good they are and say 'oh I'm not good enough'.

I - But when you compare yourself to other people . . .

I still don't think cos you know those boys they're wonderful boys at PE they're really really good (Keisha, G3, interview 2).

In this context, she compared herself to boys who she considered to be talented which arguably reduced her own ability perception. Furthermore, Keisha and Dionne's group experiences appeared to influence their confidence levels:

I was more confident in a girls' group I think than in the boys group because they're very competitive, I think that's what brought my confidence down (Keisha, G3, interview 2).

When I was in year 7 I didn't really feel that confident in PE because the boys were always like laughing and teasing you (Dionne, G3, interview 2).

Both girls highlighted feeling less confident working in PE groups that contained boys, experiences that support the suggestion of underlying hegemonic assumptions persisting within the field of PE (Evans & Penney, 2008; Hay & Macdonald, 2010a; Wright & Burrows, 2006) where boys are considered competitive and often 'better' at PE than girls (Hay & Macdonald, 2010b; Hills, 2007). Hay and Macdonald (2010b) suggest that the practices of PE have been resistant in valuing abilities that lie outside the 'masculinist norm' and gendered notions of ability remain prevalent. Furthermore, Dionne and Keisha's experiences of mixed gender groups highlight the potential for this teaching strategy to accentuate gender related social and cultural practices and discourses where boys continue to be positioned as more motivated and able students. Their experiences highlight some of the challenges faced by stakeholders in transforming mixed gender lessons within institutional and social constraints (Hills & Croston, 2012).

Perceptions of ability for Dionne, Leon and Keisha can be attributed to diverse grouping experiences which help to highlight the complexities involved in the construction of the self (Child, 2007; Harter, 1998; Mead, 1934/1967; Shavelson et al., 1976) and also the importance of organisational messages about ability. Furthermore, they serve to highlight the significance of pedagogical practices such as ability groups in terms of pupil experience and ability-related identities. In their top ability sets during the time of the study, Leon and Keisha compared themselves to the most able where they gauged and perceived their ability as less than many of their peers. Researchers in education have used the concept of BFLP to describe the phenomenon whereby due to

the heterogeneous nature of high ability groups, pupils who are not the very best in the group make their social comparisons against those at the top, possibly suffering lower levels of self-esteem than they would in a mixed ability group where their social comparisons are made against a wider range of abilities (Chanal et al., 2005). This reflects some of Mary's earlier concerns about moving pupils into higher ability groups as well. Although not specifically measured, the ability perceptions of Leon and Keisha would support the notion of a BFLP effect (Chanal et al., 2005; Marsh & Craven, 2006; Marsh & Hau, 2003) and their experiences serve to challenge the use of ability groups as an 'effective' pedagogical strategy.

The pupils drew upon aspects of their social experiences and interactions in forming their identities in relation to others (Harris & Parker, 2009; Jenkins, 1996). Pupils' broad perceptions of their ability generally aligned with the teachers' grouping indicating the strength of ability norms and practices within the school. The composition of groups impacted the pupils' perceptions of ability, and comparisons with other pupils were a key source of information. While pupils were able to identify their positioning within the school there was also evidence of pupils reflecting on the incongruence between the social field of PE at school and other experiences; young people such as Leon and Keisha who had experienced different groups were aware of the transient and changing nature of their ability labels and were less clear in their position within the field.

Activity type

The type of activity had a bearing on pupils' ability perceptions. Table 6.1 presents a summary of pupil responses when asked to rank themselves across a range of NC activities. The responses serve to highlight the dynamic and complex nature of ability-related identities where the activity type had a bearing on a pupil's perception of their ability in PE. Pupils differentiated their abilities by activity and pupils' rankings of ability did not always correspond with their ability group level. For example, some pupils in group 1 ranked themselves 'average' in some activities and individuals in lower ability groups identified themselves as very able in certain activities. In addition, individuals did not rank themselves consistently. For example, Cole ranked himself lower in aesthetic and team/invasion games, and higher in striking and individual games. The findings also disrupt traditional links between gender and activity type as

some of the boys ranked themselves relatively high in dance and gymnastics while girls often viewed themselves as skilled in team sports.

Table 6.1

Pupil activity rankings by perceived ability

G – Gymnastics; D – Dance; T – Tennis; C- Cricket; A – Athletics; F – Football; N – Netball; B - Basketball

Pupil	G (Aesthetic)	D	T (Striking)	C	A (Individual)	F (Team / Invasion games)	N	B
Group 1								
Melissa	9	6	7	8	7	5	5	5
Ben	6	9	-	9	10	10	-	7
Chris	5	4	7	6	7	9	-	6
Greg	7	7	10	-	9	10	-	10
Group 2								
Darren	6	1	5	7	8	8	8	9
Letitia	4	-	6	7	9	5	-	10
Peter	-	1	-	6	6	7	-	3
Dwayne	(Did not participate in the second round of individual interviews)							
Group 3								
Keisha	2	7	-	2	5	5	3	6
Dionne	5	7	5	7	8	6	8	-
Leon	7	6	5	-	7	8	-	-
Cole	1	1	5	10	7	8	3	3
Group 4								
Jeff	1	1	3	-	-	5	-	-
Syeed	8	10	-	-	3	6	7	-
Marlon	(Did not participate in the second round of individual interviews)							

Reasons for pupils' ability rankings were explored further in the interviews where they discussed the relationship between perceptions of ability and particular activities.

Maybe it's just back to motivation, for some reason I'm not that motivated to try as hard in basketball although I still enjoy it . . .

I - What about stuff like gymnastics and dance?

Whoaa I hate them, I'm so glad that I don't have to do them . . . (laughs) it could have been taught by the best teacher in the world in the best way and I still wouldn't have liked it, it's more about the activity (Jeff, G4, interview 2).

I - What about something like netball or basketball?

A 6 . . . in football the one that I see as the best and the most skilful player I've played with because they're in my year and they're in the team whereas in basketball I've never been in the team . . . so I look up to those players and think damn they're good, I'm nowhere near as good as them (Chris, G1, interview 2).

I - Something like cricket?

I'm good at it but I just don't like it, 7 (Letitia, G2, interview 2).

Pupils' ability perceptions were therefore also influenced by levels of interest and motivation in the activity, whether they had previously covered the activity, played the activity in a team, and whether they felt they were 'capable' and possessed the required skills to be successful in that activity.

Pupils were able to compare their abilities within and between different sports illustrating the challenges of being able to label themselves as talented or not talented. These inconsistencies help to highlight the ways that different social fields (Bourdieu, 1990) can provide alternative ability-based discourses and practices and subvert the normative definitions with the current social field, where through the movement and practice of agents, fields have the potential to alter (Rawolle & Lingard, 2013).

6.2.3 Acknowledging 'ability' and ability-based identities

Previous research has identified the ways that teachers in particular can shape pupils' perceptions of who is able through differential treatment and expectations of pupils, which tend to privilege the most able (Hay & Lisahunter, 2006; Hay & Macdonald, 2010a). This section explores the processes through which ability was acknowledged in the field, specifically: formal acknowledgement; the allocation of roles and responsibilities; the opportunities and resources pupils received. Further consideration is given to how such processes influenced ability-related identities and the individual pupil experience.

Formal acknowledgement of ability

The school formally acknowledged ability in PE by awarding trophies and certificates to pupils at the end of the academic year. It was the talented pupils that received these and who were publicly acknowledged for displaying high levels of sporting prowess:

I - Have you ever had any rewards in PE, any certificates or trophies?
Yeah best sportswoman of the year (Letitia, G2, interview 2).

I - Do you think you're probably one of the best people in your year then?
Probably, sports man of the year me, got an award for it and everything [laughs] so yeah probably . . . apparently I got sports man of the year again (Chris, G1, interview 2).

Many of them had received awards which symbolised and reinforced their beliefs that they were the best in their year group. In contrast, pupils in study groups 3 and 4 commented that they had received no awards or certificates for their ability levels in PE:

I - Do you ever get rewards like certificates, medals?
Um not really (Leon, G3, interview 2).

Keisha did however provide one exception:

I - Can I ask what sort of reward that was and what was it for?
[Laughs] erm trying hard. I got an award, a certificate and a medal.
I - Wow that's great.
The first time people were like 'what you!' (Keisha, G3, interview 1).

Keisha's efforts in PE were acknowledged despite her perceived lack of physical capital which demonstrates that wider notions of ability can be recognised. However, she showed awareness of what held value within the field through her comment on the surprise of others in her award. The school's attempts to acknowledge more than just physical ability were also evident during their sports day which consisted of a combination of encouraging participation through pupils working together in their form groups and competitive events where the talented pupils could display their physical capacity.

These were the only examples of formal acknowledgement of ability in PE that were provided across the investigation. In addition, there were however various other less formal ways that pupils' physical ability in PE was acknowledged: the roles and responsibilities they were given and the opportunities that they received.

Roles and responsibility in PE

There was a certain level of responsibility associated with being talented in PE, for example, the teachers gave leadership roles to the more able pupils:

They're given different types of roles maybe so like in one of my lessons I make, in the warm up, I make my gifted um talented people lead the warm up so they're having a bit more responsibility (Danny).

I found myself as one of the leaders . . . the teacher's getting all the equipment and stuff and they tell us to go upstairs, we have to like sort out our groups, cos if we know what sport we are doing we have to sort out the groups and the teams . . . I think sometimes it's mainly me that the teacher chooses um to sort out the teams and stuff (Darren, G2, interview 1).

Talented pupils such as Darren were often asked to organise groups. This finding is similar to those of Redelius and Hay (2009) who suggested that the capacity to display leadership qualities mainly applies to those who possess physical capital. Other leadership roles were evident for the talented pupils:

I like to be co-teacher in PE so um so I get to see how the teacher does it and then he'll usually take the lower group . . . he'll tell us what to do and we go and tell our group 'you've got to do this' and we'll demonstrate (Ben, G1, interview 1).

Ben appeared to enjoy this particular role which was supported in other aspects of his narrative:

I was always the captain and stuff like that, we'd start a tag football team I was captain of that, we had a cricket team, I was captain of that (Ben, G1, focus group 1).

It's fun being the captain . . . cos you get to tell people what to do and they have to listen to you . . . we also have to have lots of responsibility . . . I like to be captain a lot (Ben, G1, interview 1).

Ben was very positive about his role of captain in lessons and extracurricular which also supported his belief that he was talented. Another role often allocated to the talented pupils was to be used for demonstrations within the PE lesson:

I- Do you ever get asked to demonstrate much?

Yeah sometimes, depending if the teacher knows I'm good at that sport . . . like football I get asked to demonstrate a lot and like basketball.

I- Ok and how do you feel about that?

It feels good cos like the teacher's picking you out of everybody to help them out (Darren, G2, interview 2).

Darren indicated that for him, being asked to demonstrate made him 'feel good' and also consolidated his perception that he was talented. Demonstrating in PE lessons was an overt opportunity for talented pupils to publicly display their physical capital.

In association with such levels of responsibility, many of the talented pupils were seen as role models by their peers and parents:

Well for me I find myself in a good position in that I probably am a role model to others because I do take part in things like lots of PE related things like I coach the year 7's rugby, um JSLA (Chris, G1, interview 1).

Yeah cos people look up like, say like on the football [school team] . . . like some of the year 9's that play for us they look up to me . . . Cos I heard like my teachers said that kids look up to me cos like I'm a role model and that's what my mum says as well.

I- Why do you think people look up to you?

I actually don't know because I never actually knew that people looked up to me, I thought I was just a normal person (Darren, G2, interview 1).

Chris was involved in coaching the younger pupils in extracurricular activities which supported his development of associated skills as part of his JSLA, skills that sit outside some of the field's more dominant perceptions of talent. In addition, Darren believed that he was looked up to by his peers and was perceived as a role model; he also felt this perception was held by his family and his PE teachers. Whilst there remains a dearth of literature on peer role models within PE, the importance of significant others on the development of young people has been highlighted, particularly during adolescence (Haensly & Lehmann, 1996; Lee, 2002), on aspects of self-concept and identity (Greenberg, Siegel, & Leitch, 1983) and, in relation to developing talent (Bloom, 1985; Côté, 1999). The findings here would suggest that talented pupils can act as significant agents in supporting the development of others.

Many of the talented pupils seemed to enjoy being a role model, and giving talented pupils this responsibility was an indication of the type of working relationship that existed between teacher and pupil. This was acknowledged by the teachers who emphasised the interactions that took place within extracurricular PE:

I'm sure that they [PE teachers] do have, not a preference but that kind of a closeness with them from working with them for that period of time, you know you find that you are able to talk to them differently, they know what you'll accept, they know what you won't accept, they know when to be quiet, so you can kind of treat them differently because you know they are going to behave in

the way that you want them to cos you've got that relationship with them (Kieran).

Kieran's view was reinforced by talented pupils' narratives:

I'm in the basketball team and my PE teacher is the basketball coach, so I can just get away with things pretty easy (Greg G1, interview 2).

If we're doing a sport that I don't like . . . I'll just pretend sometimes not to have my kit and not do it (both laugh) but sometimes like my teacher's said we're doing netball and I was like oh forget it, and then afterwards cos people taking long, and it takes long to set up the netball, she just does football and afterwards, cos I have my trainers with me, she just lets me do it (Darren, G2, interview 2).

Greg highlighted how being talented and being on the school basketball team has contributed to the relationship that he has with his PE teacher, so much so that he felt he could get away with certain behaviours that perhaps others could not. Darren provided a similar example of where he was allowed to participate without the correct kit and in a preferred activity to the one scheduled.

In contrast, the roles, levels of responsibility and working relationships for pupils in study groups 3 and 4 were quite different. Neither group specifically highlighted that they thought they were considered as role models or that they were given any responsibility within their PE lessons:

I - Are you ever given any leadership roles?

Well there are some people but that's never me (Syed, G4, interview 2).

Despite the fact that Syed was in a homogeneous low ability group, he was not given any leadership roles which could indicate that he was not considered able to cope with such a role or that these roles were not part of PE lessons in the lower ability groups. Furthermore, pupils in study group 3 were only occasionally asked to demonstrate and those in study group 4 felt they were never used:

I - Are you ever asked to demonstrate anything in a PE lesson?

No it doesn't really ever happen (Jeff, G4, interview 2).

I - Do you ever get asked to demonstrate?

Er sometimes.

I - How do you feel about that?

Um it doesn't really matter as long as I don't do it wrong, cos if they ask me to demonstrate something and I do it wrong then everyone else will do it wrong and that will just make me look a bit stupid (Leon, G3 interview 2).

Basically sir um, if he wants to demonstrate something he'll call the best people up.

I - And who are those people normally in your group?

The boys (Keisha, G3, girls' focus group and interview 2).

Jeff was in a mixed ability core PE group and never got asked to demonstrate. Leon and Keisha were in top ability groups that were taking GCSE PE. Leon was quite aware of the importance placed upon the capability to display physical capital and that the potential consequence for him performing incorrectly was to 'look stupid'. Keisha highlighted her association with the dominant notions of ability within the field where those who were capable of displaying physical capital were the ones who were relied upon for demonstrations, these were often the boys. The practice of not using lower ability pupils to demonstrate in lessons may also be an indication of the teachers being responsive to pupils' needs and capabilities:

If I'm demonstrating I want to know one the kid's not going to be put in a position where they can be embarrassed, two they are confident enough to do it (Alison).

Alison highlighted her awareness of the potential negative consequences for lower ability pupils who demonstrate in front of others and emphasised the importance of being confident to perform, a quality that the talented pupils were able to display.

Overall, pupils in study groups 3 and 4 indicated that they often enjoyed PE and were able to speak about their PE teachers in a very positive light however they provided little evidence that the roles, levels of responsibility and types of relationships that existed for the talented pupils existed for them. Although there remains a dearth of research on the teacher pupil relationship in PE there is some suggestion that it is more positive with those of higher ability (Hay & lisahunter, 2006; Hay & Macdonald, 2010a). In particular, Hay and Macdonald found that high ability students in PE were privileged in terms of achievement possibilities, teacher perception and treatment.

Furthermore, it has also been suggested that teachers and coaches have higher expectations of higher ability individuals in a PE and a sport setting (Hay & lisahunter, 2006; Hay & Macdonald, 2010a; Kirk, 1992; Wilson & Stephens, 2007) and also within a higher ability group (Boaler et al., 2000; Hallam & Ireson, 2005). In support of the latter point, a number of pupils expressed the belief that the teachers had higher expectations of the talented pupils:

Like if we are playing basketball he [teacher] would expect me to do, to actually try and do better than other people that don't play basketball.

I- So do you think he expects more from you then in terms of effort and ability?
Yeah he expects more (Greg, G1, interview 2).

They [teachers] expect them to be really good because they're good at the sport (Melissa, G1, girls' focus group).

Greg and Melissa highlighted an association with being good at sport and the teacher having high expectations.

It has been suggested that teacher's perceptions and expectations of ability are strongly influenced by how pupils present themselves and the closer their 'style' is to 'legitimate' notions of ability the more likely they are to be perceived as successful (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Hay and Macdonald (2010b) stressed the significance of teacher's values, beliefs and expectations of students in shaping the practices of the field. The disparate teacher expectations in the school were justified as the teachers considered this realistic:

I want to see everybody trying to make some kind of progress but there are students that you do have higher expectations of them because you know they can do better and I think if you begin to reduce that then you're kind of almost making it ok for them not to try (Mary).

Certain expectations were realistic in the sense that the learning environment was acknowledged to be about raising achievement for all pupils and matching expectations to the level of pupil ability was considered to be important. This is an example of how the teachers were sensitive to individual pupil differences and were also responsive to their needs.

The powerful influence of teacher interaction should not be underestimated. Where inconsistencies in teacher expectations and treatment are evident this has the potential to impact upon pupils' self-perceptions (Freeman, 1998) and can lead to feelings of inferiority, low self-esteem and possible attrition (Wilson & Stephens, 2007). It also impacts upon pupils' capability to accrue capital. This is an important consideration for stakeholders because providing a PE environment where an individual possesses capital and feels positive is considered a good foundation for enjoyment and for developing skills to cope with the stresses of PE and sport (Brettschneider, 1999). Furthermore, the capacity to accrue and employ capital is beneficial in achieving further

desirable outcomes such as adherence, and increased motivation, effort and persistence (Marsh, et al., 2006).

Having a positive relationship with teachers was important as it was acknowledged as acting to motivate the talented pupils in PE:

What motivates me? Um probably the teachers, definitely (Chris, G1, interview 2).

I - Do any of those teachers that you've had, do they motivate you in different ways?

Miss . . . [Sue], that's the only teacher for me.

I - Is that because of how she speaks to you?

Yeah and because I used to be bad, very bad, she was the only one that used to help me with my problems and stuff.

I - So when you say bad do you mean behaviour bad?

[Nods].

I - And she was the person who supported you through that?

Yeah (Letitia, G2, interview 2).

Chris highlighted the positive motivational relationship that existed with his PE teachers and Letitia provided a distinct example of how one teacher motivated and supported her particularly when she was experiencing problems at school. Establishing a positive motivational climate in a PE class is a significant consideration for stakeholders of which the teacher/pupil relationship is one crucial aspect (Epstein, 1989; Jaakkola & Digelidis, 2007). Where the teacher-pupil relationship does differ in relation to levels of ability it may have a variable influence upon levels of motivation.

Opportunities, resources and support

Ability was also acknowledged through various additional opportunities and resources. Young people and teachers in this study felt that greater opportunities were given to those who were considered talented, for example:

They're more likely to be involved in actual clubs . . . we're also gonna push them into outside clubs . . . so I think they do get a lot more opportunities in sport than the kids who are not on the gifted and talented register (Kieran).

Other students were aware of these extra benefits which included opportunities to go on trips and to be asked to join clubs.

The talented kids get to go like to the sports events and the others are not, they just stay at school (Darren, G2, Yr 10 & 11 boys' focus group).

If you're talented they're just like oh why don't you come to this after school club (Dionne, G3, Yr 9, 10, 11 girls' focus group).

Within this study, findings suggest that the possession of an 'ideal body' can potentially lead to increased opportunities for participation and skill development (Hay & lisahunter, 2006; Hay & Macdonald, 2010a; Hunter, 2004) which can also influence how pupils define their own and others' ability:

I - How do you know that you're talented in PE?

Well you get special things like talented and gifted sports things so I'm going to a multi sports thing on Friday, cos I'm talented (Greg, G1, interview 2).

Because I get picked for most stuff and there's some gifted and talented thing that you go to each year and I always get picked for that (Letitia, G2, interview 2).

Being selected to attend G&T related events was highlighted by the majority of the talented pupils. Darren's narrative helps to emphasise how this contributes to his overall perception of his ability:

I - When do you think you first thought you were talented in PE, roughly?

In primary school when I went to some sports programme . . . called gifted and talented . . . I went to it and got some certificates so that's when I thought I was talented at sport . . .

I went there and they did different sports . . . then they would take you to some computer class room . . . they'll talk to you . . . about nutrition and stuff like that, so it was good . . . It made me feel like I was special like that cos I got selected . . . it made me feel like I was like one of the best kids in Hackney (Darren, G2, interview 1).

Darren's experiences made him feel 'talented', privileged and 'special'. Thus, for many of the talented pupils, being selected to attend extra G&T events served as symbolic capital and helped to shape their assessment of their own abilities.

In comparison, the 'less able' pupils felt that they were often 'ignored' in PE which resulted in a lack of opportunities. For example, Keisha highlighted her frustration at not being given a chance to prove that she was perhaps more able than others perceived her to be:

There's a couple of boys, they are always the ones who are the best and they get to go on most things, I think it would be nice . . . I would like to at least over the whole year . . . go on a PE trip, cos there's always people that they assume that because they are good at it that they will like it, but I know I'm not good at it but I really would like to get to do you know (Keisha, G3, interview 2).

Keisha believed that her perceived level of ability impacted upon her not being invited on trips. The importance of being ‘noticed’ and invited to extracurricular opportunities by the teachers was highlighted by other pupils:

When a teacher points it out or invites you to a particular kind of sporting event to represent the school it makes me feel like you really are doing well in this particular part and maybe I should take it up, cos if the teacher’s noticing that then I must be doing good (Dionne, G3, interview 2).

Dionne emphasised her positive feelings where she was ‘noticed’ and offered an extra opportunity to attend an event on behalf of the school which made her feel that the teachers perceived her to be ‘able’; this is similar to some of reinforcement processes previously explored. However, her own low perception of her ability prevented her from attending:

I got encouraged to go to like other events but I didn’t always go to them because I didn’t think I was that good at it (Dionne, G3, interview 2).

Subsequently, lack of perceived ability resulted in lack of opportunity which is an important consideration for stakeholders as opportunities and resources have been acknowledged as key in terms of talented individuals fulfilling their ‘potential’ and becoming ‘successful’ (Bloom, 1985; Côté, 1999; Ericsson et al., 1993). It is the talented pupils who received the greater opportunities, which gave them an advantage over others. The importance of demonstrating physical capital within the field and how this is interpreted by the teachers as the possession of ability in PE can be seen in aspects of Keisha’s narrative:

I was good at running but maybe because I didn’t show it I didn’t get chosen for the track team . . . when the teachers see you, that you’re talented, you have more benefit to clubs, which is not fair really (Keisha, G3, interview 2).

Keisha’s comments support the suggestion that physical displays of ability are central to definitions of talent and ability within the field (Hay & Macdonald, 2010b) where, for her, ability-based practices reinforced the belief that she was not ‘good at it’. Keisha’s narrative highlights how her ‘ability’ was not acknowledged in the same way as the ‘talented’ pupils despite her belief that she was ‘good at running’. The privileging of ability reinforces practices associated with elite sport and diminishes more participatory and inclusive practices that might support the preparation of each pupil for lifelong participation and engagement in physical activity. A more inclusive practice might limit

the possibility that those who are not initially considered talented will fail to accrue meaningful forms of activity-related capital; a process that may be exacerbated when teachers rely on early initial talent identification and limited opportunities for group transition, as in this study.

It is also worth noting that in terms of what pupils bring from outside the field of PE, being given the right amount of support, opportunities and resources in a wider context has been acknowledged as key in terms of talented individuals becoming successful (Bloom, 1985; Côté, 1999; Ericsson et al., 1993). This, alongside the conversion of physical capital provides one explanation for the apparent differences between the ‘successful’ and ‘unsuccessful’ talented pupils. Bloom and Côté highlight the importance of the environment that surrounds talented individuals at specific stages of development where influences, such as the family, coach, teacher, and peers, impact upon the achievement of excellence. There is some evidence of this within the current study (Appendix C) where the ‘successful’ pupils (study group 1) all had a consistent supportive network particularly provided by their family and coach. In contrast, the ‘unsuccessful’ talented pupils (study group 2) appear to have more variable levels of support and resources. The possession of physical capital itself is therefore no guarantee of ‘success’ in the field of PE.

Overall, various ability-based practices can be seen to shape pupils’ ability-related identities. Certain distinctions are evident and reinforced in relation to ability; what this means for pupils in terms of how they experience PE, what they gain from these experiences and the possible implications for learning, future engagement and participation are explored next.

6.3 Ability-based practices and the consequences for young people

Irrespective of their ability, all the pupils indicated that they enjoyed aspects of their PE experiences:

I - How is PE at the moment, anything different since last time I saw you?

Well it’s changed subjects [activities] cos I think we did running around the park was the last one I think . . . so yeah it’s changed subject but it’s still fun (Ben, G1, interview 2).

We did swimming a couple of weeks ago and we just done Gaelic football for a one off and then we done netball as well . . . Yeah they were fun (Peter, G2, interview 1).

I think PE in this school has improved over the years . . . it's really good (Keisha, G3, interview 1).

I've always enjoyed it, sometimes more than others, we do a range of things, and we're doing rounders and stuff as well as football . . . so yeah it's good at the moment (Jeff, G4, interview 2).

Furthermore, the teachers demonstrated a level of flexibility and responsiveness to pupils' needs in considering certain groupings and what they expected from a wide range of abilities. However, there were aspects of the pupil narrative that indicated that certain ability-based practices did not necessarily support *all* pupils. This section explores some of the consequences for pupils that resulted from their respective ability-based experiences.

6.3.1 Pupils' Confidence

Confidence and self-belief are important qualities in managing school and life experiences (Henry, 2004; QCA, 2007) and as such, developing an individual's confidence has been identified as part of successful educational practice. More recently, confidence has been characterised as a form of psychological capital which facilitates an individual's capability to succeed in school and beyond (Henry, 2004) as well as contributing to an individual's overall identity, their social self, effectiveness and 'feeling good' (Demerath et al., 2008; Stewart et al., 2012). Psychological capital has also been associated with other cognitive dispositions such as self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience (Luthans, Avey et al., 2006; Luthans, Vogelgesang, et al., 2006; Luthans et al., 2004) and with positive psychological states that can result from experiences that involve physical exercise (Stewart et al., 2012) all of which are important resources in coping and managing life experiences (Henry, 2004). Some of these dispositions are evident within the pupils' narratives.

Out of all the participants the talented pupils portrayed themselves as the most confident in PE:

I'm confident in PE all of the time cos I know that I'm good at the sport that we're doing, there really isn't a sport that I'm not that good in (Darren, G2, interview 2).

In addition, Chris' narrative helps to illustrate some of the characteristics of talented pupils and how they experienced themselves in relation to others:

I can run quick, I can throw far, I can kick a ball, I dunno it all seems basic stuff to me that I can do perfectly fine, but obviously some people can't . . . Five years I've been here, everybody knows if someone's good at sport or whatever, so for me I always seem to be one of the better ones, so it makes you feel good (Chris, G1, interview 1).

Chris's comments are representative of the majority of other pupils in study groups 1 and 2 and they help to highlight how talented pupils perceived themselves as very competent in PE which made them 'feel good' and enabled them to employ confidence across the range of their PE experiences. The talented pupils also regularly participated in outside sports and/or extracurricular teams which provided them with extra training and coaching which may have influenced their own ability perceptions, their capacity to succeed, and their associated levels of confidence. Their capacity to display desirable forms of physical capital was, therefore, enhanced by the range and consistency of their experience in sporting fields including and beyond PE where they have had opportunities to develop 'a feel for the game'.

In comparison, pupils in study group 4 did not discuss confidence and self-belief in the same way, there were however small aspects of their narratives that indicated that they had limited levels of confidence in PE in comparison to other subjects:

I - Do you think your confidence is different in other subjects than it is in PE?
Yeah cos in drama, I love that [emphasis] lesson and that's when I'm most happy and confident, like way more confident then [PE] (Syed, G4, interview 2).

Syed's belief that he was more confident in drama than PE helps to reinforce the importance of context as a variable for ability-related identities. Confidence levels for pupils in study group 3 also seemed quite low but sometimes variable:

I - Can you describe a time when you felt particularly confident in PE?

Um

I - Are there any particular times that you feel really confident?

Not really.

I - No?

It's [confidence levels] just like the same for most parts of it [PE lessons](Leon, G3, interview 2).

I would describe myself in dance because there's sometimes when I feel really good and sometimes when I feel 'oh this is so crap' . . . (Dionne, G3, interview 2).

Leon was unsure in his responses and unable to give a specific example of being confident in PE. Dionne emphasised the variable nature of her confidence levels. Some of the ‘less able’ pupils also suggested a lack of confidence by highlighting their fears associated with leading and performing in front of others:

I don't like being a leader for fear of being watched (Keisha, G3, interview 2).

Keisha had a fear of being watched in lessons and lacked confidence in her belief to perform or lead others. Dionne also provided an example of how performing poorly in front of others could have a negative effect:

I - Have you ever been embarrassed or made fun of in PE?

Yeah like when you make a mistake in dance or, I just think it's about when you make mistakes and people just point them out and keep telling you about it, it just makes you feel like your crap (Dionne, G3, interview 2).

Dionne and Keisha both expressed a fear of being watched and perhaps being judged by their lack of ‘visible’ ability. Their responses may be associated with their ability-related identities and low confidence levels where they did not want to be seen to ‘fail’ in front of others. The importance of being able to perform well has been acknowledged in terms of how it supports levels of confidence and a positive self-concept (Bracken & Lamprecht, 2003; Shavelson et al., 1976) and where pupils demonstrate physical competence and are confident in their belief to perform to a high standard in PE it may be a reflection of possessing physical and psychological capital.

The fact that most pupils could identify some positive aspects of their approach to PE or capabilities arguably provides a platform for developing confidence more broadly. The current findings indicate, however, that confidence was primarily linked to being better than other pupils and was shaped by school experiences. This is an important consideration as positive ability perceptions can have a mediating effect that impacts upon other desirable outcomes in PE (Li & Xiang, 2007). Therefore, those students who identify as more confident may also be experiencing other benefits such as adherence, increased motivation, effort and persistence (Marsh et al., 2006). In comparison, low levels of confidence can contribute to limited motivation and engagement in physical activity.

6.3.2 Pupils' learning and achievement

There was an endorsement and assumption by the teachers and pupils that PE is, and should be, concerned with ability-based learning which is best achieved through

ability groups. A key reason cited in support of using ability groups is that the group will consist of pupils of similar ability (Boaler et al., 2000; Hallam & Ireson, 2005; Kerckhoff, 1986). This facilitates the implementation of tasks that extend and challenge pupils at the ‘appropriate’ level where they can work with others of similar ability. The teachers held this belief:

In order for kids to progress at whatever level they’re at they need to be either challenged at the level that they’re at, to get better if they are high level performers or they need to achieve something even if they’re a low level performer, and I feel that they best do that playing against people that are able to challenge them (Jack).

Jack highlighted the importance of challenging pupils in order to extend them irrespective of their perceived level of ability. Having ability groups was therefore seen as one effective way to meet individual needs. The majority of the talented pupils were consistently in the top sets and many of their PE experiences were very positive and served to support their learning. However, where individual pupils were at a more ‘expert’ level than their peers, for example Melissa and Greg, the practice of ability groupings failed to extend their ability in their areas of expertise. In some instances this was due to their peers not being capable of providing enough of a challenging within specific tasks:

I- You were doing badminton . . .
Yeah it’s different though in PE cos you don’t like, no one really knows how to play properly and I don’t know, I don’t exactly always play properly in those lessons (Melissa, G1, interview 1).

This was further supported by notes from an informal observation:

They got into pairs and played doubles, Melissa was partnered with a boy of less ability to her and she was quite supportive towards him and encouraging when he made mistakes.
She explained the rules to other players and those helping to umpire when it was needed, she even put the teacher right on the serving rule.
She seemed fine with explaining everything even laughed about some things although she looked a little frustrated with her partner at the beginning.
Melissa is obviously one of the best in the group at badminton . . . Melissa is skilled, has a range of shots, she isn’t making the opposition move that much, it looks like she’s not using tactics yet. She doesn’t have to move much around the court either.

Melissa adopted supportive roles in her badminton lessons which arguably did not extend her physical ability but may help develop other skills.

Elite pupils were also less able to develop in their main sports within PE lessons as they were given a leadership role by the teacher. Greg played tennis to quite a high level (Appendix C) and his main role in tennis lessons was that of a ‘coach’:

It’s a different standard [PE lessons], there’s this other kid called David in my class as well, and well in tennis, when we have tennis in a PE lesson it’s nowhere near like the training that we have to do outside of school . . . because the teachers can’t really coach the actual tennis players, so the tennis players help teach when you do tennis, so that gets really boring . . .

I - Are you motivated in PE in a tennis lesson?

No not at all, we are just the coaches so we just feed the balls and . . .

I - Were you motivated in that?

Not really . . .

I - Would you like to be more challenged in your PE lessons?

Yeah probably (Greg, G1, interview 1).

The teachers were aware of this dilemma:

One of the kids that I teach is sort of nationally ranked in tennis so I’m sure my tennis lessons are absolutely useless for him . . . I mean in the last three years I’ve got him to help me just because that’s got to be more productive than me trying to tell him how to, you know, cos he trains every day, so I think in that respect yeah there is still something for them to get from it [the PE curriculum] (Mary).

Mary’s comment is about a similar pupil to Greg and is an indication that she felt the only way she could challenge and include such pupils was by giving them the role of coach. However, Greg illustrated that he found this role presented no challenge at all and was boring. The experiences of Melissa and Greg highlight challenges faced by PE teachers in extending pupils who are already at an ‘expert’ level.

Using talented pupils as leaders or coaches may enhance a wider skill set, however it also served to compensate for the teacher’s lack of expertise, as in Mary’s example. This notion was highlighted by pupils:

They don’t know that much even though they are PE teachers yeah, but they only know basic stuff like, but they don’t know how to play sports. I don’t want to rude yeah but Miss . . . she don’t know how to play basketball and she teaches it to us sometimes . . . Because the teachers yeah they’re only good at some sports and they don’t actually know everything about the sport, like some sports yeah so we need some coaches to come in (Letitia, G2, focus group 2 and interview 1).

Letitia emphasised how her teacher has not been able to extend her learning in basketball and she identified a gap in knowledge where she felt she would benefit from

qualified coaches teaching her instead. The related pupil experiences illustrate the difficulties that PE teachers face in possessing expert knowledge across a wide range of curriculum subjects; it perhaps supports a case for a narrowing of activities and schools taking greater ownership of what they cover in the curriculum, as in the disapplication of the 2007 National Curriculum (QCA, 2007) and the proposed National Curriculum for September, 2014.

An additional ability-based practice was the opportunity for talented pupils to study GCSE PE, JSLA and BTEC. The top ability groups in year 9 were considered able enough to take GCSE PE early and the talented pupils in years 10 and 11 all opted to study it (Table 4.1). However, pupils who took these options experienced reduced levels of physical participation in activity.

We have to do GCSE work now, cos I'm in a high group and we don't get to do normal stuff.

I - What's normal stuff?

Like playing sports init (Letitia, G2, Focus group 2).

Yeah, like when I chose BTEC I thought we were going to do a lot of sports but it's like in one week we will have one practical lesson and like five theories, and the next, like this week, like tomorrow, I'll be having two practical lessons, and then five theory lessons again. On that point I'm kind of disappointed (Darren, G2, focus group 2).

I'm a practical person, we were doing more theory than practical so then I kind of got a bit annoyed with it cos I thought like PE was mainly practical, so I changed it to JSLA (Darren G2, interview 2).

Letitia and Darren expressed their disappointment in having less practical time due to taking either GCSE PE or BTEC. Darren's dissatisfaction with the lack of practical prompted his request to change from GCSE to the JSLA group where there was more of an emphasis on practical skills, leadership and coaching.

The association of PE with the physical is reinforced through the forms of capital that appear to be valued in the field where physical prowess was rewarded. The academic side of PE was not really introduced until pupils progressed to GCSE. Less skilled pupils who might enjoy the academic side might have been less likely to pursue this route as they may have not been aware of the academic approach to sport. Despite highlighting these issues, overall the talented pupils' narratives indicated a positive learning environment where they were supported to achieve through the ability-based

practices present within the field.

In comparison, pupils in study groups 3 and 4 also highlighted positive learning experiences in PE:

Mr . . . [Hue] is my teacher, I like the way he keeps encouraging us like ‘good, well done’, you know and when we don’t understand sometimes he teaches us how to do it, he taught me how to do the cricket thing (Keisha, G3, interview 2).

Keisha also discussed various occasions where she felt supported by her PE teacher and peers:

I get put into the boys’ group a lot and they’re really good they want to get things done and most times I don’t want to do it because you know I’m afraid that I’m going to make mistakes but the nice thing is that they encourage me (Keisha, G3, interview 2).

In contrast, there were other examples from pupils in study group 3 and 4 of where ability-based practices and groupings resulted in negative and marginalised experiences which has implications for their learning and levels of achievement in PE. For example, Keisha, who was defined by the head of PE for the study as ‘potentially’ talented, chose to study GCSE PE which was considered a top ability group. Her reasons for selecting this option were not discussed in detail however her previous experiences in PE, many of which were in an all-girls’ middle ability group where she felt she was quite able, may have been influential. Keisha’s narrative provides an indication that some of her group experiences did not necessarily function in supporting her learning and progression in achieving her potential. Her experiences in the GCSE PE group sometimes resulted in her being marginalised either through pupil interactions or those with the teacher:

Yeah, netball they [the boys] shout you know . . . if I do something, cos I’m not really good at netball but I was learning from it and every time I’d make a mistake they’d always go oh why are you doing that? (Keisha, G3, interview 1).

There’s been a couple of times [speaking very quietly] I’ve been embarrassed when, because sir, when we begin a game . . . he’d put captains and then you know he’d pick the three best boys in the class to be captains, Bob, Joel . . . they’re really good, and he said pick people, they picked people and I was the last one which made me feel like ‘oh I’m bad at it, they don’t want to pick me’ it was terrible.

I - Does that happen a lot in your lessons?

Most of the time, I’m mostly last or one of the last, me and my friend, she’s a girl (Keisha, G3, interview 2).

These experiences were in contrast to those in her previous comments on how the boys could support her learning in PE; these experiences reinforced her belief that she was less able than others in her PE group, especially the boys. Her divergent experiences help to illustrate the complexities involved in unpacking the individual experience. Dionne also discussed examples of marginalisation which were from a mixed gender, mixed ability group from her previous year:

If you did a mistake or I dunno you didn't pass the ball to the right person, or you didn't save a goal, one of the competitive boys in my class would just start shouting at you and I thought he was really horrible he could have just been like 'oh next time just do this' but he was just shouting at you and I found it really horrible, and I kind of just went off football . . . Some of the people in my tutor group were really horrible especially the competitive boys who kind of just push you off the football (Dionne, G3, interview 2).

He would be like 'who wants to be a leader', so we kind of had a team captain and some of the girls put their hands up and I would as well, and he would just pick out the boys and we would be like why didn't you pick us, and then he would kind of not respond, and it happened really often so, I dunno, it just made me feel like I wasn't good enough cos he always picked the boys (Dionne, G3, interview 2).

Dionne's experiences influenced how she perceived and valued football as an activity and also contributed to her 'low' perception of her ability. There were other examples of marginalisation within the 'not talented' pupils' narratives:

There's some guy when we do football and if I go to mark him he goes I swear if you get the ball I'll punch you, just like what is this guy on (Jeff, G4, focus group 4).

You find that I'm not really getting passed to and stuff like that, so that's [football] one of my least enjoyable things because I hardly ever get a chance to shine in that so (Marlon, G4 focus group).

Jeff and Marlon had both experienced PE consistently in low ability groups. However as part of the KS4 programme, Jeff was in a mixed ability group during the time of the study. Both pupils highlighted how they could be excluded and teased. Additionally, during informal observations, it was noted that Marlon did not participate very often and was left out by others especially in a football environment.

The marginalised experiences of the 'less able' pupils are similar to those found in other studies (Hay & Lisahunter, 2006; Hay & Macdonald, 2010b) and are experiences that remain in PE for those who do not embody 'legitimate' notions of

ability. However, in the current study there was some suggestion that pupils could develop ways to manage some of these experiences, for instance Jeff employed humour:

I - Can you maybe describe a time to me when you didn't feel particularly confident in PE, have you ever experienced that?

There's times when I get the ball and I do something like kick it off when I should have passed it, and little things like aaw, but as I say I kind of make a joke out of it . . . Doing things well kind of builds up confidence but if I do something wrong I can have a laugh about it, I don't get too down, I don't let myself get down (Jeff, G4, interview 2).

A possible explanation for this strategy may be that as he had experienced four years of PE in the school, in comparison to the younger pupils in group 4, this may have given him time to develop some resilience in managing some of his marginalised experiences. He may have formed these over KS3 and KS4 where he acknowledged a difference in his PE experiences:

So in the first three years there's a lot of oh what you doing you stupid idiot, and that, there's a bit of that, but not that much [now] cos you know if someone does a mistake, people kind of know who is more likely to make mistakes and they can kind of accept that, and when someone who's maybe not so good does something really good or impressive, people kind of cheer them on, you know well done . . . My group is actually quite good because, they don't put people down as much as they used to, in previous years (Jeff, G4 interview 1 and 2)

Jeff's experiences seemed to be more positive in year 10 where there was less pressure on him to perform at a certain level and also perhaps less emphasis on the performative aspects associated with PE. His group seemed to appreciate the mixed levels of ability that existed where the emphasis was on participation as opposed to attainment and/or competition. It is an example of the potential for inclusion to work and illustrates one approach to limiting the marginalisation of low ability pupils. The fact that this was a core PE group with no related exams or assessments may have also been influential. Furthermore, it contributes to debates on the purpose and nature of PE (Kay, 2007; Kirk, 1988, 1992, 2004; Kirk & Tinning, 1990; Lee, 2004; Macphail, 2004; Penney & Evans, 1999; Phillips & Roper, 2006; Talbot, 1999; Williams, 1964), especially for the type of activity and emphasis within a lesson. Despite many of his experiences in PE, Jeff was realistic about his ability and seemed to enjoy PE despite having lower ability.

Keisha was also able to demonstrate resilience within some of her wider ability-based experiences in school which in some instances motivated her to try harder. She provided an example from science:

In science last year . . . they let the people who were in the top group do SATS and then the other people didn't get to do SATS. I didn't get to do SATS but I was smart you know, but then that kind of brought my confidence down but it made me try harder, so there is a good and a bad thing about ability groups it makes people try harder who are in the lower group but it kind of brings down confidence as well.

I - So you're saying, this is not in PE but in science for example, you think you're smart but you weren't put in the high group and that actually affected your confidence?

Yeah

I - But it also made you want to try harder?

Yeah.

I - And did you end up getting into the top set in science?

Yeah (Keisha, G3, interview 2).

Keisha showed an awareness of the potential influence of being placed in a low ability group which made her want to 'try harder'. Keisha's different experiences in science may have supported her in managing some of her ability-based experiences where she was in the top set and perhaps more confident as a result of different practices to those that she experienced in PE. Her approach in this instance poses the potential of transference and the development of confidence in other areas of the curriculum.

Collectively, the examples highlight how ability-based practices, in particular ability groups, did not necessarily support learning across the range of abilities. This is in support of other research that has suggested that alternative approaches to ability-groupings should be considered by stakeholders in education (Boaler et al., 2000; Hallam & Ireson, 2005). Within the related practices, the most able pupils were sometimes not challenged and pupils of lower ability could experience forms of marginalisation, which may be due to their lack of physical capital (Hay & Macdonald, 2010a). Pupils such as Keisha, could receive mixed messages about their ability with limited acknowledgement and support towards achieving any 'potential'. Her experiences particularly help to highlight how pupils with 'potential' ability may be 'at risk' of not fully achieving within a system that employs certain ability-based practices. In support of this last point, Jeff made a poignant observation on how he felt that many pupils, who were considered to be somewhere in the 'middle' in terms of ability, were often ignored within education:

The thing about the school is the people who are really high and super they're congratulated a lot and then the people who are really bad and then turn good, or who are just kind of bad are encouraged when they're not so bad and they get

loads of rewards when they have improved. For example on the progress report if someone goes from 2.6 to 3, they'd be rewarded whereas if I've been 3.5 constantly nobody cares, so if I'm like within anywhere like the middle, even if I'm high or not quite super but really good, you never get any praise or anything, this isn't necessarily about PE it's more of a general thing of the school (Jeff, G4, interview 2).

Jeff's example indicates how high ability pupils possessed a form of capital that was acknowledged through related practices which reinforced their status, and pupils who were at the lower end were encouraged and rewarded when they had improved. However, he felt that those in the middle who performed consistently were ignored within the current system. His example raises concerns over how to support *all* pupils in achieving their full potential.

6.3.3 The value of physical education

In exploring how ability-based practices served to support pupils' perceptions of PE, the talented pupils were very positive:

I think it's [PE] more important to me cos I know it will take me somewhere, my other lessons will, but sport's more me (Darren G2, focus group 2).

I've always loved PE so I wanted to do that as an option from straight away and JSLA was always popular (Chris, G1, interview 2).

PE was very important to them, in terms of the practical gains as well as what they could achieve through examinations and coaching qualifications. The talented pupils also expressed the view that PE was valuable:

I think it is because it keeps you healthy and keeps you fit so you can, no yeah, I think it is just as important (Melissa, G1, interview 1).

I think people should make it more important because if you're not fit, it's all about keeping fit and if you're not fit then nobody would hire you, cos you wouldn't look as well and then you'd probably like die earlier, like obese [laughs] (Ben, G1 focus group).

However, despite its value to them, they also acknowledged that it was not necessarily considered by others to have value as an 'academic' subject:

People don't think it's like that important for colleges, you won't need it for University whereas there are other better subjects to do (Greg, G1, Yr 9 boys' focus group).

They [school] take English, maths and science more seriously than PE (Letitia, G2, interview 1).

In contrast, the importance and value associated with PE was less for pupils in study groups 3 and 4:

It's not really that important . . .

Out of all the subjects that you do that's like, that's the least needed subject . . . I think if you enjoy it you just think of it as fun, you don't really think of it as a lesson . . . I don't feel that PE is gonna play a part in my life, there's nothing in my life I want to do that involves PE (Cole, G3, boys' focus group and interview 2).

You don't really need PE in your life, well you do need physical education and all that so you don't turn fat . . . I'm not going to be a basketball player or a football player so I don't really need to know about that stuff (Syeed, G4, interview 2).

Cole viewed PE as fun and Syeed acknowledged a health-related aspect, but both pupils emphasised that it held very little value or importance in their lives. This notion was evident from other 'less able' pupil narratives:

I - How have you felt knowing that you're not considered perhaps particularly talented at PE in the school?

Honestly I couldn't really care, I like PE you know it's not a criticism of PE, I'm just not interested in some sort of status related to how good I am at PE (Jeff, G4, interview 2).

I - If someone says this boy's really good at PE, are you bothered by that, do you wish that was you?

It's a good thing for them but yeah I really don't care (Syeed, G4, interview 2).

In discussing how being perceived as having limited ability in PE made them feel, the pupils above illustrated how they attached limited importance to being considered able in PE. This may be associated with a lack of importance that PE held for them in general. There is also a suggestion that PE related qualifications held limited value for them:

Well JSLA I just didn't like the idea . . . and the GCSE I didn't choose it because a lot of people said to me . . . GCSE it's a lot about theory and so, one out of three lessons a week is just a theory lesson um and I couldn't imagine anything worse . . . it's a bit pointless (Jeff, G4, interview 2).

Where high ability pupils such as Darren, Chris and Melissa place value on PE helps to reinforce Bourdieu's assumptions about the existence and reinforcement of 'legitimate' cultural capital within the education system (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). The lack of perceived value and cultural capital of PE held by the 'less able' pupils who see PE as

‘not important’ may be a reflection of their PE experiences and contributes further to discourse surrounding what is valued within the field of PE but also education as a whole (Bailey et al., 2009a; Capel, 2000a, 2000b; Kay, 2007; Kirk, 1988, 2006; Lee, 2004; Murdoch, 1990; Talbot, 1999; Williams, 1964).

Overall, many of the lower ability pupils emphasised the lack of importance that PE held for them which was in contrast to those who were talented and, it perhaps demonstrates a plausible relationship between ability and engagement in PE where those who are more able perhaps have a greater vested interest in doing well in PE than those who are less able. It may also be an indication of a type of coping strategy that the less able pupils have developed to compensate for their lack of ability in PE; specifically, in the sport domain, it has been suggested that young people have been shown to compensate for a lack of perceived physical ability (poor sport self-concept) by lowering their value of sports to maintain their overall esteem (Harter, 1999). The difference in how PE is perceived across the different levels of ability may also be associated with the pupils’ aspirations and their intentions for future engagement in physical activity.

6.3.4 Aspirations, lifelong learning and engagement in physical activity

For the talented pupils, PE was linked to many of their aspirations where some wanted to continue participating in their sport and others wanted to coach or continue to study it; this was particularly evident in study group 1:

I want to kind of stay along the same road so maybe pick it [A level PE] and see how it goes, I think you can drop one after the first year so if I’m really struggling then I can drop it, but like things like biology I’m thinking about to do with the body and stuff (Chris, G1, interview 1).

I think I’ll, cos I’ve always done sport I think I’ll definitely keep it up otherwise it would just feel a bit, I think it would just feel a bit empty cos I’ve never not done it . . . it would be nice like a couple of qualifications in coaching (Melissa, G1, interview 2).

I hope that sport will be a part of my life like even if I’m doing like a really non sporty job like sitting in an office or something, I’ll organise a team from my office against other teams (Ben, G1, interview 2).

I don’t think I’m good enough to be a professional, maybe a semi-professional. . . It’s fun at the moment but soon it will get really tough and hard training, and I’d have to go to college, a tennis college or academy . . . it’s possible but it would be hard (Greg, G1, interview 1).

Chris discussed his interest and aspirations of studying A' level PE at College. Melissa and Ben could see sport being a part of their life and Melissa was also interested in coaching. Greg considered continuing with his tennis as a possibility although he acknowledged that being 'successful' involved a lot of hard work. Continuing in both the physical and theoretical aspects of PE was therefore important to these pupils, which they could see opened up a variety of opportunities:

I think sport definitely gives so many opportunities as well, like last year I had so many opportunities to do wicked things and experiences as well (Chris, G1, interview 2).

In addition, the 'unsuccessful' talented pupils portrayed similar aspirations:

I was hoping to become a professional footballer . . . but if like say something happened to me I'd have to have something to fall back on so it wouldn't matter so designing games and stuff for big companies and stuff like that . . .

I - If that didn't work out could you see yourself maybe as a coach or manager?
Yeah, not as much as a manger but like as a coach yeah like an assistant coach or something . . . Yeah cos my mum says like if you don't, if you made it pro and playing for a big club and in your first game you get injured and you can't play football for the rest of your life, she said you always have to have a back up plan, and my back up plan would be like a coach to coach football (Darren, G2, interview 2).

Darren was quite passionate about becoming a professional footballer but also quite realistic about his chances and had considered alternative ways to be involved as a coach, a route in which his mother seemed to be supportive. In contrast, some of the other pupils in this study group appeared to aspire to continue to participate but with perhaps slightly less conviction:

I - Do you think that football is something that you might carry on with?
Might do yeah?

I - Is it something that you'd like to go further in?
Yeah.

I - Yeah, to what sort of level?
Well if I could be professional I'd like that but if I'm not I don't mind
(Peter, G2, interview 1).

I - How far do you think you'll take your basketball?
I don't know, I don't even know nothing about it, they don't teach us about it, where you can go (Letitia G2, interview 2).

Both Peter and Letitia seemed less sure about their continued levels of participation. Letitia's uncertainty may have been related to a lack of resources or awareness of how

she could continue her basketball outside of school. Her experiences highlight some of the recent debates about policy changes to the funding and resourcing of extracurricular activities and sports clubs for young people to continue participation (Phillpots & Grix, 2014).

In comparison, the pupils in study groups 3 and 4 held limited aspirations to continue to participate. This was especially the case for pupils in study group 4:

I'm not particularly . . . aspirational to do with PE. I don't particularly want to be a footballer or something.

I - Do you think sport would be in the picture 10 years later?

Probably not but who can say, I don't know . . . Um . . . I doubt it . . . well with friends probably I'll do the occasional kick about but I'm not a particularly sporting person, but then I am interested in sport but not as doing it (Jeff, G4, interview 2).

Being considered as able in PE held little importance to Jeff; he was more interested in being an observer in the future rather than a participant. Similarly, some pupils in study group 3 highlighted a lack of interest or understanding of why they should participate in PE:

You don't really learn you know, we just do it, when we play football sometimes . . . we spend like half an hour just going around cones and stuff, I don't really understand what we're doing (Cole, G3, focus group 3).

Cole did not feel that he learnt much in his PE lessons and also portrayed himself as quite lazy and possessing a laissez faire attitude towards aspects of participation:

I - Why do you think you didn't carry on doing well in your football?

Because . . . cos I think that I was kind of lazy, I couldn't be bothered (Cole, G3, interview 2).

His aspirations were not linked with physical activity, on leaving school he wanted to be an accountant. In contrast, other pupils in study group 3 emphasised that they would like to continue to participate:

I - Do you think you'd like to carry on with sport when you leave school?

Erm probably, I enjoy sport, is a fun thing to do, like active (Leon, G3, interview 2).

I - Do you think that would be something that you will carry on with after you leave school?

Yeah I'd like to keep fit and maintain a healthy diet . . . it depends what kind of job I have . . . if you have a job that has long hours then when you get home you'll be exhausted and then you won't have time to fit it in (Dionne, G3, focus group 3 and interview 2).

Leon enjoyed sport, saw it as fun and had the intention to continue. Dionne could see the health benefits of physical activity but had considered how she might not be able to fit in with work commitments. Keisha expressed similar interests:

I - Do you think PE or sport, is something that you will carry on with after you leave school?

Definitely, I want to do basketball . . . I've started to like netball as well, tennis I'm not so sure about but basketball is definite (Keisha, G3, interview 2).

Keisha's diverse experiences in PE do not seem to have detracted from her enjoyment or interest in pursuing physical activity. Her aspiration to be a doctor combined her love of science with an interest in understanding how the body works.

The narratives of pupils here help to highlight some of the wider implications of ability-based practices and considerations for engaging young people in physical activity beyond school. The more able pupils valued PE and physical activity where it linked with many of their aspirations. Pupils who were not considered as able saw little value in pursuing physical activity and the 'potentially' talented held disparate opinions on the value of PE. Consequently, if the central purpose of physical education is to encourage young people to engage in physical activity beyond school life then it is arguably the pupils who are considered 'potentially' or 'not talented' that are the most vulnerable in terms of achieving such an outcome. It has been argued that confidence, self-esteem and physical competence all influence the likelihood of young people becoming lifelong participants (Kirk, 2010). If there is to be effective transfer of learning and valuing physical activity some of the 'legitimate' ability-based practices and activities associated within PE perhaps need reconsidering (Fairclough, Stratton, & Baldwin, 2002).

6.4 Summary

This investigation has attempted to enhance understanding of how ability-based practices and discourses within the social field contribute to the pupil experience in PE. This chapter has highlighted certain practices that served to strengthen ability identities that were shaped by PE groups. Ability perceptions were constructed and reinforced in accordance with social processes, interactions, communication and negotiation (Harris & Parker, 2009) and pupils drew on ability-based practices to understand and make sense of their ability and position themselves accordingly within the field. How pupils were grouped in PE, the type of activity they participated in, and how they perceived

and experienced a range of interactions was influential, potentially through a self-fulfilling cycle where related processes strengthened pupils' perceptions of ability (Ommundsen, 2001; Trouilloud et al., 2002). Where these processes were inconsistent or challenged self-perceptions, as in many of the 'less able' pupils' narratives, there is a concern that they can be associated with some disengagement from the subject (Hay & Lisahunter, 2006). Conversely, where reinforcement processes were more consistent this contributed to a more positive PE experience, a 'stable' identity, regular engagement and aspirations in PE and extracurricular sport, as in the case of the talented pupils.

As 'legitimate' notions of ability were valued and acknowledged by the teachers, both formally and informally, through the ability-based practices, it is those who 'fit' these notions, the talented pupils, who are most able to convert their physical capital into various other forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Hay & Lisahunter 2006; Hay & Macdonald, 2010a). The findings would support Bourdieu's supposition that a major role of the education system is cultural reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) where the success of pupils is often predetermined by the capital that they bring with them and where the education system serves to build on this basis rather than provide equality of opportunity for all to develop their 'potential'. Hay and Macdonald (2010a) argue that ability in PE is therefore about what resources an individual possesses and employs in and through their habitus, and it is the "interaction of field, habitus and capital" (p. 16) that produces and reproduces notions of ability and reinforces pupils' beliefs about their position within the field. The amount of capital possessed by an individual influences not only how they experience PE but also their confidence, learning and future engagement in physical activity.

In further support of this suggestion, it is the talented pupils who perceived themselves as the 'best', had the most opportunities, were given responsibility and seen as role models. Their experiences often resulted in them gaining symbolic capital, as in the case of Chris:

My mum's always said it to me . . . no matter how smart you are in other subjects . . . if you're good at sport then it doesn't matter you'll be seen as, not like exceptionally cool or something but you won't be seen as a geek . . . I'm good at sport . . . I think it helps being sporty, especially if you are smart, you're still kind of cool or whatever, because you play sports . . .
There was this one boy that I've never talked to cos he's a bit of a rude boy . . . and I um started talking to him and he's like 'oh you're the boy who's really good at sport' . . . even if I haven't talked to someone they'll still know me for

one reason or another and that's always encouraging (Chris, G1, focus group 1, interviews 1, 2).

Chris was able to accrue symbolic capital through others perceiving him as able and he believed that he was 'accepted', 'cool' and encouraged by others which made him feel popular in the school.

There were however some incidents where pupils had experienced transition and a variety of groupings and their ability perceptions had altered during their time in the school, for example Keisha and Leon. Their fluctuations in perceived ability highlight the complexities involved in the formation of ability perceptions and also the ways in which differences within, as in ability groups in PE, and across social fields, such as PE and science, can provide alternative ability-based discourses and practices that can challenge normative definitions with the current social field (Rawolle & Lingard, 2013). This is particularly in relation to Bourdieu's argument that each distinct field provides a unique form of capital located within it (Rawolle & Lingard, 2013).

In comparison to the experiences of talented pupils, the pupils in study groups 3 and 4, had very few opportunities, were not given responsibility or seen as role models. Despite these pupils indicating that there were certain positive gains for them in PE, where the expectation for them was only on participation there are implications for achievement and fulfilling their full potential. There were however times when some of the less able pupils were able to exercise their own agency and develop mechanisms to cope with some of their more negative experiences in PE.

Where 'legitimate' notions of ability prevail it has additional implications for how girls experience PE. Girls who are 'talented' and display physical ability gain symbolic capital (Hills, 2007) which in turn confers them with a type of status and similar treatment to boys. Girls are only recognised as able if their demeanour aligns with the hegemonic order of the field; notions that are reinforced through the teacher's perceptions and interactions (Hay & Macdonald, 2010b). It is Letitia who appeared to benefit from her top set, mixed gender group experiences where she was challenged and motivated to learn. This is in contrast to the negative experiences of Keisha and Dionne. It has been suggested that girls achieve and enjoy PE more in a single-sex environment (Derry & Phillips, 2004; Olafson, 2002) and the experiences of all three girls contribute

to debates on how best to group pupils in PE in relation to gender (Hannon & Ratliffe, 2005, 2007; Hills & Croston, 2012; Lines & Stidder, 2003).

Furthermore, the practice of grouping pupils by ability or mixing ability levels together has received contrasting levels of support (Hallam & Ireson, 2005; Ireson, et al., 2002; MacIntyre & Ireson, 2002). A key structural aspect of the field for the current study was the use of ability groups in supporting ability-based learning and within this context there were various examples of how the teachers were responsive to many of the pupils' needs where they often demonstrated careful thought and adaptability in supporting the needs of all their pupils. However, in comparison to ability groups there was limited evidence that a more integrated approach (Boaler et al., 2000; Hallam & Ireson, 2005) was valued in the same way. Ability groupings appear to support those who are talented the most by helping to reinforce the status quo and aligning with ability discourse where such practices serve to reinforce 'legitimate' notions of ability. This finding supports previous research (Evans & Penney, 2008; Hay & Iles, 2006; Hay & Macdonald, 2010a, 2010b; Wright & Burrows, 2006). In particular, Hay and Iles argue that such conceptions of ability impose constraints and educational limitations which can affect pupils' future engagement in PE; this is of particular concern for those who are considered as having low levels of ability as they are constrained by the narrow and performance-oriented definitions and practices associated with ability. Thus, the practice of ability groupings is perhaps no panacea in supporting and meeting the needs' of pupils of *all* abilities.

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSIONS

This investigation was driven by my own personal experiences of physical education, as a learner and as a teacher. My intention was to enhance understanding of young people in a PE context and to specifically explore the complexities involved in how pupils of different perceived levels of ability experience PE as well as examining the processes that contribute towards notions of ability. Qualitative methods were employed over the course of one school year to explore the pupil narrative in PE in one case study school, with the additional objective of providing an opportunity for pupils to voice their experiences. The pupil narrative was contextualised with the PE teacher perspective. In addressing the aims of the study two specific research questions were posed:

How is ability conceptualised within PE?

How do pupils of varying levels of ability experience PE?

The findings reveal a variety of processes that contribute towards the conceptualisation of ability within PE and indicate that the resulting ability-based practices influence how young people experience physical education.

This chapter focuses on the key themes that emerged from the data: the social construction of ability in PE, including defining, reinforcing and challenging notions of ability; and, the pupil experience in PE, the learning environment, valuing physical activity and lifelong engagement. In addition, consideration is given to the theoretical and methodological issues in relation to drawing upon Bourdieu to understand socially constructed ability-related experiences. Furthermore reflections on the research process and implications for PE in relation to discourse, policy and practices are presented. The chapter concludes with suggestions for future research.

7.1 A social construction of ability in PE

In exploring how notions of ability were conceptualised and thus experienced within PE it was important to consider contrasting theoretical perspectives. Chapter three addressed how the theoretical perspective can influence how ability is conceptualised and, for the purpose of this investigation, ability was positioned as a social construct. The research findings complement and extend previous research on the social construction of ability (Hay & Macdonald, 2010a, 2010b; Hay & Lisahunter, 2006) and identify a variety of contributing processes and interactions between

individuals and also between individuals and the field. Whilst there was evidence of practice that had the potential to challenge 'legitimate' notions of ability, the identified processes often resulted in hierarchical ability-based practices that served to reinforce dominant notions of ability. The key findings are summarised below.

7.1.1 Defining ability in PE

This investigation recognises that defining ability in PE is a complex process. For the PE teachers, there was a level of consistency and a sense of shared knowledge and agreement where they were able to identify ability in PE in broad terms, acknowledging the significance of both physical and cognitive abilities. Teachers also made clear distinctions between the aims of PE and sport. However, despite such distinctions and a collective broad definition of ability in PE, further exploration revealed that in practice the teachers used physical excellence to evaluate talent suggesting that predominant notions of ability within the field of PE in the school continue to be associated with physical prowess and embodiment (Bailey et al., 2009b; Croston, 2013).

Variations in defining ability highlight the tensions that can exist within the field where there is a contrast between teachers' broad definitions of ability in PE, how they conceptualise sport-based talent, and what prevails as the dominant notion of ability within PE. The findings also highlight tensions that can exist between one school and the wider field of PE where the teachers appear constrained by the powerful influence of discourse and field-related practices in their capacity to influence and challenge 'legitimate' notions of ability. Furthermore, these tensions contribute towards inconsistencies in working towards clarity and consistency in defining ability in PE and also to discourse that has evolved from previous, and continuing, debates on whether the field should distinguish between PE and sport. Consequently, it can be argued that questions about appropriate indicators of talent and ability in PE seem to centre persistently on debates about whether and how to distinguish between PE and sport and the balance between physical and social, cognitive, creative and personal elements (Morley & Bailey, 2006; Croston, 2013; Kirk & Gorley 2000; Murdoch 1990) points which continue to be contested.

7.1.2. Reinforcing and challenging notions of ability

Understandings of ability and the associated ability-based practices within the school are often seen to reinforce ‘legitimate’ notions of ability. Hierarchical ability-based practices, such as being placed on the G&T register and the formation of ability groups, are evident whereby those who match dominant definitions (in terms of physicality, performance and capital) are privileged in terms of resources, support, opportunities, expectations, and the roles they are allocated. In addition, the composition of PE groups was found to particularly impact upon the pupils’ perceptions of their own and others’ ability.

The identified ability-based processes and practices serve to align the pupils with specific notions of ability and the resulting pedagogy predicated a social order in which individuals are attributed positional status by virtue of how well they can perform. In other words, through the ability-based practices pupils learn the relative importance of their own and others’ ability as well as their allocated or achieved social role (Evans & Penney, 2008); this finding was anticipated and was especially evident through the alignment of pupils’ ratings of their ability and the perceptions of the teachers as evidenced in their ability groups. In contrast, there were some pupils who reflected on the incongruence between the social field of PE at school and other experiences; pupils such as Leon and Keisha who had experienced a variety of groupings were able to reflect within their narratives upon the transient and changing nature of their ability labels and were therefore less clear on their position within the field; their fluctuations in perceived ability highlight the complex nature of ability perceptions and the significance of social context. Their experiences also help to further understanding of the processes that contribute towards fluctuations in ability perceptions and may help to increase awareness for stakeholders in considering some of the implications of ability-based practices, for example, in relation to how young people identify themselves within the field. Furthermore, these inconsistencies highlight the ways that different social fields can provide alternative ability-based discourses and practices and subvert normative definitions with the current social field (Rawolle & Lingard, 2013). Despite evidence of variations, all the pupil experiences highlight how ability-based practices contribute to the formation and reinforcement of ability-related identities where pupils are able to interpret ability through their own individual

experiences, drawing on related interactions, communication and negotiation processes to understand and make sense of their ability.

The theoretical proposition of Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) as highlighted in chapter three provides one perspective that explains how 'legitimate' notions of ability are reproduced. In particular, this perspective highlights how social discourses and practices serve to reproduce existing hierarchies and forms of organisation in schools as in the case of 'able' pupils receiving greater opportunities, differential teacher treatment and higher expectations. Bourdieu and Passeron emphasise the suggestion that dominant ideas are consistently the ideas of the ruling class and the process of cultural reproduction contributes to the maintenance of power by the dominant groups in that society. In the case of an individual who fits the dominant notions of ability in PE, by definition they accumulate symbolic capital, gain power and authority as they adopt the culture and as they acquire additional capital they become more influential, gain more control and, hence, legitimacy (Zevenbergen et al., 2002), acting to reinforce and reproduce the structures of the habitus that generated them in the first place (Nash, 1999). It is those who 'fit' these notions, the talented pupils, who are most able to convert their physical capital into various other forms of capital. The amount of capital a pupil possesses remains a key variable in terms of how they experience PE (Evans, 2004; Evans & Penney, 2008; Hay & Macdonald, 2010a; Hills, 2007).

Conversely, and in addition to the teachers' broad definitions of ability, there were examples of where reinforcement processes could potentially be challenged within the field. For example: 'effort' was sometimes acknowledged and rewarded, as in the case of Keisha's award for trying hard and the emphasis on participation during events such as sports day. In addition, teachers could be considerate in how they grouped pupils in terms of their ability and who they used for demonstrations; girls were acknowledged and identified as able and received opportunities and resources, as in the case of the year 9 girls who were placed into a talented group with boys where there was a positive impact on their development and achievement in PE. However, despite such practices, the prevalence of 'legitimate' notions of ability remains and the teachers and pupils appear to be constrained by the powerful influence of discourse and field related practices. It appears that the performative culture within the field of PE is too 'strong' for any sustained change in ability assumptions and practices to occur. This is a key

finding for the study and should be of concern to stakeholders, especially where there is a belief that current notions of ability may not facilitate all pupils in reaching their potential; a notion strongly supported by the pupil experience and the implications for young people in PE which are summarised next.

7.2 The pupil experience in PE

The pupil and teacher narratives help to emphasise the complex and dynamic nature of the PE experience. Most pupils, irrespective of their ability were able to highlight a range of positive and negative experiences. There were examples of enjoyable experiences in PE where pupils felt supported to achieve within a positive learning environment. There were also contrasting examples where pupils did not enjoy or appear to benefit from certain ability-based practices. In addition, the teachers demonstrated a level of flexibility where they were responsive to pupils' needs in considering certain groupings. Conversely there were some practices from teachers which resulted in negative pupil experiences.

The variations across all the pupil experiences help to illustrate the complexities involved in unpacking the individual experience. Where practices result in a positive outcome for pupils, related practices should be commended. However, where ability serves to inform hierarchical practices that privilege those who are defined as 'able', further consideration needs to be given to the potential impact upon the young person. The findings indicate that ability-based practices influence how pupils experience PE and these variations hold important consequences for pupils of all abilities in PE, especially in terms of becoming physically literate. This section summarises the related findings.

7.2.1 The learning environment in PE

Ability groups were a key structural aspect of the field of study. This practice has received contrasting levels of support (Hallam & Ireson, 2005; Ireson, et al., 2002; MacIntyre & Ireson, 2002) and the findings indicate that some pupils can benefit from this strategy where it is suggested that learning is easier to plan and deliver and hence it is a strategy that supports an effective learning environment (Boaler et al., 2000; Hallam & Ireson, 2005). The findings suggest that it is the 'more able' that benefit the most from ability groups and related practices as they perceived themselves as very competent in PE, displayed confidence across the range of their PE experiences, were

motivated to perform, and enjoyed positive relationships with their teachers. There were some instances however where ability-based practices did not necessarily facilitate talented pupils' learning. Those who were at a more 'expert' level than their peers in certain activities (Melissa and Greg) stressed how being in the top ability group did not support the extension of their ability; this was due to the fact that they were not challenged through working with their peers and the PE teacher was not capable of extending their expertise. Both their experiences serve to question some of the perceptions about how ability groups work to extend the more able pupils (Boaler et al., 2000; Hallam & Ireson, 2005; Kerckhoff, 1986) and highlight the challenges faced by PE teachers in extending pupils who are already at an 'expert' level.

In addition, some of the experiences of the 'less able' pupils also challenge the use of ability groups where pupils can suffer low self-perceptions of ability and low confidence within a high ability group. In particular, Leon and Keisha sometimes compared themselves to the most able where they gauged and perceived their ability as less than many of their peers. Negative connotations have been highlighted in relation to pupils comparing themselves to the very able, otherwise known as the BFLP effect (Chanal et al., 2005; Marsh & Craven, 2006; Marsh & Hau, 2003) and this may be the case for these pupils.

There were other instances where ability-based practices and groupings sometimes resulted in negative and marginalised experiences for the 'less able' which influenced their confidence and perhaps their capability to reach their full potential. In comparison to the talented pupils, the 'less able' often had limited levels of confidence where they sometimes had a fear of performing in front of others and being seen to 'fail', as in the case of Dionne and Keisha. Furthermore, the narratives of Keisha, Dionne, Jeff and Marlon provide examples of marginalisation either through pupil interactions or those with the teacher. These marginalised experiences are similar to those found in other studies (Hay & Lisahunter, 2006; Hay & Macdonald, 2010b) and are experiences that remain in PE for those who do not fit 'legitimate' notions of ability. There was however some indication that the 'less able' pupils developed ways to manage some of these experiences. For instance, Jeff was able to employ humour and Keisha was able to draw upon some of her wider educational experiences such as being motivated to try harder after being placed in a low ability group in science which

eventually resulted in her being placed into the top set. Her ability to potentially develop confidence in other areas of the curriculum poses the possibility of transference to other subjects, a strategy which could help enhance confidence levels in other pupils.

The experiences across the range of abilities highlight how ability-based practices, in particular the use of ability groups, can influence pupils' ability-related identities, their confidence and motivation, and consequently impact upon the learning environment. This finding supports the consideration of alternative pedagogical approaches (Boaler et al., 2000; Hallam & Ireson, 2005). Furthermore, Keisha's experiences particularly help to highlight how pupils with 'potential' ability may be in danger of not fully achieving within a system that employs such ability-based practices. If we are to challenge assumptions and practices related to ability in PE then we need to raise awareness of their influence on young people, an important development in terms of making PE an enjoyable and positive environment for pupils where *all* potential can be realised. Furthermore, efforts to create pedagogical strategies that support an effective learning environment need to be guided by re/considerations of the purpose of PE (Kirk, 2004; Kirk & Tinning, 1990; Macphail, 2004; Penney & Evans, 1999; Talbot, 1999), in order to highlight the link between the rationale that underpins the pedagogical practices and activities that are offered to pupils within the PE curriculum; a point that is expanded upon in the section that discusses the wider implications for PE.

In extending debates surrounding how to best group pupils in PE, Dionne and Keisha's experiences of mixed gender groups highlighted the potential for this pedagogical strategy to emphasise gender related social and cultural practices and discourses where boys continue to be positioned as more motivated and able students. Their experiences are in contrast to those of Letitia who appeared to benefit from her top set, mixed gender group experiences where she was challenged and motivated to learn. This may be related to Letitia being identified as 'talented' by displaying physical ability for which she gains symbolic capital, a process which in turn confers upon her a type of status and similar treatment to boys. The various experiences of all three girls contribute to debates on how best to group pupils in PE in relation to gender (Hannon & Ratliffe, 2005, 2007; Hills & Croston, 2012; Lines & Stidder, 2003) and highlights additional challenges faced by stakeholders in transforming mixed gender lessons within institutional and social constraints (Hills & Croston, 2012). Their experiences

also draw attention to the complex interplay between socially constructed processes surrounding assumptions about gender and ability and contribute towards understanding some of the factors that influence how girls experience PE.

7.2.2 Valuing physical activity and lifelong engagement

The promotion of lifelong physical activity and the development of a healthy population has been a central focus of PE related discourse (Cale & Harris, 2009; Duncan, Birch, & Woodfield, 2012; Demetriou & Höner, 2012). Schools have consistently been acknowledged as the primary institution for promoting physical activity (Cale & Harris, 2009) and despite continuing debates on the purpose of PE, there is general agreement that one of its central aims should be to support and encourage participation in young people in working towards the promotion and continuation of healthy and active lifestyles (Cale & Harris, 2013).

The findings indicate that the pupil experience in PE influences how young people perceive and value physical activity which in turn has the potential to impact their lifelong engagement. For the talented pupils, PE was linked to many of their aspirations where some wanted to continue participating in their sport and others wanted to coach or continue to study it. They appeared to value physical activity and engage in regular participation; their values can be linked with their positive and consistent experiences of being recognised as talented. In comparison, pupils who were not considered as able saw little value in pursuing physical activity; their values may be associated with some of their less positive experiences such as marginalisation, limited expectations and access to resources. Arguably, an association is apparent where higher levels of ability equate to greater value and participation in physical activity; however, it is more complicated. The experiences of the ‘potentially’ talented illustrated the potential for young people to hold disparate opinions on the value of PE and their diverse experiences and opinions highlight that such an association is much more complex, especially where this group of pupils have experienced ability group transitions, variations in ability-based identities, and both positive experiences and marginalisation in PE. This last point was not anticipated and it helps to stress the need for greater research into the experiences of pupils who are identified as having ‘potential’ ability and the possible impact of this label.

In addition, some of the experiences of study groups 3 and 4 hold important considerations for stakeholders as it has been argued that positive experiences, confidence, self-esteem and physical competence all influence the likelihood of young people becoming lifelong participants (Kirk, 2010). Where the pupil experience is inconsistent and challenges ability self-perceptions there is a concern that they can be associated with some disengagement from the subject (Hay & Lisahunter, 2006). If there is to be effective transfer of learning and valuing physical activity some of the 'legitimate' ability-based practices and activities associated within PE perhaps need reconsidering; within the current culture, it is arguably the pupils who are considered 'potentially' or 'not talented' that are the most vulnerable in terms of achieving and engaging in lifelong physical activity.

7.3 Drawing upon Bourdieu to understand socially constructed ability-related experiences

This study has considered and incorporated a number of theoretical perspectives in order to explore the construction and experience of ability in PE. The field of physical education and notions of ability were both positioned as socially constructed concepts, a perspective that acknowledges the social context and the values contained within it (Evans, 2004; Kirk, 1992). I found this perspective particularly useful in acknowledging how the field of PE has been influenced by dominant political ideologies and social elements that have advantaged certain groups (Bailey et al., 2009a; Evans & Penney, 2008). As Bourdieu emphasised the social world as being the product of social constructions his framework was considered appropriate in exploring both research questions from a socially constructed perspective.

Although contrasting views have been presented regarding the application of Bourdieu's ideas within educational research (Jenkins, 2003; Hills, 2006; Rawolle & Lingard, 2013; Reay, 2004a) I found his conceptual tools (habitus, field and capital) useful in informing much of the investigation. In particular, the concept of field facilitated an acknowledgement and consideration of the culture where pupils' and teachers' notions of ability were configured, reconfigured, and experienced. The concept of field also supported consideration of the context, the history of that context and the contributing structures, processes and agents. In other words, Bourdieu's conceptualisation of 'field' allowed for the inclusion of the history of PE and the related

discourses that seem to be central to various issues raised within PE throughout this study. Furthermore, the concepts of habitus and field contributed concurrently to understanding the teachers' perceptions of ability in PE where I have suggested that the formation of the PE teacher's habitus has taken place, and been influenced by certain 'legitimate' assumptions about ability, from their experiences as players and teachers of PE. Furthermore, the notions of habitus and doxa enabled a level of analysis of the PE teachers' practical mastery, their 'feel for the game' which was grounded within the context of the field of PE.

In addition, Bourdieu's notion of capital helped to explain why certain ability-related qualities were socially and culturally valued and reproduced in the context of this study and the significance of capital was reiterated in terms of how young people of various abilities can experience PE where for capital to be 'symbolic' it must be 'recognised' and valued within the field. I also found combining notions of capital and field useful in explaining how, despite evidence of teachers and pupils being able to sometimes challenge dominant notions of ability, they are constrained by the powerful reproductive forces within the field and related discourse. Both concepts also facilitated an acknowledgement of the culture, where Kirk (2010) suggests that techniques of the body are socially constructed in ways that are meaningful to the field of PE (physical culture). However, I would suggest that Bourdieu's concept of capital warrants extending to include 'psychological capital' and cognitive dispositions such as confidence and self-efficacy; hope, optimism and positive attributions; and resilience (Henry, 2004; Luthans et al., 2004; Luthans, Avey et al., 2006; Luthans, Vogelgesang, et al., 2006). This would facilitate exploring the variations across pupils' levels of confidence, motivation and some of their coping mechanisms and how these linked to their ability-related experiences. Understanding how young people develop such concepts and strategies would also be beneficial for stakeholders in enhancing the pupil experience in PE.

Applying Bourdieu's theoretical concepts in educational research has come under criticism specifically in relation to attempting to explain how individuals exercise their own agency (Green, 2013; Hills, 2006; Shilling, 1993a). Although Bourdieu acknowledged individual agency within a structured environment where individuals have the capacity for reflecting upon how their habitus has developed over time

(Rawolle & Lingard, 2013), his concepts may require revisiting in relation to how they might explain the finding that pupils in groups 2 and 3 were able to exercise their own agency by drawing upon other fields to inform their ability-related identities, as in the case of Keisha and her science group.

7.4 Reflections on the research process

Reflecting on the research process is a crucial aspect of any investigation. Bourdieu strongly supported the notion that the production of academic knowledge was not a neutral activity and stressed the importance of researchers submitting themselves to the same rigorous critique that they would apply to the object of their research; this includes reflecting upon their own history (Green, 2013). In this respect it is essential to acknowledge my personal, political and professional interests and experiences, and how they may have impacted upon the research process.

My formative experiences in education have been presented in the introduction of this thesis and related considerations have been highlighted in chapter 4 (4.2.4). It is important to acknowledge later reflections on the research process and highlight the discussions that ensued with my supervisors during the writing up of both discussion chapters where it became apparent that my formative experiences were influencing my perspective on the findings. In particular, initial drafts of discussion chapters portrayed the field under investigation as quite a negative environment for many of the pupils, especially those of less ability where there was limited focus on the practices that existed to support pupils and those that fostered an enjoyable learning environment. Shifting my perspective on the findings was a fairly long and challenging process and whilst there are many elements that remain within the discussion that highlight inequalities and negative experiences for pupils in PE there is also a focus on what the pupils enjoyed and how the teachers contributed towards a positive environment. I believe that conducting a lengthy and detailed analysis in the presence of my supervisors has supported a 'more balanced' view of the pupil experience and enabled me to portray the individual experience, the complexity of factors and the issues more accurately.

The methodology appeared well-suited to capturing the individuality and subjective nature of the pupil experience. Narratives served as a useful method for exploring the pupil experience in PE and the teacher perspective, as well as the

processes that contributed towards the social construction of ability. Over the course of the year I was able to develop a level of rapport with the pupils and teachers that enabled me to gain a rich insight into ability-based practices and experiences in PE. In addition, concurrently managing two sets of participants proved challenging where there was the potential for different power relationships in the same context, for example during my lesson observations. I feel that my capacity to relate to both the teachers and pupils and the development of a rapport supported by ability to synergise and manage the working relationships. This was evidenced through the depth and quality of data that was generated over the course of the investigation.

Reflecting upon the research process also facilitates an acknowledgement of certain limitations to the study. This research represents the perspectives and experiences contained within one case study school within the field of PE. In addition, the research incorporated an interpretive paradigm, one that supports the notion of multiple truths where truth is seen as a social construction that is inextricably linked with the meanings of the study's participants (Macdonald et al., 2009). Both of these points may therefore make it difficult to generalise the findings to other secondary PE contexts.

Furthermore, the pupils who participated represented a wide range of abilities and different ages however, despite attempts for equal numbers across genders there was an imbalance in participants recruited with the majority being boys (11) in comparison to girls (4). A more even gender split may have resulted in different findings and may have facilitated greater discussion and comparison on gender differences and ability-based experiences. Additionally, the current study explored ability within the context of 'able bodied' pupils however there is an acknowledgement that wider notions of ability and ability-based practices exist within PE. This is especially the case within an emerging policy agenda that promotes the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) within mainstream provision. This investigation also particularly focused on the variables of gender and class which were defining features of the development of the field of physical education and therefore considered essential in exploring the construction and experience of ability in PE. There is however an acknowledgement that young people can be defined in relation to other aspects of diversity, such as ethnicity, race and sexuality. Considering the research

questions from alternative differences and/or also combining multiple axes of difference (intersectionality) may have impacted upon the methods employed and the interpretations of the findings.

The investigation had a clear structure and design in place at the start, although an adjustment was made to the composition of the second focus group. Furthermore, the pupils made some contribution towards the research agenda where each time after the first instance, their responses inductively informed the next set of questions.

7.5 Implications for PE

The findings hold certain implications, recommendations and considerations for physical education which can be discussed under three areas: discourse and policy; practices and the field; current policy context.

7.5.1 Discourse and policy

The social construction of the field of physical education has been discussed throughout this thesis. Prevailing ideologies have been noted to have influenced the field and the subsequent ability-based practices that can exist within it. In particular, within chapter two it has been suggested that policy on sport and PE has contributed towards perceptions on the purpose of PE where the aims, values and practices of PE and sport have been combined (Flintoff, 2003; Green, 2006; Houlihan, 2000, 2002; Kay, 2007) and this practice has had a significant bearing on how ability is valued and perceived within what can be described as a 'performative' culture (Evans, 2013). Furthermore, it has been suggested that sport policy has reflected a shift away from educational objectives and a move towards elite development and school sport performance objectives which has re-prioritised a competitive culture (Houlihan, 2000; Kay, 2007). Consequently, a key question to emerge from the study is whether ability-based practices in PE help to raise educational objectives and standards for all, or do they serve to support the focus on elite sport development, which, arguably, can undermine attempts to develop a more participatory teaching that works towards developing physically literate individuals?

In addition, chapter two highlighted the NCPE (DES/WO, 1992) as a significant document that has defined PE and ability in England since the 1990s. There was a belief that it offered steps towards greater equity in the quality of provision by referencing entitlement of all pupils to a 'broad and balanced curriculum' (Evans, et al., 1996;

Penney, 2002) with the intention to facilitate more equitable PE and sporting opportunities. However, it has been argued that this and the various versions since its inception (DFEE, 1999; DfES/QCA, 2000; QCA, 2007) is a document that reinforces a performative culture (Evans et al., 2007), one that has also helped to keep in place some of the pre-conditions for persistent inequalities, in particular the continued emphasis on ‘traditional activities’ such as invasion games (Kirk, 2010). Kirk acknowledges how difficult it is for PE teachers to meet the suggestions of Morley and Bailey (2006) in defining ability across their multidimensional model; a notion that has received some support (Bailey et al., 2009b; Croston, 2013). Subsequently, the values within the NCPE have implications for how notions of ability are conceptualised and therefore how young people experience PE. According to Kirk, egalitarian principles may therefore be at odds with the fact that “practices such as games and sports . . . contain standards of excellence and goods intrinsic to these practices” (p. 114) and it is therefore difficult to see how notions of ability may be changed.

Subsequently, the findings support the suggestion that ‘legitimate’ notions of ability can be implicitly and/or explicitly reinforced through discourse and policy which in turn informs ability-based practices that may not necessarily support equality of opportunity for all. In particular, it is not evident how the NCPE supports PE teachers in recognising and acknowledging ‘potential ability’ or ability that lies outside ‘legitimate’ assumptions, or how the less able may be reassured that their physical activity experiences are valuable.

Recommendations for stakeholders

The current findings indicate that perhaps PE has lost its way, its focus. Indeed Kirk (2010) argues that too often stakeholders have failed to consider how the field of PE is constructed through its relationships with wider society. If stakeholders wish to challenge the place of dominant notions of ability and ability-based practices in PE then the influence of policy needs to be addressed. Furthermore, a clearer agreement amongst stakeholders is required in terms of the purpose of physical education, one that recognises the changes and demands of the current culture and one that would support conceptual clarity in defining ability. If the purpose of PE is indeed to develop much more than physical abilities and qualities associated with elite sport then notions of ability should represent those who are physically *educated* (Croston, 2013). A return to

discussions pertaining to the notion of a related pursuit being educationally 'worthwhile' (Peters, 1966; Ryle, 1949/1990; Williams, 1964) may therefore be timely.

7.5.2 Practices and the field

The current findings highlight practices that exist and serve to privilege 'legitimate' notions of ability, ones that are associated with elite sport. Such practices may arguably diminish other and perhaps more participatory and inclusive practices that might better support the development of physical literacy and the preparation of all pupils for lifelong participation and engagement in physical activity. There is therefore a need for PE teachers to consider the place of ability-based practices and perhaps integrate more inclusive practices which may limit the possibility that those who are not initially considered talented, or who do not fit 'legitimate' notions of ability will fail to accrue any type of capital; a process that may be exacerbated by narrow definitions of ability, early initial talent identification and limited opportunities for group transition.

Recommendations for practice

The findings of this study suggest that incorporating wider and clearer notions of ability would help to benefit all pupils in PE in achieving their *full* potential. This thesis recommends that the practice of early assessment and identification of talent in PE is avoided and, instead, all pupils have the opportunity to have their ability acknowledged at any point throughout their schooling. This could be supported by policy at local and national level.

Additionally, teachers should be further supported in developing their knowledge and understanding of broad definitions of ability in PE and the potential implications for young people that dominant notions of ability hold. This could be facilitated by integrating related knowledge into teacher training and additional professional development which may serve to enhance teachers' confidence in utilising wider notions of ability within their schools. New teachers potentially have the opportunity to contribute towards changing how ability is conceptualised and experienced within PE although arguably their field-related experiences and dispositions may have already been formed in line with 'legitimate' notions. There are therefore implications as to how they are trained but also integrated into the current system. Challenging notions of ability will continue to be difficult until teachers can detach themselves from dominant discourse. Interestingly, the implementation of

different types of schools, such as, academies and free schools facilitates the potential to work outside discourse that is informed through policy; such schools may therefore be well placed to challenge ‘legitimate’ notions of ability and the related practices.

7.5.3 Current policy context

A core argument within this thesis is the influence of prevailing ideologies on the field of PE through sport and PE policy which have significantly impacted upon how ability is valued and perceived. Since the completion of this investigation related policy and rhetoric appears to be serving to further reinforce a ‘performative’ culture where the coalition government strongly supports an emphasis on competitive team sports/games in schools. Their ideologies are evident in the aims of a new NCPE, to be introduced in September, 2014 which are to ensure that all pupils: develop competence to excel in a range of physical activities; are physically active for sustained periods of time; engage in competitive sports and activities; lead healthy, active lives (Department for Education [DfE], 2013). Consequently it can be suggested that a new NCPE will do more to reinforce rather than challenge ‘legitimate’ notions of ability with a continued emphasis on developing physical competence, excellence, and competitive activities. If this is the case, it remains difficult to see how ‘less able’ pupils, in this study for example, might be able to work towards achieving a healthy and active lifestyle. A performative culture may also continue to be supported through the integration of additional programmes such as the school games competition which is run by Sport England, DCMS, YST and the British Paralympic Association.

In contrast however, the new NCPE (DfE, 2013) stipulates subject content for Key Stages 2, 3 and 4, where there is an emphasis on personal development and learning. As an objective for schools to work towards this continues to be at odds with those of elitism, however focusing on individual development may enhance the experiences of some of the less able pupils in PE by shifting the focus away from pupil comparison and normative standards; a process that may also be facilitated by the removal of the attainment levels.

7.6 Positive outcomes and future directions

This investigation has contributed towards understanding the nuances of ability, how it is conceptualised and consequently experienced in PE. The findings of the study indicate that pupils do have a voice and they can make a valuable contribution to

educational research, especially when it is about them. It is hoped that the findings will contribute towards related discourse. Furthermore the addition of the teachers' perspective added greater insight to the pupil experience and helped to provide clarity in relation to how notions of ability and ability-based practices were defined and reinforced. I believe that combining the teacher and pupil perspective was a valuable addition to exploring the experiences of young people in PE and is a useful strategy that can be employed in future related research.

This investigation has identified various processes and practices that exist within one school. There are examples of practices that support learning for pupils where the teachers are often responsive to individual needs. However there are other ability-based practices and experiences that would benefit from further exploration. In defining ability, variations and tensions exist within the school and also the wider field of PE. This thesis has suggested that despite their wider understandings of ability and practices that can challenge 'legitimate' notions, teachers are constrained by the powerful influence of discourse and field related practices. Exploring strategies and practices that teachers can employ to subvert dominant notions would help to develop greater understanding of the constraints that they face and also provide possible ways that the profession could work towards a clearer conceptualisation of ability in PE.

In relation to the theoretical framework employed within the study, Bourdieu's concepts were useful in adopting a socially constructed perspective, analysing the findings and explaining the processes of reinforcement within the field. Revisiting his concepts may enhance understanding of how they can contribute towards explaining how young people are able to exercise their own agency by concurrently drawing upon other fields to inform their ability-related identities. Furthermore, exploring variations across ability in terms of pupils' levels of confidence, motivation and some of their coping mechanisms may be enhanced by integrating the concept of psychological capital, where perhaps there is also the possibility of combining qualitative and quantitative methods. Measuring and exploring psychological capital, how it is accrued, how it is employed across all levels of ability may enhance understanding of the pupil experience in PE and facilitate strategies that have the potential to improve some of those experiences.

The notion of a socially constructed PE provides one explanation as to why some people will inevitably experience PE differently due to their habitus and capital. Young people's realities therefore need to be understood and consequently their experiences in PE need to be further explored. One way to enhance this would be to include more studies that draw upon a combined pupil and teacher perspective. Furthermore, exploring the diverse experiences of those who are considered as 'potentially' talented, or those whose ability-related identities appear to shift requires further exploration as their experiences appear to be the more complex.

In addition, this study also highlights the need for further investigation into strategies that serve to support 'talented' pupils in PE, especially where they are considered the 'expert'. Conversely, there is also the need to explore the experiences of those who are considered as having no ability in PE as they remain the ones who can experience marginalisation which can lead to disengagement. If stakeholders can increase their understanding of how all abilities experience PE they may be better positioned to ensure that more pupils reach their *full* potential. The experiences of the girls in the study draw attention to the complex interplay between socially constructed processes surrounding assumptions about gender and ability and suggest the need for future research that explores both these constructs together. This would contribute towards understanding the factors that influence how both boys and girls experience PE in relation to ability-based practices and how these experiences are influenced by field related discourse.

Debates on the nature and purpose of PE remain and this study has highlighted that the performative culture increases the likelihood of ability-based practices that privilege the most able. Despite the fact that the pedagogical strategy of grouping pupils by ability has a long and controversial history within the English education system a dearth of research remains on the use of ability groups in PE. Further investigation into the practices and experiences of ability groups in PE seems warranted especially in relation to the influence on pupil self-concept and/or their identity.

The findings of this study contribute towards enhancing understanding of the complex processes involved in the construction and experiences of ability in PE. The study provides insight into the perspectives and experiences of young people in PE. The various interactions, contexts, and different outcomes for pupils in PE that emerged

from the narratives are intended to support young people in future experiences of ability-based practices.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

School/ PE department information sheet

I currently lecture at Brunel University in the School of Sport & Education, mainly on topics particular to Physical Education. In addition to lecturing, I am currently completing my PhD, and, as an ex PE teacher, I am very interested in pupils' experiences in PE in schools today. I am very keen to involve children in the research process as I believe that this is lacking presently. I am also interested in the Gifted and Talented programme.

The possible benefits of your school taking part in this study may be for pupils to have an opportunity to discuss and reflect on their experiences in PE and to share some of those experiences with other pupils as well as contributing to the research process. Also, the study will provide an opportunity for PE teachers to reflect on their current practices and compare their views with those of their pupils in PE. The study will take place over one academic year.

If your school agrees to the study, I would ask the following things:

- An initial meeting with the appropriate PE staff to discuss potential participants and procedures that fit in with all concerned and draw up a timetable for the study to take place.
- Select 4 groups of pupils (24 in total) in relation to certain criteria.

Pupils will be asked to do the following:

- Participate in four/five one to one interviews, of approximately 30 minutes each, with me over the course of the year
- Participate in three/four group discussions, approximately 30 minutes each, with other pupils in the school who have agreed to participate in this study, to discuss experiences in PE over the year.
- Allow me to observe them during three/four PE lessons over the year.
- If they feel it is appropriate and convenient, for them to record any thoughts or experiences that they have during PE lessons, in a type of diary. These can be written or put in picture format and can be done at any appropriate time. If they feel comfortable, to bring these to the interviews where they can be discussed if they so wish.

PE teachers of the pupil participants will be asked to do the following:

- Participate in two X 30 minute, one to one interviews over the year
- Allow me to observe them during three/four PE lessons over the year

All information will be kept confidential and no pupils or teachers will be identified. Pupils will have the choice as to whether they feel they would like any information discussed given to the PE teacher or the school, if it is agreed that this is appropriate.

All participants can choose whether to be in this study or not. They can also withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. They may also refuse to answer any questions and still remain in the study.

I have a current CRB check, QTS and am an experienced teacher who is aware of many possibilities that can occur through being involved in talking, observing and researching with children. I also have some counselling training and am practised in interview techniques with children and adults.

If you have any further questions about the study please contact Amanda Croston, email: amanda.croston@brunel.ac.uk. Address – Sport Sciences, Heinz Wolff Building, Brunel University, Uxbridge, Middlesex, UB8 3PH.

I have read and been given time to digest the information about the study and consent for the study to take place in our school.

Name of school _____

Name of SMT/Head of PE _____

Date _____

Signed _____

Appendix B

Parent/guardian Information and consent

27.6.08

Your child has expressed an initial interest in taking part in a study of PE. Before they can assent (agree) to participate it is important that they have parental/guardian consent. I would therefore ask that you please read the following information and that if you are agreeable to them participating that you sign your consent and return the bottom slip by the date provided. If you do agree to their participation I will meet with them again in September to check that they are still agreeable to participating, and if so, I will go through the project again with them and ask for their written consent before I begin. They have every right to change their minds and are not obliged to participate.

I currently lecture at Brunel University on aspects of PE and am very interested in talking to pupils to find out how they experience PE in schools today. I feel that pupils' perspectives are definitely lacking from research and I would like them to have some opportunity to contribute their views and experiences. The possible benefits of your child taking part in this study are that it may provide them with an opportunity to discuss and reflect on their experiences PE with someone who is external to those experiences, also to share some of those experiences with other pupils. It may also help to support other pupils and future developments in PE in relation to policies on PE and school sport by providing a clearer insight into those experiences and hopefully informing practices in PE. Doing research with children in education is vital in order that they can contribute to changes in education.

The study will take place over one academic year, commencing in September 2008.

Pupils will be asked to do the following:

- Participate in three/four one to one interviews, of approximately 30 minutes each, with me over the course of the year
- Participate in three/four group discussions, approximately 30 minutes each, with other pupils in the school who have agreed to participate in this study, to discuss experiences in PE over the year.
- Allow me to observe them during three/four PE lessons over the year.
- Where they feel it is appropriate and convenient, to record any thoughts or experiences they have during PE lessons, in a type of diary. These can be written or put in picture format and can be done at any appropriate time. If they feel comfortable, to bring these to the interviews where they can be discussed if they so wish.
- Give their assent (agreement) to participate.

All information will be kept confidential and accessible only by me, the researcher, and no pupil will be identified in any reporting of the study.

If a situation arises where a pupil indicates that they might want others to be aware of their experiences, pupils will always have the choice as to whether this will happen, and if it is agreed between the researcher and the pupil that this is appropriate.

All participants can choose whether to be in this study or not. They can also withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. They may also refuse to answer any questions and still remain in the study.

I have a current Criminal Records Bureau check, Qualified Teacher Status and am an experienced teacher who taught PE for over ten years prior to university lecturing.

Thank you very much for your time.

If you have any further questions about the study please contact Amanda Croston, email: amanda.croston@brunel.ac.uk.

Address – School of Sport & Education, Heinz Wolff Building, Brunel University, Uxbridge, Middlesex, UB8 3PH.

Please complete and return to Mr [REDACTED] in the PE department by the 4th July, 2008.

I have read the information about the study and give my consent for my son/daughter to participate in the above study.

Name of Pupil _____ Year group _____

Name of Parent/guardian _____

Signed Parent/guardian _____

Date _____

Appendix C

Profile of pupil participants

Pupil	Participation in X-Cur PE & External Sport	Preferred role in PE	Support network for interests in sport	Interests & Aspirations	Pupil self perception / description	Pupil perception of what others think of them in relation to their ability in PE
GP 1 Melissa Female Yr10	<p><u>PE</u> Cricket team- not currently running as there is no female PE teacher to lead at the moment.</p> <p><u>Sport</u> County Cricket (stopped due to bad organisation)</p> <p>Trampoline – national level stopped due to nerves and it becoming too competitive.</p> <p>Badminton – trains externally and been to London youth games</p>	<p>Doesn't get many leadership roles but doesn't mind doing them.</p> <p>Likes coaching.</p>	<p>Parents and siblings sporty.</p> <p>Mum supports external sport training</p>	<p><u>In school</u> Performing arts Music PE</p> <p><u>Out of school</u> Animals Horse riding Ski-ing Plays piano</p> <p>Coaching others in sports</p> <p><u>Aspirations</u> Continue with badminton, not to any specific level. Will always do sport. Attend University</p>	<p><u>Sport / PE</u> Was good in primary school.</p> <p>Is all right at most sports. Always done sport Possibly talented, between average and talented.</p> <p><u>Other</u> Good at music</p> <p>Top set in maths</p>	<p>If you are good at one sport you get picked for other teams – expectation from teachers.</p> <p>She thinks others think of her as talented</p>
GP 1 Ben Male Yr7	<p><u>PE</u> Football team</p> <p>Athletics</p> <p><u>Sport</u> Football club</p> <p>Cricket team</p>	<p>Likes being captain / leader in PE but wants to excel perf wise.</p>	<p>Father plays sport with him.</p> <p>Father used to play football, stopped</p>	<p><u>In school</u> On the school council</p> <p>Technology, maths, art, science, PE.</p>	<p><u>Sport / PE</u> Good at most sports. Always captain.</p> <p>Talented in primary school.</p>	<p>Some peers get annoyed with him being captain and being good at sport.</p> <p>Others see</p>

			<p>due to injury.</p> <p>Younger brother plays football and wants to be like him.</p>	<p><u>Aspirations</u> Continue with football – highest level possible.</p> <p>Sport will be part of his life.</p>	<p>Is one of the best in his PE group. Talented. Talented in football</p> <p><u>Other</u> Enthusiastic at everything he does.</p>	<p>him as talented and/or a show off. Expectation for him to be good all the time.</p>
<p>GP1 Chris Male Yr11</p>	<p><u>PE</u> Rugby team – No football team for his year group.</p> <p><u>Sport</u> Would like to play rugby but not found a team.</p>	<p>Participant and coach</p>	<p>Sporty parents</p> <p>Older brother is going to Uni.</p>	<p><u>In school</u> Biology Maths Science PE <u>Aspirations</u> Sixth form and University.</p> <p>Coaching in sport Possibly A level PE CSLA Continue rugby.</p>	<p><u>Sport/PE</u> Talented. Good at sport, not exceptional</p> <p>Natural ability.</p> <p>All rounder, good at most sports. Always been sporty Suffers from nerves in competition</p>	<p>Is captain a lot Received sportsman of the year award Others see him as the one who is good at sport and talented.</p> <p>PE teacher told him to take GCSE as he would be good at it.</p>
<p>GP 1 Greg Male Yr 9</p>	<p><u>PE</u> Basketball team. Tennis team Football team.</p> <p><u>Sport</u> Went to Dubai as a ball boy.</p> <p>Trains and plays tennis-elite level, been playing tennis since he was 6 years old.</p>	<p>Doesn't really like having to coach others in tennis in PE lessons.</p> <p>Prefers to participate</p>	<p>Tennis club coach and physio.</p> <p>Mum supports his travel.</p> <p>Older brother coaches and plays tennis at the same club.</p>	<p>Coaches tennis to younger kids.</p> <p><u>Aspirations</u> Continue tennis maybe semi-prof. Get as many GCSE's as possible.</p> <p>Get into selective grammar school to do A levels,</p>	<p>Always been gifted and talented, even in primary school. Feels gifted. Is average as a tennis player compared to those he plays on the circuit.</p> <p>Gets injured a lot.</p>	<p>Thinks PE teachers have the best perception of him over other teachers, although they think he is lazy.</p> <p>Received sportsman of the year award.</p> <p>Good at PE because he is doing</p>

				where his brother is.	Growth related injuries.	GCSE early & in the top group. Captain of the basketball team. Parents think he is sporty.
GP 2 Dwayne Male Yr 10	<u>PE</u> Football team <u>Sport</u> Football club	Is enjoying coaching	Father used to play football	<u>In school</u> Art and photography Likes drawing <u>Aspirations</u> Limited but continue with sport, coaching young children football.	<u>Sport/PE</u> Average. Is in the high set for PE. <u>Other</u> Was excluded and missed a group interview, didn't do well on his YR10 work exp	Others laugh at him when he speaks in the focus groups. Has been moved groups based on his ability and behaviour.
GP 2 Peter Male Yr9	<u>PE</u> None <u>Sport</u> Football team (won their league).	Participate Sometimes a leadership role.	Father – played football but stopped through injury. Friends.	<u>In school</u> Doesn't like music or drama. Likes maths, English and science. <u>Aspirations</u> Continue football – professional or job linked to sport GCSE PE	<u>Sport/PE</u> Is sort of talented. Is a fast runner. Is talented in some sports. Is one of the best in his PE group Competitive. <u>Other</u> Likes playing X box.	PE teacher told him to take GCSE PE as he would be good at it. Peers describe him as talented. Assessment levels. Hard working and quiet.

<p>GP 2 Darren Male Yr10</p>	<p><u>PE</u> Football team Basketball team- just starting up again. <u>Sport</u> Basketball for London Football team, semi-professional.</p>	<p>Taking up more of a coaching role, but enjoys all roles.</p>	<p>Father was very supportive and was involved in high level sport is now deceased. Mother still supportive of sport. Two brothers both play sport. Sister does dance.</p>	<p><u>In school</u> Graphics and media. PE and BTEC <u>Aspirations</u> Professional footballer or basketball player. Continue sport. Coach. Computer work</p>	<p><u>Sport/PE</u> Always thought he was talented. A sporty person. People look up to him. There are others who are more able than him. <u>Other</u> Used to be badly behaved in general and in PE. Leader / role model. Good looking. Concentrates. Self-motivated and hard working.</p>	<p>Selected for G&T opportunities. Selected for school teams. Only compares himself to other boys. Others tell him that others look up to him.</p>
<p>GP 2 Letitia Female Yr9</p>	<p><u>PE</u> Girls basketball team, quite successful. Netball and football. <u>Sport</u> Girls basketball but stopped due to travel difficulties</p>	<p>Participating not leading but is captain of the basketball team which she likes.</p>	<p>Parents fairly supportive of sport. Three brothers and one sister. Father is sporty. Friends.</p>	<p><u>In school</u> Drama Dislikes English <u>Aspirations</u> Continue sport – possibly. Become better at sport like boys. Watch basketball on trip to USA. Is not sure where she can take</p>	<p><u>Sport/PE</u> Always been talented in PE. Shows off quite a lot. Is the best basketball player in her team at school. <u>Other</u> Quite an angry person. Has been badly behaved (only one PE teacher was</p>	<p>Sports woman of the year award. PE group are talented –GCSE PE early, is a high ability group. Win basketball matches. Teachers pick her for G&T opportunities. Teachers</p>

				her basketball.	supportive)	describe her as talented as do her parents.
GP 3 Cole Male Yr9	<u>PE</u> Football & Cricket – not consistently. Wants to join the rugby team. <u>Sport</u> Football – used to be at an academy.	Limited role as captain in PE.	Lives only with his mum who is not sporty. Brothers and sisters live elsewhere	<u>In school</u> Music. Football. Riding his bike <u>Aspirations</u> Continue football. Job linked to sport. Not GCSE PE. Accountant	<u>Sport/PE</u> Good at certain sports. Average <u>Other</u> Is more confident in drama. Funny and nice character.	Some feedback from teachers in PE lessons. Average.
GP 3 Leon Yr 9 Male	<u>PE</u> Football. <u>Sport</u> Football. Sporting activities	No preference	Mum is an administrator for football league that he plays in. Brothers and sisters have limited interest in sport. Coach is aggressive.	<u>In school</u> Music PE and drama <u>Aspirations</u> Possibly continue sport – health reasons.	<u>Sport/PE</u> Doesn't know if he is talented or not. Average. Was more talented in primary school. <u>Other</u> Likes sport and music. Competitive, active and works in a team.	High grades in PE. Compares his ability within his current group. Mum thinks he is good at PE. Has won lots of cups etc with his external football team.
GP 3 Dionne female Yr10	<u>PE</u> Netball team but left. <u>Sport</u> General exercise	Possibly coaching.	Lives with Mum. No siblings. cousins	<u>In school</u> Art Photography Computers Dance. <u>Aspirations</u> Continue sport-fitness Dance as a	<u>Sport/PE</u> Not talented. Average. Was more physical in primary school.	Peers asked her for advice. Has some limited experience of G&T Teacher feedback and

				hobby. Possibly go to sixth form. Coaching others.	<u>Other</u> Enthusiastic. Positive. Independent. Happy.	assessment levels. Mum thinks she is good at dance.
GP 3 Keisha Female Yr10	<u>PE</u> No teams available would like to play basketball. <u>Sport</u> none	Not a leader, no confidence	Mum works in a hospital. Dad sporty. Male peers are supportive in PE. Two sisters.	<u>In school</u> Science Maths Poetry <u>Aspirations</u> Continue sport. Doctor. Basketball.	<u>Sport/PE</u> Was good in primary school (possibly talented). Is now average. Good at running. Not good at leading. Is not the best. <u>Other</u> Kind.	She is less able than others but likes to watch and learn from more able. Award in PE for hard work. PE teachers think she could be better. Mum thinks she is good at PE.
GP 4 Jeff Male Yr10	<u>PE</u> None <u>Sport</u> Watching sport	Participate not lead.	Mum studying masters. Father not sporty nor brother and sister. Watches football with his father. Friends.	<u>In school</u> Music - plays an instrument. Likes watching sport. Science and maths are boring. <u>Aspirations</u> Continue sports socially and observing. Maybe join a club. Music as a hobby.	<u>Sport/PE</u> Not talented in PE. Not particularly skilful but not terrible. Average. <u>Other</u> Non-judgemental. Open minded.	Pupils are less critical of his ability now than in KS3.

GP 4 Marlon Male Yr7	<u>PE</u> none <u>Sport</u> Dance club		Social worker.	<u>In school</u> Dance PE. Music / choir <u>Aspirations</u> Continue dance	<u>Sport/PE</u> Is more talented in other subjects. <u>Other</u> Tries hard.	Is clear who is more and less able in PE. Teachers feedback. His PE levels have increased.
GP 4 Syed Male yr8	<u>PE</u> None <u>Sport</u> None	Referee and participate Observer.	Father gives him extra maths and English work. Parents and siblings not bothered about PE. Is the youngest.	Art IT. Drama. Maths. Dislikes music. Aspirations Go to America and be an actor.	<u>Sport/PE</u> Not talented. Is all right at PE. Not good but not bad, in the middle. Average. Talented in rounders in primary school, best in his class. Not good at running. <u>Other</u> Clever.	Assessment s. Never given leadership responsibili ty in PE. Teacher feedback. Similar ability in his PE group. Being chosen for the project made him think he was poor at PE.

Appendix D

PE Teacher Consent form

Thank you for expressing an initial interest in taking part in this study. I am very interested in having an opportunity to discuss and share your experiences and views on the pupil experience in PE in your school. I currently lecture at Brunel University on aspects of PE and am intending to talk to pupils and PE teachers to find out how they view the pupil experience in PE in schools today.

The possible benefits of you taking part in this study may be for you to have an opportunity to discuss and reflect on how you think a range of pupils experience PE, as well as being able to contribute to a wider understanding of how initiatives like the G&T strand can impact upon all concerned.

If you volunteer to be a part of this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

- Participate in an interview.
- Allow me to observe you during three/four PE lessons over the year.
- Read the Information Form and if you agree to participate please sign the Consent form.

All interviews and information will be kept confidential and in a secure place. All participants' names will be kept confidential and will not be used in any reporting of the data. You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you can also withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study.

If you have any further questions about the study please contact Amanda Croston, email: amanda.croston@brunel.ac.uk. Address – Sport Sciences, Heinz Wolff Building, Brunel University, Uxbridge, Middlesex, UB8 3PH.

I have read and been given time to digest the information about the study and therefore agree to take part. By signing this consent form I am showing that I am happy to participate in all the requirements above and understand that my name will not be used at any point in the reporting of the study and that I can withdraw at any time, and that I do not have to answer any questions that I do not wish to.

Name of PE teacher _____ Date _____

Signed _____

Appendix E

PE Teacher demographic information

Teacher pseudonym & Age	Teacher training	Coaching awards & external experience	Sports played	Years teaching & experience	Teaching areas of specialism	Current Extra Curricular clubs and teams
Jack Acting head of PE Male 28	PGCE in England	UEFA B Football coach. level 1 in rugby, and rounders. Smaller awards in badminton, basketball, gymnastics.	Professional footballer – stopped due to injury. County level for rugby and basketball.	4 years in current school. All aspects of PE curriculum.	Football and rugby	Boys' rugby.
Alison Ex head of PE White Female (50's) (has been on extended sick leave)	PE teacher training college in England, three year course.	Hockey coaching.	County hockey and lacrosse.	32 years of teaching. 8 years in current school. Taught all aspects of the PE curriculum and also A level music.	Jack of all trades but hockey, cricket, gymnastics, badminton. Taught a mixture of all types of groups, ability and gender. Aware of a variety of styles.	Girls' cricket
Kieran PE G&T coordinator Male 27	PGCE in London	Level 1 in football, basketball, Gaelic football, rugby, and cricket.	International U18 level in football. Gaelic football - county level. Amateur boxing	4 years, all in current school. Taught all except BTEC and A level PE.	Football, basketball, rugby, badminton all of them really.	Yr 10 and 11 boys' football teams. Mixed gender badminton club.

Danny NQT Male 24	PGCE in London	Level 1, basketball, football and athletics. CSLA.	Football semi - professional level, county and district. Basketball and cricket, district and school level.	In NQT year.	Invasion games.	Boys' cricket. Girls' football U12's, U13's and U15's. Yr 7 boy's football.
Mary Head of girls PE Female 28	PGCE in London	Netball, football, trampolining and gymnastics awards.	Netball at county and University level.	4 years teaching all in the current school.	Worked with special needs children before training as a teacher. Netball and trampoline. BTEC and GCSE.	
Hue Non QTS Male 26	4 year BEd in Australia	Level 1 in cricket, rugby and football. Level 2 in basketball. Coached up to U16 in football and basketball	Semi - professional level in Australia. Just under semi - professional level in UK	6 months in Australia. 4 years at current school. Taught mixed ability and ability groups GCSE PE group in year 9.	Football Physiology and anatomy Striking and fielding sports.	Year 9 boys' basketball and football. Covered year 9 girls' basketball team for a while.

Appendix F

First focus group outline

In ability groups 1 to 4. Initial meeting:

Purpose

- To develop a rapport with the pupils, to provide a forum where they might feel comfortable speaking about their experiences in PE with others of similar experiences.
- To serve as basis for further questions.
- Strategy to identify individuals on the tape recording
- Introduce project and purpose of the discussion, gain verbal & written consent, check they are clear on recording interviews, get to know pupils and for them to know info about me.
- Remind of confidentiality, for them but also what is discussed outside the room
- Participants do not have to answer and there are no right or wrong answers, try and speak one at a time.

Initial themes to explore:

- Background information from the researcher and the pupils – hobbies etc.
Demographics, age, gender.
What things do they like doing in and out of school?
Favourite things at school, why?
- Physical education
Nature and purpose of PE? Is PE in school important? Why?
How is PE set up in the school?
What do they like and dislike about PE? Why?
- Their experiences in PE
Positive / negative, sharing experiences, comparing.
- Introduce, give out and discuss diaries, highlight that I will be observing them in PE and then individually interviewing them.

Appendix G

Individual interview guide 1

Explore themes that came out of the initial focus groups plus a detailed discussion of their individual experiences. First interview takes place after the first focus group meeting and at least one informal observation from researcher.

Themes/areas that arose from the first round of all focus groups:

- Background of pupils
- Other likes in school – non PE
- PE in school now and previously
- Experiences in PE – positive and negative – behaviour – how to improve PE experiences
- Ability groups – experiences - opinions
- Importance/purpose of PE
- Qualities of ‘good’ at PE
- Defining their own ability
- Views of talented pupils
- Awareness of talented pupils
- Links to PE Extra Curricular
- Links to outside sport
- Continue with PE
- What will they do after leaving school?

Themes to explore during the individual interview:

- Clarify background information, age, etc.
- General discussion of PE in the school and their experiences to date and re cap on what they said in the focus group discussion. What have they done in PE so far?
- Experiences in PE– expand from focus group examples?
 - Are these experiences different to other pupils and other subjects? Why?
 - Do they consider themselves good at PE? Why?
 - What do they use as indicators?
 - How do they think they are viewed by others (teachers and peers) in PE?
- External influences
 - Link to outside hobbies/participation in sport? Non sport?
 - Peers / Family

Who has helped them if they are talented? Has PE? (extend this in the second interviews)

- Other - Points to explore from informal lesson observation
 - Have they anything from their diaries that they want to share? How do they feel about being in the project?

Appendix H

Individual interview guide 2

Themes will differ based on the individual, what we have discussed already and which group they are in.

PE in general

1. How is PE at the moment?
Any changes since last time
What are you working on at the moment, activity, group.
2. Name three things you like best about PE
Why?
Which is the most important to you?
3. What motivates you to try and do your best in PE?
Activity type
Type of group – gender, ability level, teacher, aims of the lesson
Are you generally motivated yourself, or do you need to be motivated by others or external rewards or assessment?
4. Name three things that you least like about PE
Why?
5. Are there any occasions when you have not wanted to do PE and how has this made you behave?
Forgot your kit on purpose, why?
Mis-behaved whilst watching
6. What role do you prefer to have in a PE lesson
Participant, leader, supporter, observer, non-participant? Why?
7. If they do GCSE, BTEC or JSLA why did they choose them?

SELF

8. Can you describe a time when you felt confident in PE?
What things make you feel confident in PE?
Is your level of confidence in PE affected by the activity, groups, and teachers?
Is this confidence different when you are not in PE?
9. Can you describe a time when you were not confident in PE?
What things make you not feel confident in PE?
Have you ever been embarrassed or made fun of in PE – explain.
How did this make you feel after?
Perceived physical competence?
10. How would you introduce yourself to someone who didn't know you
My name is . . . and I . . . (defined by their sport). What would you want me to know about you?
11. How would you describe yourself in PE

Do you think you are good at PE? talented? When did you first think of yourself as talented?

How does your ability level in PE make you feel?

Score that you gave last time – expand on different activities, team game football, netball, tennis, cricket, gymnastics, athletics, swimming, dance.

How do you know how good you are? Criteria?

Is it based on self-improvement or comparison to others?

If it is compared to others who do you compare yourself to and why?

When do you do this, often, why?

Who is the most talented in the group, why?

12. How do you think others describe your ability in PE?

Teachers, Peers, Parents

13. Is this the same as in any sports that you do outside of school?

14. Do you think you have a label in relation to your ability in PE?

Can you just confirm then how you think others see you in pe (label)

What is it?

Do you feel under any pressure with it

How does this label make you feel during PE lessons? Do you like being labelled as talented or not?

If ID as talented

- How has this impacted upon your development in PE?

- What support do you think you have received in PE as part of this label? Has it made a difference and helped you to develop your potential?

- How has this impacted upon your development in your sport outside of school?

- What have been the main factors that have contributed to your success?

Training, parents, coach, pe teacher, X cur.

- How much has PE contributed?

Not ID as talented

- How has this impacted upon your development in PE?

- Have you made the best progress in PE that you could have?

- How does this make you feel in PE?

15. Has your label changed over the time you have been in this school? How has this impacted upon you?

16. Do you think you can change & develop your level of ability in PE, How?

17. Are you ID as talented in any other subjects?

18. How do you feel during demonstrations in PE

If you demonstrate? When others demonstrate?

19. Are you ever given praise or rewards in PE

How do you feel when you are

How do you feel when others are give praise or rewards in PE

20. Is it ok to be a girl/boy who is good at PE?

-Talented - how do you feel being talented at pe and being a boy/girl what do you think others think of you in this respect.

-Not talented - what are your perceptions of a boy/girl who is talented

Both -

Is a boy considered talented if they are good at gym and dance, Is a girl?

Is a girl considered talented if she is good at football or rugby? Is a boy?

21. How would you describe a talented athlete, person in PE?

TEACHER TREATMENT /INTERACTION

22. Can you describe how your PE teacher treats you and the relationship that you think you have with them?

23. Is it different at any times?

Activity

Group – ability, gender, place of the activity.

24. Do you think you are treated differently to others in your PE lessons?

Activity

Teacher

Gender of your group

Ability in your group

25. What do you think your PE teacher expects of you in the lesson?

Is this different from what they expect from others in your PE lessons?

What do you think your PE teacher expects from others – talented or not?

26. Why do you think that there is a perception that boys are better at PE than girls?

Check Background information

- Parents, siblings, sporty or not?
- How supportive are your parents, how do they support your PE/sport, or in other interests.
- Primary school experiences –types of sports, groupings, enjoyment or not, X Cur, what did the teacher do, teach or supervise? How much actual time did they get and participate?

What should have been done differently in PE?

Appendix I

Second focus group outline (gender)

Remind of confidentiality and non discussion of topics outside of group.
 Extend responses from initial focus group and individual interviews.
 Themes are based on previous data collection.

PE in general

- How is PE currently?
- What are you doing at the moment?
- What are you enjoying/ not enjoying? Why?
- How much PE do you get in comparison to other subjects?
- How much do you think you should actually get?
- How important is PE in comparison to other subjects?
- What is the purpose of PE – how is this achieved? What do you learn in PE lessons? Has it changed over time KS3 and KS4?
- How much emphasis is place on competition and winning? What do you think it should be?
- (Experiences from primary school) a possible area.

Talented pupils

- Do you know who is talented in your year groups/whole school, in a range of subjects? How?
- Do you know who is talented in PE in your year groups/whole school? Do you all agree?
- What would you look for to identify someone as talented in PE? (describe a talented and a not talented person in PE)
- What do you think the PE teachers look for to identify someone as talented in PE? Is this different/same?
- Do those considered good at PE get any extra benefits? Is it fair? (hierarchy?)
- What happens when pupils misbehave in PE? If they are talented or not is it the same experience/ punishments? Equal treatment.
- What contributes to being successful in PE and sport, nature nurture?
- Why do some succeed and others not? (support networks)
- G&T in X Cur and how does it support external sport?

Ability groups

- How have you experienced ability groups? Have you changed / always stayed in the same group? Any differences since last time?
- Why are some experiences different?
- Why do you think people change groups sometimes?
- For and against ability groups – reasons
- Why do you think the PE department has ability groups?
- How come some pupils can take GCSE PE in year 9? Is it linked to science and SATS scores? What do you feel about this?

Gender differences

- Can you explain your experiences of having PE in either a girls/boys only group and mixed gender groups.
- Own experiences and history of group composition and percentage in terms of gender, reasons why?
- What type of activities did you do?
- Does your PE curriculum offer different activities for boys and girls? Why?
- Do you think there are/were any specific activities that are more suitable for boys or girls?
- Do you think other people think of activities as more suitable for boys or girls? Who?
- Have you experienced mixed groups where you have been separated into boys and girls, why do you think this has happened? (activity, teacher).
- How would you identify talent in PE for a girl and then for a boy? Are they the same thing?
- Do you think other people think the same things? (teachers, parents etc)- are boys and girls seen differently in terms of being talented in PE?
- Are boys and girls treated differently?
- Is it the same for a boy or girls to be good at PE – what do other people think of a boy who is good at PE and a girl who is good at PE? (Status and being good at PE/sport).
- What opportunities do you think girls and boys have in curricular and extracurricular PE?
- Does extracurricular offer different activities for boys and girls? Why?
- Do you think there are differences in opportunities for boys and girls in outside sport?
- Do teachers teach boys and girls differently? Does the gender of teacher make a difference?
- Do you think boys and girls are the same with effort, ability, competitiveness, & behaviour, qualities.

- Do you think PE and sport are the same things?

- Would you make any changes to PE? what?

What are they doing for PE now and in the summer term?

Remind participants that there will be one more observation and one more individual interview.

Appendix J

PE teacher interview guide

Background

Age

Type of training

Number of years teaching

Areas of specialism

Coaching awards

Brief Teaching history – ability, gender, exams subjects

Why PE teaching

Played Sport - level

Extra coaching, type and what level, how long – X Cur teams

Current teaching

I have a grasp of how PE works, please say if it is different. Ability groups. Rationale for how PE is currently run?

Why do you think you have ability groups. Benefits? Disadvantages?

What do you think about having them?

What do you consider is the dominant ethos of the dept? (participation for all, talent, competition). Same as yours?

Talent ID in PE

How would you describe a talented person in PE?

What things should they be able to do?

Is it different in different activities?

Is it different for boys and girls?

Is this different to being talented in sport?

Can you explain the processes of Talent ID in PE. Do you all agree?

How do you measure/quantify/assess talent? (NC levels?) Physical, social, creative, cognitive, personal. What do you think about these other characteristics- Importance? easy to measure? Based on past, current or potential ability?

Can you identify potential? Yes - What does that look like? No – why not, what are the problems?

Do you use any guidelines to help you ID talent in PE. What are they? (Baileys model, department handbook, whole school guidelines).

Have you ever had any specific training for ID talent in PE? What was it?

Do you find it easier to ID talent in some activities over others? Which ones, why?

Are there more pupils ID in games activities? Why? Dance and gymnastics?

Are there any gender imbalances in numbers?

Pupils and perceptions of ability

How do you think pupils decide what level of ability they are in PE?

Do you think that pupils are aware of the processes of talent ID in PE? How?

Do you think that other pupils are aware of who is talented and who isn't? How?

Is there a status attached to being talented in PE around the school? Boy & girl?

Support for pupils

How are pupils supported once they are identified as talented? Curriculum, X Cr and external club links?

How do you cater for different levels of ability in PE?

Talented (are they challenged?) Potentially talented. Not talented, less able pupils?

Would those who are talented excel in their sport despite what they do in PE (does PE add anything that helps them develop their talent) what is it?

What do you think are the important things that contribute to talented pupils being successful in PE and sport?

Why do you think those who are considered talented sometimes don't succeed?

Perceived impact on pupils

Do pupils change ability groups much, how and why? Based on changes in behaviour or ability?

Opinions of this?

What do you think the impact of changing groups has on a pupil? Either going down or going up. Examples?

Does your opinion of a pupil and their level of ability ever change? How, examples?

What do you think is the impact on a pupil as to whether they are considered talented or not?

Confidence/self-esteem; Enjoyment in PE; Levels of participation; Success in PE

Do you think that you ever treat pupils differently based upon their ability?

Do you think other PE teachers treat them differently

Do other pupils treat them differently?

Do you think your expectations of pupils ever differ?

In relation to what? Ability, gender, age?

Once labelled do you have higher expectations of them?

Do have fewer expectations of low ability pupils and does this impact upon their ability to move up groups?

Would you ever assume someone is talented before you had officially assessed them, why?

Physical appearance, ethnicity, gender, academic standard, external sporting success?

Do you think there any differences in ability in relation to gender?

Teacher and pupil Expectations; Teacher treatment; Pupil treatment.

Any Gender issues in PE? Stereotypes?

What other things do you think impact upon a pupil's level of confidence in PE

level of ability in PE perceived & actual

motivation in PE

What are your opinions of the G&T strategy?

Should PE play a role in identifying and developing talented pupils?

Appendix K

Pupil Information and Assent

Thank you for expressing an initial interest in taking part in this study.

I am very interested in having an opportunity to discuss and share your experiences and views on PE in your school and invite you to do this over the next academic year.

I currently lecture at Brunel University on aspects of PE and would appreciate talking to you to find out how you experience PE. The possible benefits of you taking part in this study may be for you to have an opportunity to discuss and reflect on how you experience PE and share some of those experiences with other pupils through discussions in groups.

If you volunteer to be a part of this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

- Participate in three/four one to one interviews, of approximately 30 minutes each, with me over the course of the year
- Participate in three/four group discussions, approximately 30 minutes each, with other pupils in your school who have agreed to participate in this study, to discuss experiences in PE over the year.
- Allow me to observe you during three/four PE lessons over the year.
- If you feel it is appropriate and convenient for you, to record any thoughts or experiences that you have during your PE lessons, in a type of diary. These can be written or put in picture format and can be done at any appropriate time for you. If you feel comfortable, to bring these to the interviews where they can be discussed if you so wish.
- Read the Information Form and if you agree to participate please sign the assent (agreement) form.

All the interviews and discussions will not be heard or given to anyone else apart from me, the researcher. When I write about the discussions and interviews that have taken place I will never use your name, and therefore you will not be identified at any time. All information will therefore be kept confidential and in a secure place. If there is something that you want me to tell your PE teacher I will only do this if you ask me to and we agree that it is appropriate.

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you can also withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study.

If you have any further questions about the study please contact Amanda Croston, email: amanda.croston@brunel.ac.uk. Address – Sport Sciences, Heinz Wolff Building, Brunel University, Uxbridge, Middlesex, UB8 3PH.

I have read and been given time to digest the information about the study and therefore agree to take part. By signing this assent form I am showing that I am happy to participate in all the requirements above and understand that my name will not be used at any point in the reporting of the study and that I can withdraw at any time, and that I do not have to answer any questions that I do not wish to.

Name of pupil _____ Date _____

I assent (agree) to participating in the above study,

Signed _____

Appendix L

Table of data collection

Participants - 11 boys; 4 girls, 6 PE teachers.

Participant	Focus Group	Observations	Individual Interview
Group 1 Chris Yr11 Boy	30 minutes	2 hours, mixed ability PE, boys' football.	30 minutes
	40 minutes	40 minutes GCSE PE, mixed gender, badminton.	54 minutes
Group 1 Melissa Yr 10 Girl	30 minutes	30 minutes GCSE PE mixed gender group, badminton.	32 minutes
	40 minutes	20 minutes – GCSE PE mixed gender, netball	47 minutes
Group 1 Greg Yr 9 Boy	30 minutes	30 minutes- GCSE PE, top ability group, mixed gender, fitness.	22 minutes
	30 minutes	60 minutes GCSE PE, top ability group, mixed gender, football. 90 minutes GCSE PE, top ability group, mixed gender, athletics	35 minutes
Group 1 Ben Yr 7 Boy	30 minutes	1 hour 5 minutes - mixed gender, top PE ability group, rugby.	24 minutes
	40 minutes	1 hour 10minutes – form group, mixed gender and ability, fitness.	44 minutes
Group 2 Darren Yr 10 Boy	28 minutes	30 minutes – GCSE PE group, mixed gender, netball.	34 minutes
	40 minutes	20 minutes (non-participant) GCSE group fitness. Taken out of GCSE moved into core PE of own choice. 20 minutes core PE, all boys group, mixture of ability, boxing introduction.	41 minutes
Group 2 Peter Yr 9 Boy	28 minutes	40 minutes – Top ability boys' PE group, rugby.	15 minutes
	30 minutes	40 minutes – Top ability boys' group, volleyball with a supply teacher.	32 minutes
Group 2 Dwayne Yr 10 Boy	28 minutes	15 minutes – mixed ability, mixed gender, football (JSLA).	18 minutes
		20 minutes, boys' football, mixed ability. 25 minutes mixed gender PE group, mixed ability, badminton.	
Group 2 Letitia Yr 9 Girl	28 minutes	Attempted observation – no kit therefore did not participate.	22 minutes
	40 minutes	60 minutes, GCSE PE, top ability group, mixed gender, football. 90 minutes. GCSE PE, top ability group, mixed gender, athletics.	35 minutes

Group 3 Dionne Yr 10 Girl	27 minutes	30 minutes - GCSE dance, mixed ability, girls' group.	30 minutes
	40 minutes	10 minutes GCSE dance, same group. 15 minutes GCSE dance, same group.	48 minutes
Group 3 Keisha Yr 10 Girl	27 minutes	25 minutes – GCSE PE group, mixed gender, fitness.	31 minutes
	40 minutes	30 minutes - GCSE PE, badminton, mixed gender group. 20 minutes GCSE PE, mixed gender group, netball.	44 minutes
Group 3 Cole Yr 9 Boy	27 minutes	25 minutes - mixed ability group, all boys', football.	16 minutes
	30 minutes	25 minutes badminton, low/mixed ability, mixed gender group. 15 minutes – mixed ability and gender group, cricket.	30 minutes
Group 3 Leon Yr 9 Boy	27 minutes	30 minutes – Top ability group, mixed gender, GCSE PE, fitness	19 minutes
	30 minutes	60 minutes Top ability group, mixed gender, GCSE PE, football, non participant. Not present at last observation - GCSE athletics	31 minutes
Group 4 Jeff Yr 10 Boy	29 minutes	20 minutes, mixed ability, all boys' group, fielding game.	25 minutes
	40 minutes	20 minutes football, all boys group, mixed ability.	47 minutes
Group 4 Syeed Yr 8 Boy	29 minutes	50 minutes, low ability group, all boys', dance.	13 minutes
	40 minutes	70 minutes all boys', low ability group, netball.	39 minutes
Group 4 Marlon Yr 7 Boy	29 minutes	30 minutes, low ability, mixed with the middle group for wet lesson, football, all boys.	19 minutes
	40 minutes	1 hour 5 minutes, form group, mixed gender and ability, fitness.	
PE teachers			
Jack			56 minutes
Kieran			58 minutes
Alison			1 hour 16 minutes in 2 parts
Mary			48 minutes
Hue			1 hour 1 minute
Danny			40 minutes
Totals	Focus groups 4 hours 42 minutes	Observations 23 Hrs 45 minutes	Pupil interviews 14 hours 37 minutes Teacher interviews 6 hours 39 minutes

Appendix M

Suggestions for the PE department

Feedback from pupils that was positive

- PE teachers work really hard
- PE has improved
- PE staff are approachable and nice

Possible changes to consider implementing in PE

Ability-based practices -

- Consider rationale for groupings and be consistent – pupils don't really understand the groupings, especially the ones in lower ability. Some pupils are not aware of how talent is identified and how ability groups are formed, others had not even heard of G&T.
- Consider making talent ID procedures clearer and more consistent and consider having written guidelines or using available resources rather than relying on individual and personal judgements. Could be clearer as a dept as to what it is you are looking for and measuring, there were inconsistencies across teachers answers.
- GCSE PE early in year 9 – potentially prevents physical ability from developing (top group) they get less PE time which it was they love about PE - consideration as to what is the purpose of PE here? Pupils across the board commented on limited practical PE time and that they would like more.
- Changing pupil's groups isn't always good as they don't enjoy lessons until they have had time to get to know the others. Consider why you would change groupings and the benefits for all pupils.
- Some pupils are afraid of making mistakes in their group – does this contradict the department ethos of having ability groups so that the talented can be extended and the less able not ridiculed. This hasn't happened in the current yr10 GCSE – if you have a mixed ability GCSE group there is the potential for a BFLP and a change in some pupil's self-perceptions about their ability.
- Some more able pupils feel that they don't learn much during curriculum time, they are not challenged particularly, they feel they extend themselves much more in extracurricular or outside activities.
- Avoid the practice of pupils picking teams so that the less able ones are left.
- Some of the less able pupils feel like they would like to given more of a chance to shine or get better in PE and have the same opportunities as some of the more able pupils.

Lesson format and structure

- Some pupils did not think there were any specific lesson objectives, some did, but only in the theory lessons. Sometimes they did not know what they were working towards or how to know if they had met the objectives or not, some did highlight that there were plenary sessions at the end, but there were no clear examples of lesson outcomes like in maths and English for example where they were written up- more for KS3 than 4.
- Need a central place where they can organise pupils/register.
- The changing rooms were quite cramped. Nearly all pupils hated the changing rooms and said that if the school had lockers this would help with bringing in kit etc, even some of the better ones leave kit at home if they can't be bothered to carry it in.
- Some suggested options at KS4, more choice.
- More specific feedback on how pupils can improve in PE, what is it they actually need to do to improve, pupils seemed vague on this and would like more guidance.
- Greater links with external clubs – not enough for girls to play or progress in basketball – wider opportunities.
- More male role models for stereotyped activities, for example dance.

Appendix N

Pupil interview transcript

First interview with Keisha in the media suite, 16th Dec, 30 minutes.

I - Hi, just to remind you first that everything that we talk about is confidential and I don't talk about anything that we talk about unless there is anything that you would like me to say.

Ok,

I - Ok, so careers, yes, is that for your work placement?

Yeah oh work experience aaahh, I can't wait, I can't wait (emphasis), I want to help people so that's nice you know.

I - And when does that start?

I think its 2nd of Feb to the 13th.

I - Ohh that's not long enough for you is it, two weeks.

No (laughs) I will learn something so I can't wait, I can't wait honestly.

I - Wow, do the school often get placements at hospital or is that quite difficult?

It's rare, it's rare, I couldn't go to another hospital but my mum works in [REDACTED] so she can drive me if she wants.

I - Oh ok I see, and is that part of the reason that you want to be a doctor, is it in your family or . . . ?

Um, my grandma is a nurse, my mum is a nurse, I want to be a doctor so we have medial history should I say but it's not because of that, it's just because I want to help people you know, even if that's the only way that I can get to them I will.

I - No I mean I think that's fantastic, I don't think I knew what I wanted to do when I was your age or even older.

I've always wanted to be a doctor since I was 4, its good.

I - No that's amazing, well good luck with that.

Thanks.

I - So apart from that which sounds very exciting, how are things in general at school?

Um schools good, it's hard this year because it's all the GCSE stuff and I'm, it's really difficult. It's different from last year when we had subjects you know, we had subjects with our tutor groups you know, but now this year you know, we have a mix of people, which is good, but more work, more work.

I - So what are your favourite subjects at the moment then in school?

Um right now I'll have to say science.

I - Of course.

(laughs) yeah, maths, English is ok and PE is fun apart from the theory work, and um I'm thinking, I wanted to do French but I'm not doing it, but I would have if IT, I'm doing web design now so it's really fun but normally I don't like IT.

I - You could be an online doctor.

(laughs) that would be good.

I - Wow ok, It doesn't matter that you haven't written anything in your diary it's really fine, they were just in case people thought of something that they wanted to write down after the lesson, or during that week and they thought oh, I could talk to Mandy about

that, it's difficult cos I'm not here to remind you, cos I'm not in here every day it's, I understand that so it's really fine. But just kind of tell me how PE is in general at the moment?

PE, we finished with netball now we are doing sports studies, no its not sports studies its stuff to do with aerobic and anaerobic system so it's a bit like science as well, it ties in with science, um its nice but it's not my favourite subject in PE cos we have to keep running, yeah you saw that on that day, it was too embarrassing cos people cheated, I'm not even joking I was really, I nearly almost cheated cos it was so hard.

I - You looked like you paced yourself, If you don't mind me saying, I'm not trying to make a judgement, but you paced yourself quite well I thought.

Yeah but it's like, you know the way people run I'm very tempted to run as well you know but I am trying.

I - Yeah but I thought to me that meant that you understood what had been asked of you, was to keep at a steady pace, when some of them sprinted at the beginning or the end which isn't aerobic is it, that's anaerobic.

Anaerobic yeah.

I - So yeah I thought that was what you should have been doing so . .

Yeah, I think this PE one we are doing now is helping me to learn more. I've heard about aerobic and anaerobic but I didn't know what it was honestly, so sir is really helping us, you know and I think the theory part of it as well is really good, it's almost like science in another way.

I - Well I think it is, especially if you did it at A level it gets quite scientific in terms of understanding the body and how we move and I would imagine that would be quite useful for medicine.

Yes, yes, yes, yes, so it's good anyway.

I - Cos I think you do anatomy as well, bits of anatomy.

Yes we'll be doing anatomy I think, my mum did anatomy she has an anatomy book but I'm going to look through it one day, I don't know what it's about.

I - Oh ok, so with that lesson that I saw you talked about the gender issues i.e. there's hardly any girls in that group.

Yeah, yeah.

I - How is that for you?

Its, there's about 6 girls and I think we have a class of about 24 so the rest are boys and there's like 6 girls, its hard I mean it. I've gone from being in a class where there was only girls and I'm very comfortable cos they were like my friends you know, but then these boys they are so, oh my gosh, they are so, they just want everything to be perfect you know if you do something they'll shout at you, and say why are you doing that for, you know, they are too . . and sir doesn't help kind of as well because every time he chooses in groups he'd have 4 boys and then he'd tell all those 4 boys to choose someone you know to have in their team, I usually get chosen last cos I'm not very good at PE, but I like it anyway, so you know they are a bit too . .

I - So choosing people on a team isn't a good thing then?

No, I think sir should mix it up a bit more and let a girl for once get to choose, he always puts boys, the best 4 boys in the group.

I - Would you ever feel like that would be something that you could say to him?

I don't know how sir would take it, this is the first time that I have had him as a teacher so I don't know what he would say but it would be good you know if that could work. I want to mix in with the boys they're nice but sometimes they get a bit too . . .

I - So how is it doing netball with them then, even though it's a non contact sport it still ends up being some contact doesn't it?

Yeah, netball they shout you know, they always used to shout, if I do something, cos I'm not really good at netball but I was learning from it and every time I'd make a mistake they'd always go oh why are you doing that for? You know and it was really annoying but when I was in Key stage 3 I was put in a girls group, most of the time so none of that really happened so I wasn't really prepared nor did I really think that they would do that you know, but most of those boys they are in most of my classes you know but I didn't think that they would take PE that seriously.

I - I'm just curious how are they in the theory lesson?

In the theory, lesson let me see have to do a flash back (laughs) they are naughty in the theory lesson, I think they enjoy the practical more than theory most of the time but erm, they are smart, most of the boys, most of them are smart but they just mess about really.

I - And how does that impact upon your learning?

Sir keeps shouting at them, we get through most of the lesson but most of it is spent shouting which you know is not good and the girls just sit there and all the boys start making noise, not all of them, most of them, most of them.

I - So did you, am I right in thinking if you choose GCSE PE you just do GCSE PE you don't have core PE as well, is that right?

Core PE in the sense that you have you do like sports stuff.

I - Yeah, so there are people that aren't doing GCSE but they still have to have PE in year 10 and 11 don't they?

Yeah yeah.

I - So when that's happening in your half of the year is it your group that do GCSE and the others do non GCSE if you like, is that right?

No what I think happens is when we are doing our theory they will do their core and then when they are doing their core well do our own core as well.

I - So I think what I am asking you is do you have a PE lesson that's nothing to do with GCSE PE?

Not really.

I - OK so I think what I understand is if I had a timetable, year 10 have PE on a Monday 1 and 2 but your group do GCSE and everyone else in that half would do what I would call normal PE at the same time.

No,

I - Oh I'm sorry, I'm just trying to find out.

No we have JSLA.

I - Oh you do JSLA as well.

We don't do JSLA but some people do JSLA and then you have people who do core PE that's nothing, that's normal PE, that's nothing special like GCSE or something, and then you have girls doing dance.

I - All at the same time?

Yeah, everything happens at the same time, so when we are doing theory for example, the core, the people just doing nothing would just . . .

I - Oh I think I understand, I think we are actually saying the same thing.

Kind of.

I - So does that mean then that cos you are doing GCSE you don't have an opportunity to do JSLA?

Yeah, it's for the 2 years, you have to stick with it.

I - And do you think you've made the right choice for you out of all of those choices for PE?

Um, that's a really tough question,

I - Sorry (laughs) you don't have to answer any that you don't want to.

No (laughs) I'll answer, I think the first times you know, when school started for me being in year 10, I was put in to do dance and I really didn't want to do dance cos I really just wanted to do GCSE PE, cos I wanted a GCSE (laughs) so then I had a friend who erm, she was doing GCSE with me as well the first time, but after she saw all the boys in the class she decided no way, I can't do this cos they are too competitive, you know but, I think I've made the right choice, it ties in with science, we get to do sports as well and we write, you know its ok, well for me anyway.

I - Ok that's great, so do you think PE is something, I know you want to be a doctor and that's fantastic, but do you think PE or sport, is something that you will carry on with after you leave school?

Definitely, I want to do basketball, I love basketball, I love basketball it's my favourite sport. I've started to like netball as well, tennis I'm not so sure about but basketball is definite, when I'm a doctor, part time I'll be shooting hoops (laughs).

I - I used to play a bit of basketball myself.

Yeah, I think basketball is a bit like netball, it's just like different rules, I like basketball.

I - Good, fantastic ok, you remember we talked about ability groups last time when we were in our little group together?

Yeah.

I - Um I just wanted to clarify your feelings on that really.

Yeah, um I don't think they should do that really because, I know this is not relating to PE, I'm gonna say something, but then in science last year they put people who were top group, they let them, one boy in year 8, they let the people who were in the top group to do SATS and then the other people didn't get to do SATS. I didn't get to do SATS but I was smart you know, but then that kind of brought my confidence down but it made me try harder, so there is a good and a bad thing about ability groups it makes people try harder who are in the lower group but it kind of brings down confidence as well, you know.

I - So you're saying, this is not in PE but in science for example, you think you're smart but you weren't put in the high group and that actually affected your confidence.

Yeah

I - But it also made you want to try harder.

Yeah.

I - And did you end up getting into the top set in science?

Yeah.

I - Well done.

Yeah I did try harder, I think it's good that there is top group but I think like different people take it in different ways and some people don't really care, but for me who really wanted to work hard, you know I really care. But you know ability groups, if you have people the same ability in the same class, you won't learn much cos everyone has the same kind of knowledge, but if you have people in mixed ability you, you know everyone has knowledge somewhere you know, you would learn something from others as well.

I - Ok, so have you had that experience in PE, or have you seen other people that have had that experience in PE?

Um, I've had that experience, I remember when I was still in my girls group in year 9, we got to go with the top group to do some games you know and they were really really skilled, they were so much better than us, I'm not even joking, they were really good, but then I learnt from them, you know, I learnt from how they played, you just watch you know and you learn.

I - And how did that affect your confidence?

It helped me a lot because you know, I know these people, I knew them already but I didn't get to see how good they were in PE and that's how I started to realise maybe they were right about putting them in the top group.

I - Oh so you think it was a good idea in PE maybe?

In PE (oh – her watch is broken on the strap) sorry, I think it was kind of a good idea, it depends what subject it is, because PE is not academic, it is, you know what I mean, it's not academic so it might not affect some people that much.

I - Yeah ok, cos we also talked about the purpose of PE and you said something about it takes you away from important things.

Yeah I think that's the good thing about it, it lets you, you know, everything, you stress, like you know, I like doing practical PE a lot as well because I've taken too much academic stuff this year so it's nice to just let go you know, everything.

I - You think it's a bit of relief really, from the stress?

Yeah, yes it is definitely, if I didn't have practical PE you know I don't think I'd be in a you know, but I think because I have taken so much academic stuff it would have been nice to do something without theory as well.

I - But I understand why you are taking GCSE PE because its important and you do get some activity just not perhaps enough, cos I think the other thing that you said that I've written down was that you sometimes, er it wasn't jealous that's not the right word, but you were watching others and going aaaw they've got lots of PE time and I haven't got as much.

Yeah you know I do miss having PE, just PE you know, but it's not fair (laughs) but you know we have to do that so.

I - Ok alright so um, have you heard of something called gifted and talented?

Yeah in our school I've heard of that yes.

I - And what does that mean to you?

Gifted and talented, you're good at something you know, you've been given a gift, you might not necessarily like that but maybe people just recognise that you're really good at it.

I - Do you think that they have that in PE here?

In PE yeah, last year I got an award for PE so they do, I think they see how you do and they recognise and they reward you for it.

I - Can I ask what sort of reward that was and what was it for?

(Laughs) erm trying hard. I got an award, a certificate and a medal.

I - Wow that's great.

The first time people were like 'what you!'

I - What was the name of it again.

Um I don't remember, I have it at home, I'll bring it one day.

I - Or just remember what it is called, just write it down, you can write it in your diary.
I would.

I - I just want to check what time is lunch time?

I think it's 12:35.

I - Ok we've got about 10 more minutes, I didn't want to keep you over lunch. OK so would you describe yourself as talented in PE then?

Um, some parts, some parts.

I - Ok which parts do you think?

I like, I think I'm good at basketball, running you know, but I still have a lot to learn as well, so I wouldn't say I'm talented just yet.

I - Ok, so if I, in the group that you are in for the moment, I know it's got a lot of boys in it, but if you incorporate the theory and the practical bits together, if I say the best person in that group is a 10 and the worst person in that group is a 1, what number would you give yourself?

5, yeah 5.

I - Ok, and what number would you have given yourself in your girls group in year 9?

9 (laughs) I was one of the best, I wouldn't lie about that.

I - Ok, and was that group, was that a top girls group in year 9?

No.

I - Can you explain what group that was?

We had the top group, which had, which comprised of some boys and some girls, and then we had one boys group, no two boys groups two other boys groups, and then we had two girls groups. Those two boys groups and girls groups were just equal.

I - Oh ok, so there no kind of clear middle and bottom group there's just lots of groups all at the same level with one group at the top.

Yeah.

I - Yeah, Ok and what sort of things do you think er PE teachers look for to say that somebody is talented, what things could that person do?

Um, to be honest I think it's just about working hard and going for things, just go for it, cos the teachers, I think I can recognise from Mr [REDACTED] that he likes to see people try hard you know, and not give up even if you feel like oh gosh I'm not going to be good at this then just give it a go, that's what I think.

I - Do you think there are any kind of other specific skills or characteristics that a talented person in PE would have that someone else who is not, so how could I tell the difference between a talented person in PE and someone who is not talented in PE, what things could they do that they couldn't?

Um they'd have to be good at most stuff, both practical and theory and GCSE, they have to be, just you know, not sit out in most stuff and always kind of opt

to do stuff when the teacher wants to give an example of what you're going to do, and they have to be optimistic really.

I - Cos I did notice, that lesson that I came to see you there was about half the group not doing it.

Yes, yes.

I - Does that happen a lot?

Yes sometimes, people don't bring in their PE kit, I mean I have a friend, you know my friend that you saw, that one that was walking with me the one with the red hair.

I - The one that was talking?

Yeah she talks (laughs) she never brings her PE kit, she does sometimes but really . .

I - I think I did ask her when we were walking over cos she said she picked GCSE but she didn't like and I said well why did you pick it so I wasn't really sure but that's not really any of my business.

I don't know why she picked it, I thought she would pick general PE or dance, Or JSLA, she's good with kids.

I - Yeah, there's always time to do things later, not everybody knows what they want to do. Right ok erm, so are there any things that you think the PE department could have done differently perhaps in your time here that would have helped you even more in PE?

Um, let me think about this cos I remember being in year 7 and I was thinking that there was some things that could have been changed, um maybe their approach to students I think could have been changed.

I - What do you mean by that?

Um like, maybe the way they like um, because sometimes, wait I'm trying to think cos I.

I - Its ok take as long as you like.

Sorry (laughs) um,

I - Do you mean the way they speak to people or . . .

Kind of I think because the children that don't bring in their PE kit they are it too harsh on them, I know that its important but they are a bit harsh on them and sometimes when um, yes, I've got it sorry, when like people don't, sometimes I remember being in year 8 and Mr [REDACTED] was my teacher, no this was year 9, he was my teacher in year 9, and we had a group where it was girls but then there was some girls who were so naughty they never really brought their PE kit and then these girls they'd just, when everyone would be waiting you know to get to the lesson, sir would be waiting for them and say no I'm not going unless you change into your PE kit ,you know and he'd wait for a long time, which I think wasn't fair on the others.

I - So it wasted your time?

Yeah, I know it's right, I know there's good, but you know it wasn't fair on us as well.

I - Yeah I know I mean that's definitely tricky when you've got some people in a group doing something and you got some doing something completely different.

It's true.

I - And only one teacher trying to do two things

Yeah so you can't really blame the teacher

I - Its quite tricky I would imagine

Yeah it is.

I - Hhmm, is there anything else that you think?

I think PE in this school has improved over the years, um we have more teachers, when I came in ear 7 there was about 4 or 5 teachers and now there's about 8 or 9 so it's really good, and the teachers are getting kinder (laughs).

I - Maybe that's cos you're getting older I don't know.

Yes,

I - And you understand them a bit better.

Yes maybe cos we are leaving soon.

I - Yeah yeah ok, do you do any extracurricular sports still, you said you liked basketball?

I like basketball but I haven't been able to find a proper club, I wanted to do one after schools but there isn't, and you know what is really annoying is the boys, there's one for boys why not girls you know.

I - I think there are there might be some girls teams in Haringey which is kind of the next borough up which is wood green and that way, I'll try and remember and try and find out for next time I see you.

Thanks miss.

I - I can't promise, but there is something in North London but I can't remember where it is I think its [REDACTED] that they are called.

I'd really like to just play basketball it's really, I remember being in year 6 I used to have my friends played basketball it was fun.

I - Are there any other year 10 girls that like to play basketball?

Um there's some sporty girls but I don't know if they like playing basketball.

I - You've never had a school team for girls' basketball?

No I would have loved to.

I - Not even in any years?

No I would have really loved to.

I - We'll put that down as something that the PE dept could do then?

Yeah (laughs) that would be nice, cos it's like they have a boys group a really steady one, it's not fair on us.

I - So why, I guess one last question cos we've talked about boys and girls differences quite a lot already, do you think that girls have the same opportunities as boys in PE in this school or do you think they are very different?

Um I think most of the PE stuff is mainly aimed at, based on what I've seen it's like its more boys, it's more aimed at boys, I don't know why, I think there's more boys doing PE than girls that's why. We have football team for boys in year 10 that is they go to matches almost every now and then you know they have a really really strong team. The girls' football team in our year I'm not so sure.

I - Do you think that's because the boys are more interested or do you think it's because the boys have more support perhaps or resources, or more people to take them, or do you think, cos I think it's a vicious circle sometimes isn't it cos if girls say right we want a team someone take us and then that happens or is it because the department think we should have a boys team or a girls team so we are going to organise one, does that make sense, which way round do you think it happens?

I know what you're saying, I think it's both, part of both, because some girls, I'm not going to say who, some girls are not that dedicated cos they have other stuff to do as well, but like I think most of the teachers in this school are male and they mainly do football, cricket basketball things like that, but I think there's about 3 or 4 PE teachers that are female.

I - So there's more male PE teachers than women?

Yeah, yeah.

I - Is there more boys than girls in the school in general?

Yes definitely.

I - Oh ok.

I think (laughs) it's very glaring, it's very glaring, in my class we have like how many girls, 11 girls, 17 or 18 boys.

I - In your form group?

Yeah

I - Wow, ok um, I've just got two more things, how do you feel about being in my little project, is it ok?

I think it's good, it's getting me to think, when I was a kid (laughs) I keep going back to when I was a kid.

I - It's alright.

I didn't really like PE much but you know now I can talk about it and understand it. I think the teachers in the school are working extremely hard for PE and they are starting to really like, if someone does really good stuff they are starting to really tell them, praise them a lot which is really nice, and PE has developed, its helping to build peoples' confidence, it's nice.

I - Great, so it would be ok to talk to you again after Xmas

Yeah

I - And what I'd like to do is cos I have a few girls on the project, and because of some of the things that we have talked about, I'd like to have a girls focus group.

Ok.

I - So they might feel like talking about different things cos there no boys there and vice versa so I'll put all the boys together and they might talk about different things.

Ok.

I - Are you ok with that?

Yeah.

I - Do you know what activities you're going to be doing next term for GCSE?

After this one well do badminton, I know that and I don't know, I'm excited because when I heard we were doing netball I wasn't really happy but I finished netball and I'm so happy so I'm hoping badminton will be like that too, cos I don't like it much (laughs)

I - Ok and can you just clarify when you have PE for me?

I have my diary, I have PE this Friday week A period 4 practical, week B 4th period (theory) and 6th period (practical) and Friday B period 3 theory

Appendix O

Initial coding and data themes

Initial coding

Initial themes from literature

Background of pupils
Sport

Other likes in the school

PE currently in school
Experiences in PE

Views on setting in PE
& experiences

Awareness of talented in PE
(qualities)

How are talented in PE seen in school

Links to external sport & PE

Importance of PE

Continue with PE

Development of themes after the first set of focus groups

X Cur PE
External sport → factors contributing to success

School in general

Experiences in PE → Positive
Negative
Coaching
GCSE PE
Pressures
Behaviour

Gender

Changes in PE

Ability groups → Experiences
Opinions
Transitions

Talent ID → Perceptions of talent ID in PE
self-assess at PE
Formal assessment

Status and PE

Purpose of PE

PE support for pupils

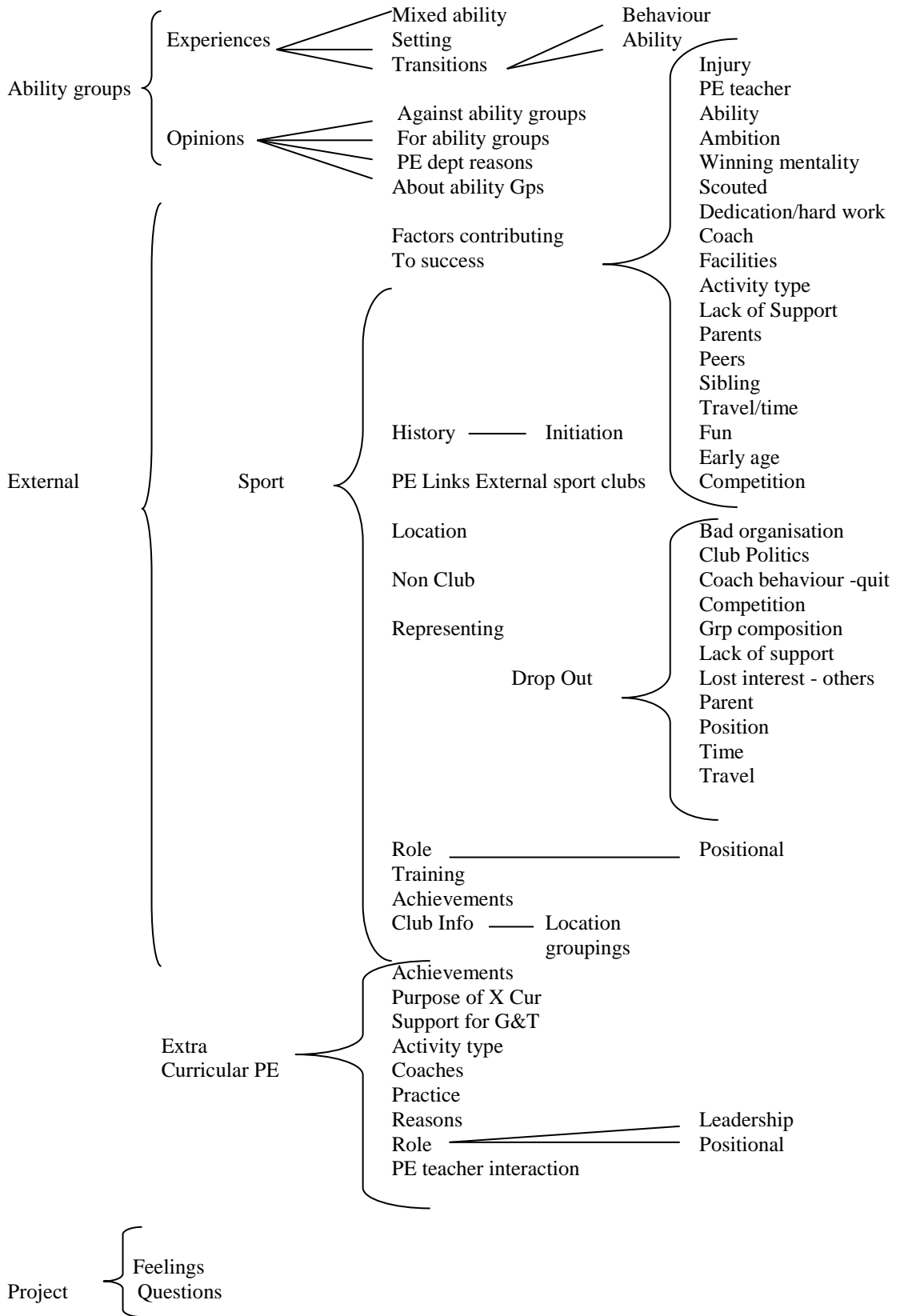
What they will do when they leave school

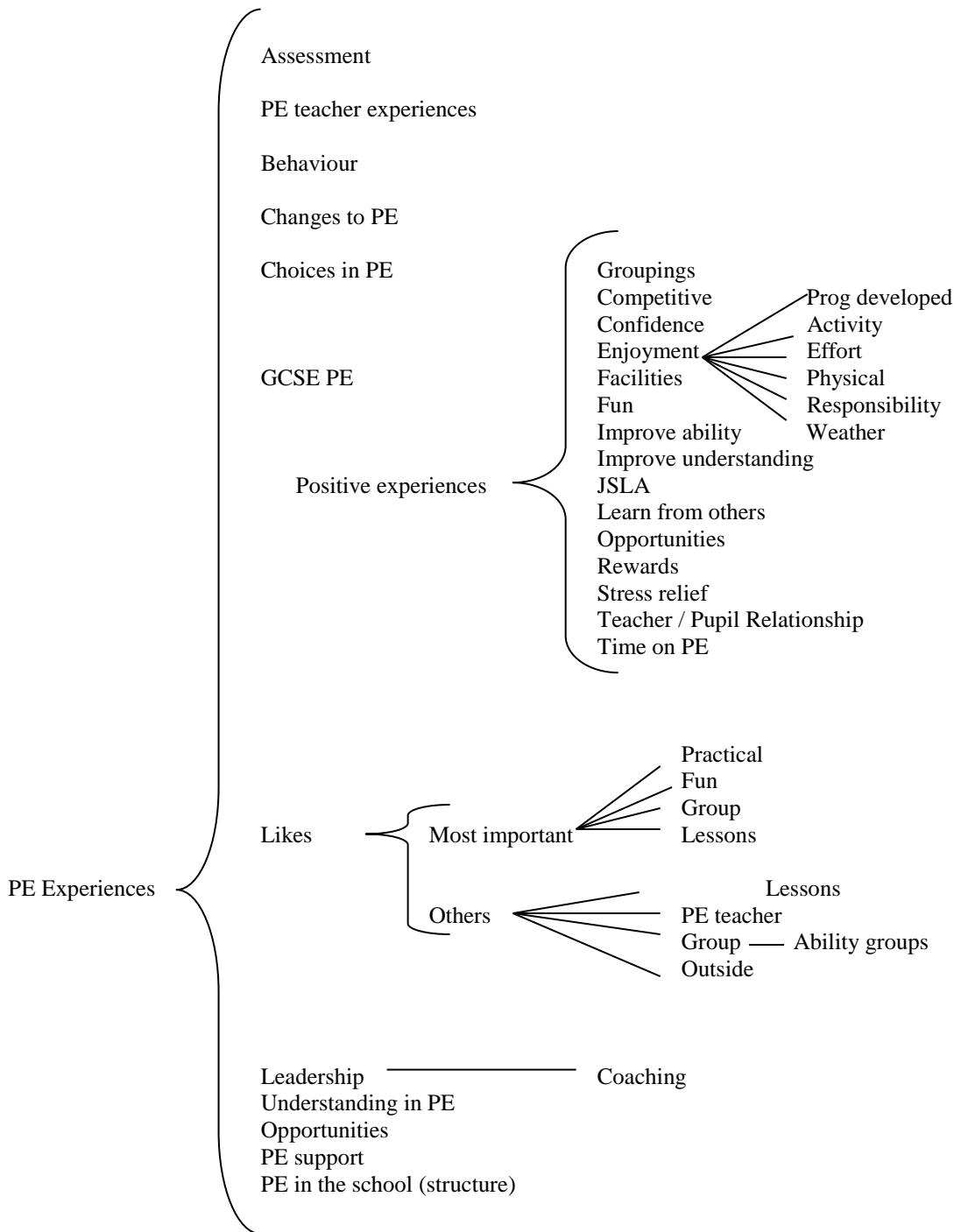
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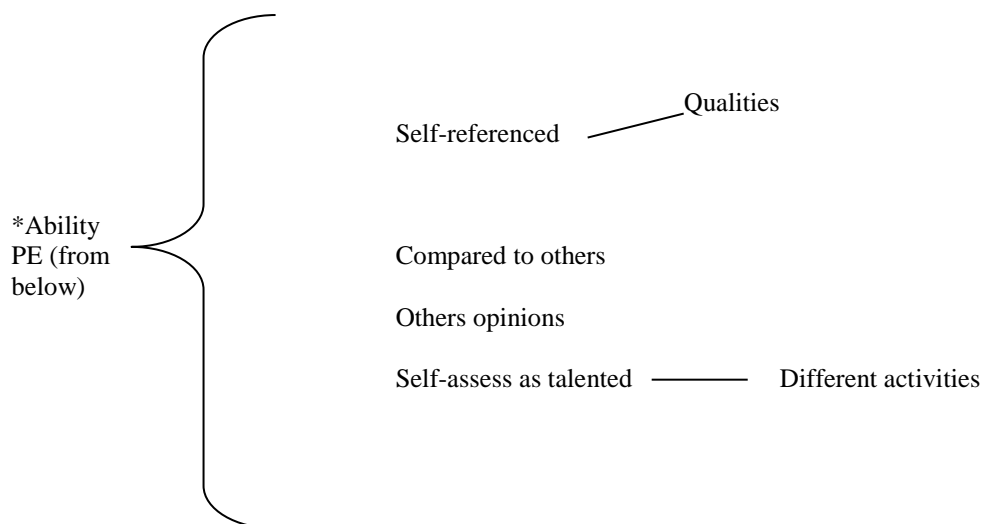
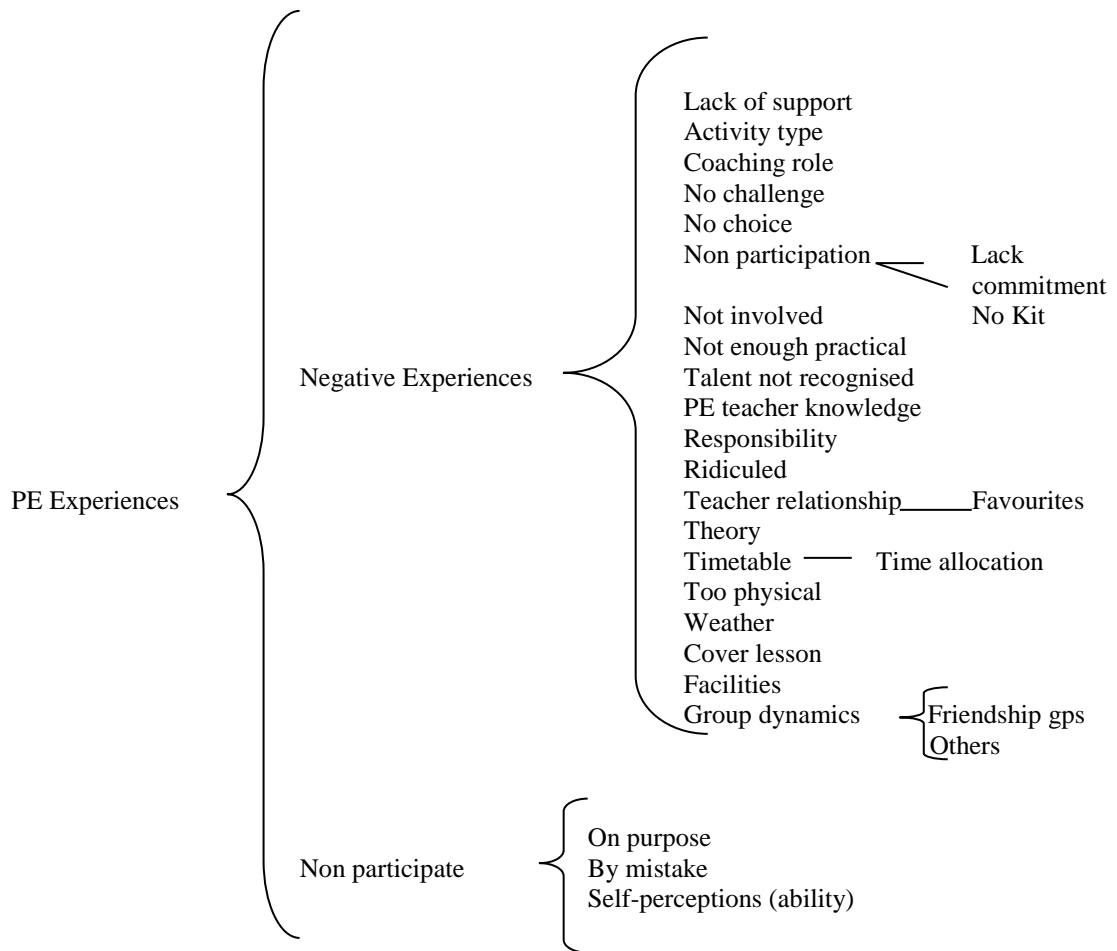
Miscellaneous

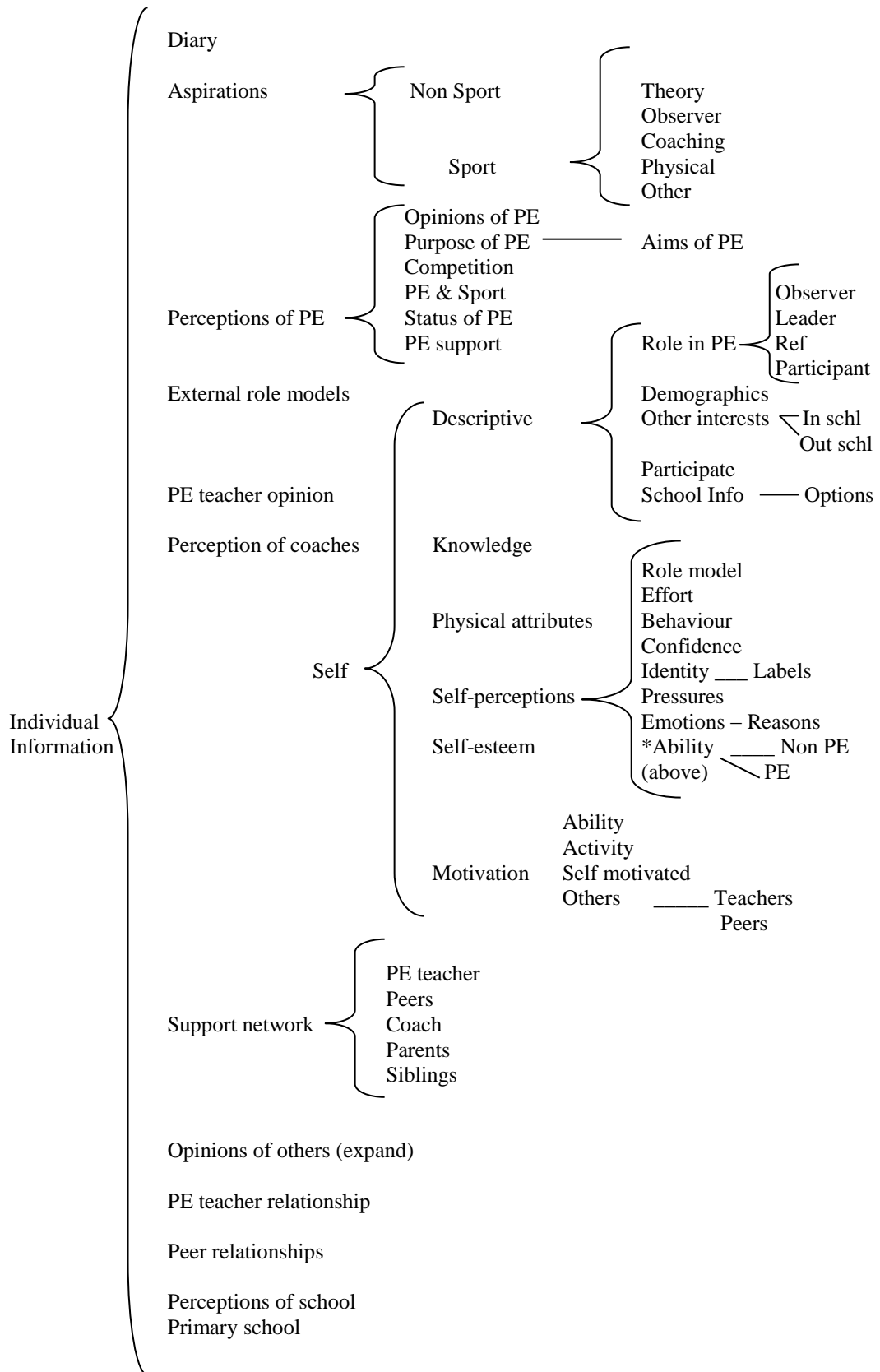
Appendix P

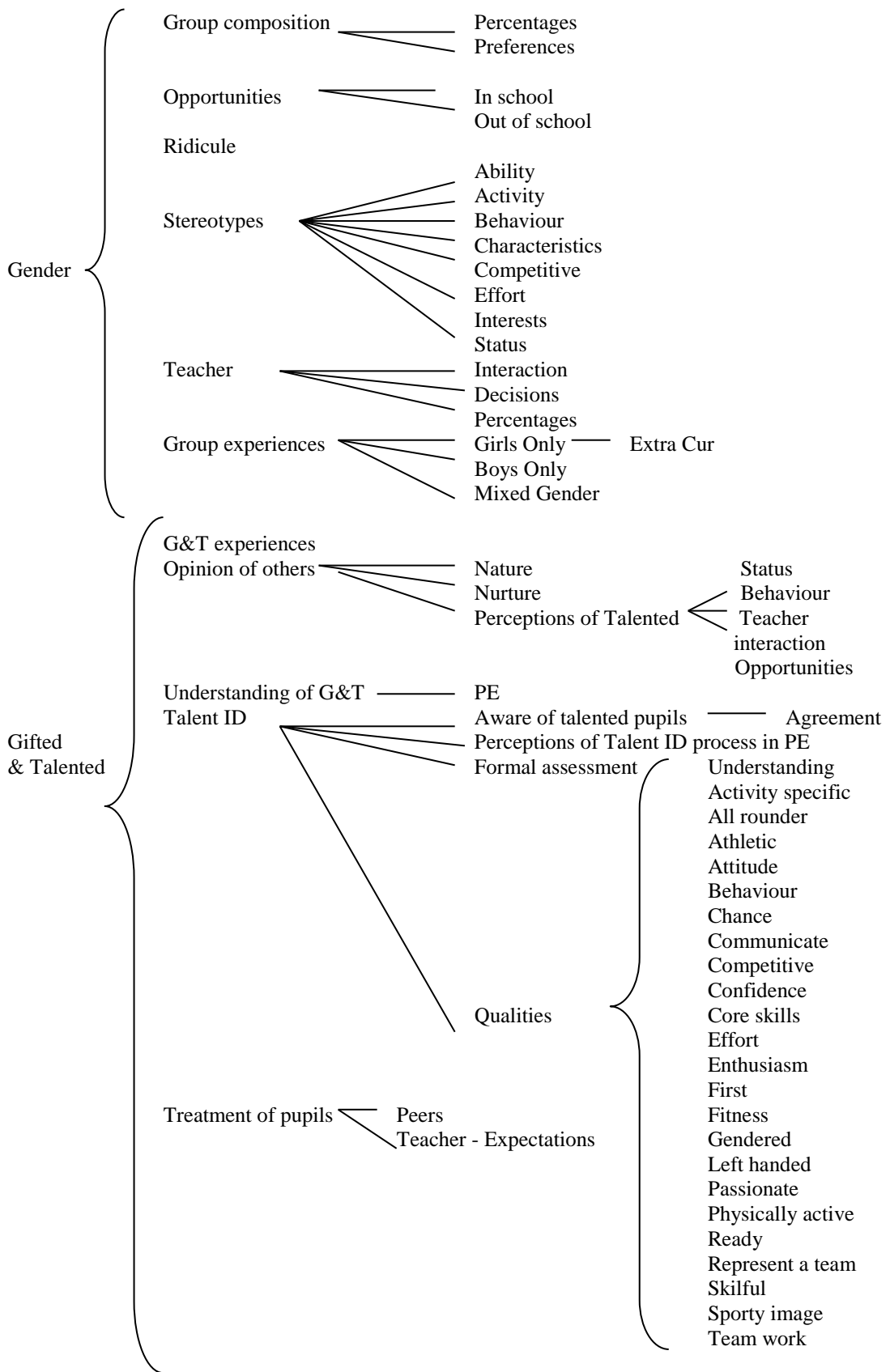
All data themes







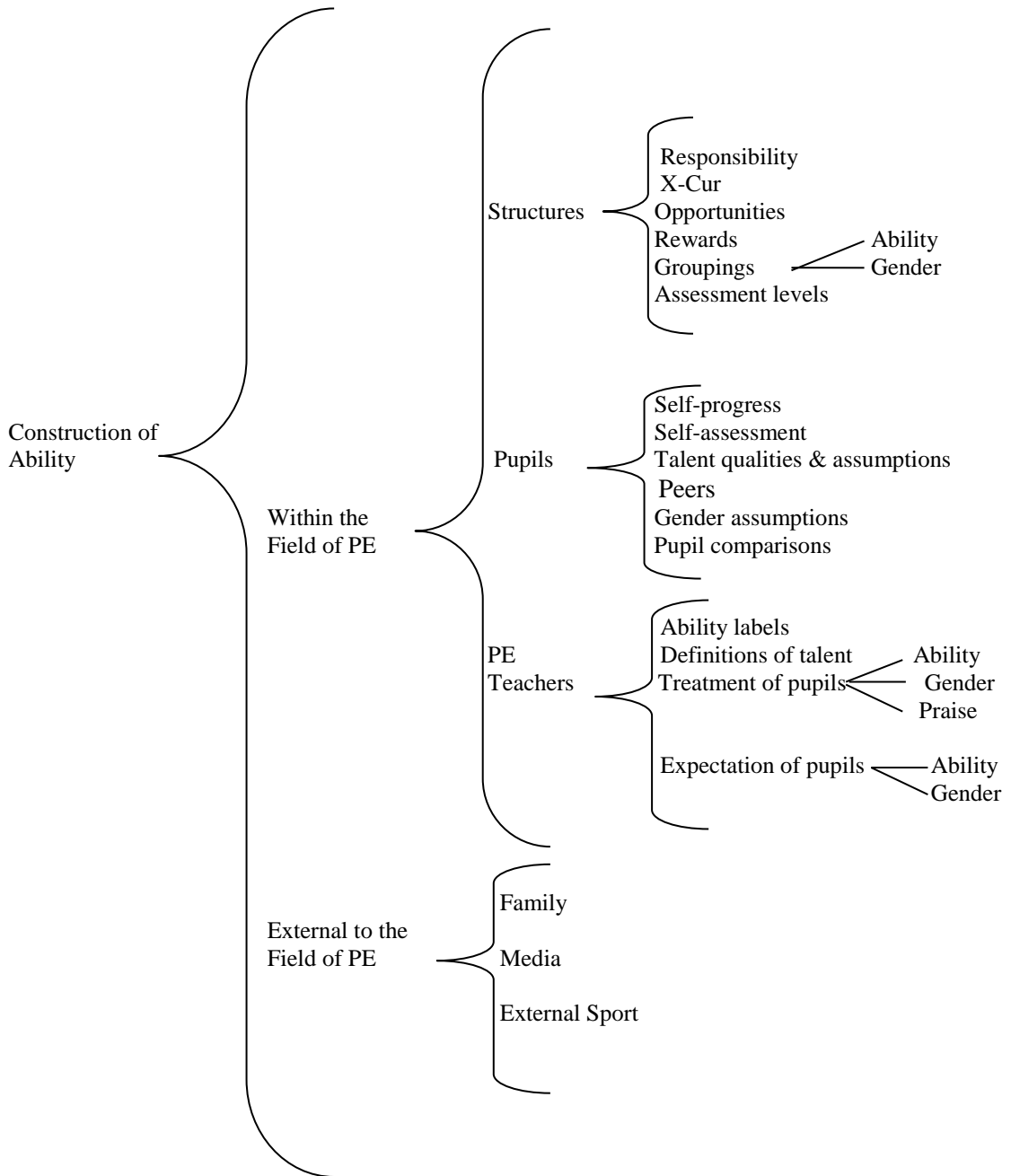


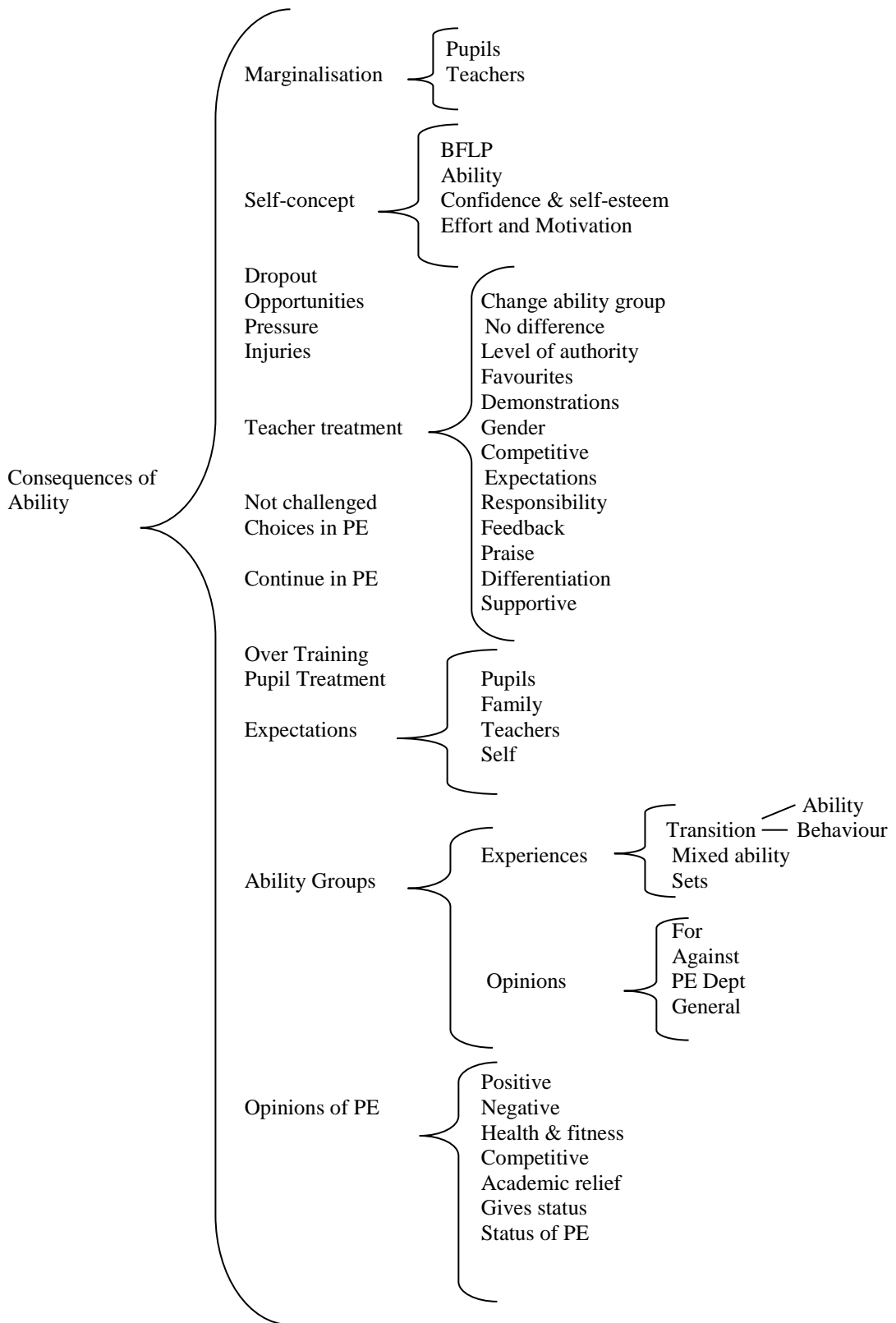


Appendix Q

Final recoding of data themes

Pupil themes in relation to the two research questions





PE teacher themes in relation to the two research questions

