



*Special school physical education experiences: pupils with behavioural difficulties becoming pupil investigators*

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**Special School Physical Education Experiences: Pupils with Behavioural  
Difficulties Becoming Pupil Investigators**

Christopher Hill

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of  
Sheffield Hallam University  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

January 2020

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Special School Physical Education Experiences: Pupils with behavioural difficulties becoming pupil investigators**

The voice of pupils with the label Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD), especially those within secondary special school educational settings, is largely unheard. By using data collection methods which placed pupils at its heart, this research explores the perspectives towards Physical Education (PE) of a small group of secondary-school pupils all labelled BESD and receiving education in a small special school. This two-part study is qualitative in nature and has a social constructionist phenomenological design. The exploration of data collected from photo elicitation, focus group meetings and individual interviews identified issues within PE lessons that pupils found meaningful. In the second part of the research, pupils took on the role of pupil investigators and explored the perceptions and experiences of their BESD-labelled peers through video interviews. This data, along with reflective field notes and informal conversation with pupils, was then analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and NVivo 11. Two main themes were identified: the importance of the role played by pupils' relationships with teachers, friends and peers, and the valuable insights accessed when pupils are given a voice. Findings include the dominant and decisive role of the PE teacher, how pupils' behaviour and attitudes within PE lessons is affected by their desire to maintain respect among their friends/peers, and the negative effects of pupils' disempowerment within PE including lack of consultation and choice regarding the curriculum and PE kit. The research concludes, whilst acknowledging the inevitable constraints on the curriculum offer of any small school, that within this offer pupils are further disenfranchised. They are not encouraged within the medium of PE lessons to develop inter-personal skills nor to gain understandings of their own or other pupils' behaviour. Pupils' lack of voice robs the school of feedback and opportunities to develop a more inclusive approach to education and fosters pupil disengagement.

## **Acknowledgements**

This thesis could not have happened without the help and support of so many people. Firstly, I would like to thank Sheffield Hallam University for allowing me to fulfil a promise made to myself 30 years ago; that of gaining a PhD.

Secondly I would like to thank my supervision team of Dr. Rebecca Mallet, Dr. Nichola Lighfoot and Dr. Diana Ridley, who have provided stimulating, challenging and thought-provoking supervision meetings. Your support has been invaluable in providing help and guidance at all stages of the research.

I give love and thanks to my wife Susan, to my best friend. Only Susan will ever know what this has taken and what it means to me. I will be forever grateful for her support, belief in me and not least the proof reading of the draft. This thesis is dedicated to her.

Finally, I must thank the school who took part in the research. The Headteachers help in getting my research off the ground was invaluable. More importantly, I would like to thank all the children who participated in the research. Without their contributions, hard work and genuine enthusiasm for taking part there would not have been any research.

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## **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of Physical Education (PE) of a group of 15-year-old pupils who all had the label Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD) and who attended a special school. The initial interest in this study came from both a teaching career within PE in secondary schools and a career move into special education. I realised that the PE experienced by pupils in secondary schools was different to that experienced by similar-aged pupils in special schools. I became interested in exploring what pupils' perceptions were about their experiences of PE within what is a large percentage of the special school population – pupils with the label BESD.

## **Context of the study**

PE, in one of its many forms, has been present in the education of children since the start of compulsory education following the Education Act 1870 (Armstrong, 1970). The publication of the 'Syllabus of Physical Training in Schools' (1933) provided the basis of the teaching of PE in schools (then called Physical Training [PT]) and accorded PE with a status and position in the elementary school curriculum (Evans, 1998). The Board of Education (1933) took the view that an efficient system of PT could help compensate but not correct, alleviate or act as a remedy for all Britain's social and economic ills (Board of Education, 1933). The present situation is little changed with the development of PE and its inclusion within the curriculum of schools being linked to the perceived developing needs of the nation. The introduction of National Curriculum Physical Education (NCPE) together with the perceived governmental need to address issues such as childhood obesity and physical inactivity has brought other pressures to bear on the development of the subject of PE (Harris, 2018). The PE profession has recently begun to highlight the physical, social, cognitive and affective benefits which taking part in PE may provide (Bailey, 2006). PE academics (Harris, 2018) have been making the case for PE not only to be a National Curriculum (NC) subject but that it should have the status of a core subject within the NC. They make the case that it is the only subject which

addresses the physical development aim of the curriculum whilst making a considerable contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of children (Harris, 2018). The argument is also made that taking part in PE may develop patterns that may lead to a healthy and active lifestyle post-school (ICSSPE, 2010).

These are the aspirations for the teaching of PE in schools and, if realised, would place the teaching of PE at the forefront of the development of the individual pupil both physically and in other ways. The realisation of these perceived benefits ought to be available for all pupils in all forms of education. However, it seemed to me that pupils were rarely asked about their perceptions of PE and this raised an important question. If pupils were not asked about their views and experiences, how was it possible to know fully if the perceived benefits of taking part in PE were being realised. For pupils who make up a minority group, those with the label BESD, it is also important to explore if they have access to the same perceived benefits of PE as any other pupil.

Research in education has recognised that the voice of the pupils should be included in all research which involves them (Fitzgerald et al., 2003; Fitzgerald, 2005; Coates, 2010, 2011; Coates and Vickerman, 2008, 2010). This appreciation of the value of including pupil voice has been aided by policies and legislations notably United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [UNCRC] (1989), the implementation of this convention into UK law, and the development of school policies relating to the needs of pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) (Revised Code of Practice, 2001). The latest revision of the Code of Practice (Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), Code of Practice: 0 to 25 Years (DES, 2013) emphasises that pupils have the right to have their voices heard on all matters concerning their education. In this research listening to the voices of the pupils about their perception and experiences of PE is central.

There has been previous research into the views of pupils in relation to PE (Fitzgerald, 2005; Medcalf, Marshall, Hardman and Visser, 2011), but such research has tended to investigate pupils within mainstream education who have been

designated with a SEN. There is limited research into how pupils who have the label BESD experience PE in mainstream education (Medcalf, 2010). There is a further group of pupils who have been neglected within research: those pupils labelled BESD and who attend a special school. This is a small proportion of the total number of pupils who have the label BESD, but is an important group whose voices have rarely been heard. The experiences and perceptions of PE for this group of pupils may offer a different view of PE from their mainstream peers. It has been noted that pupils with the label BESD often have notable difficulties in learning (Broomhead, 2013) and due to the pupils' previous experiences may have difficulties in maintaining behaviours that the school deems to be appropriate. Whilst these behaviours might be managed within a school, in extreme cases there is evidence that pupils who at school are deemed to exhibit unmanageable behaviour are often referred to special education provision. Special schools may have larger-than-average numbers of pupils who have been transferred from mainstream education and who will therefore be receiving different experiences of PE from their mainstream peers. The views of the mainstream pupils are the ones most often referred to within PE research and it cannot be assumed that this group represents a consensus view of the meaning that PE holds for all pupils. Whilst it may be argued that this large group of pupils represent a consensus of views since their overall experiences may be similar, it is only by the exploration of minority groups that a fuller picture of the personal meaning of PE may be assessed. It must be acknowledged that the differing experiences of pupils will affect the ways in which they view PE and the personal meaning which they individually ascribe to PE. It is the voice of these pupils that this research seeks to hear. These personal experiences will be assessed through the medium of pupil voice which will allow the individual pupil to express their experiences and perceptions of PE.

It is acknowledged that the views and experiences of the pupils are the subject not only of their immediate experiences but also of their social and cultural experiences. Whilst previous research has reported on the value of PE to the individual, this research has been specifically designed to hear the voice of the BESD



pupils attending a special school and, by adopting interpretive principles of data analysis, has been able to hear pupils' views in an unbiased manner.

### **Purpose and Aims of the Research**

The purpose of this research is to listen to the voices of a small number of Year 11 (ages 15-16) pupils on their experiences and perceptions of PE and to go some way in bridging the gap in previous research by integrating the fields of PE, pupils labelled BESD and pupils who attend a special school. This is an area which is under-researched. In addition to listening to the pupils' voices concerned, the research aims to provide an understanding of what it is like to be a pupil labelled BESD in a special school PE lesson and the part played by PE in the lives of the pupils.

This research aims to answer the primary question: 'What are the experiences and perceptions of PE of a group of 15-year-old pupils who have been labelled BESD and who attend a special school?' It is within this primary question that these sub-questions were addressed:

1. How do the pupils experience their PE lessons?
2. How do peer-relationships and pupil-staff relationships affect pupils' experiences of their PE lessons?
3. Is PE important to the pupils?

Whilst this is the main purpose of the research' further objectives will be considered:

- Review and assess the methodological stances which have previously been used in the study of the value of PE and the experiences of the pupils within their school PE.
- Develop a methodology which allows the full experiences and perceptions of the pupils to be revealed and allows the collection of data from which it is possible to interpret pupils' views about PE lessons in their school.

- Identify and interpret the areas in which there is similarity and difference in the experiences of the pupils within the special school and their perceptions of PE.

The views and perceptions of PE for a group of pupils with the label BESD attending a special school were examined using a phenomenological exploration. The emphasis was on understanding their views and the complex characteristics which these pupils bring to their PE lessons.

### **Pupils with the label BESD**

There has been widespread discussion amongst PE professionals on the potential benefits that taking part in PE may hold (Bailey, 2006, Bailey, Armour, Kirk and Sandford, 2009). In addition, it has been acknowledged that having practical, physical and expressive creative experiences are an important constituent of the education of pupils labelled BESD (Medcalf, 2010). As previously stated, there is a paucity of research which links PE, pupils labelled BESD and special schools, so little is known about how PE is perceived by such pupils. It is not the point of this research to comment generally on special school PE or to extrapolate what it is like to experience special school PE as a pupil labelled BESD. This research reports specifically on the experiences and perceptions of a number of Year 11 pupils attending a rural special school. Pupils' views and perceptions on the PE curriculum are described from the individual pupil's views of what is important. These views are highly contextualised and diverse in nature and as such can only be assumed to be an account of the individual pupils' experiences. In order to obtain a representative interpretation of the experiences of the pupils, a research method was utilised where the pupils themselves acted as pupil investigators and sought to explore their own views and those of their peers on their experiences and perceptions of PE. The pupil investigators were able to probe the answers of their peers using their own incisive experiences of the lessons, thus providing more in-depth responses. This in-depth probing helped the interpretation of the findings since it helped reduce the likelihood of my own positionality becoming part of the interpretation.

The pupil experiences in this research have been understood to have been socially constructed over time. The varied and often complex relationships between the learning environment and pupils' own personality constructs all provide socially constructed pupil perceptions. This research therefore accepts the social model of disability as described by Vickerman (2007) as a recognition of the belief that:

disability, causation, and location are a combination of complex interactions between the strengths and weaknesses of the child, levels of support available and the appropriateness of education being provided (Vickerman, 2007, p. 22).

The social model provides the flexibility to appreciate that for pupils with the label BESD there are many and varied influences on their lives and education which all influence their perceptions.

One of the factors which the supporters of PE claim is that it provides a different and varied experience for the pupil from any other curriculum subject. PE offers a range of different activities which results in a variety of experiences for the pupils concerned. These experiences need to be unpicked in order to explore the differing perceptions of the pupils. This is relevant to pupils with the label BESD and fosters understanding into how these pupils experience the practical, physical and expressive/creative elements of PE.

## **Outline of Thesis**

Chapter One provides a review of the key literature in the fields covered by this research: SEN, special schools and pupil voice. It includes definitions of the terms used in this thesis and explore the issues that previous researchers have identified. Chapter Two reviews the literature surrounding the curriculum subject of PE and outlines the potential benefits and negative aspects claimed from participation in school PE. Chapter Three reviews the development and use of pupil voice in schools. Chapter Four outlines the ethical issues encountered in this research and the solutions which were found to various ethical issues. Chapter Five builds on the work of previous studies and outlines the development of the research design, sampling, and data collection methods. Details are provided of the pilot study and

its influence on the methodology used for the data collection methods of the main study. The need for the use of pupil investigators is discussed, as is the interpretation and analysis of the data. Chapter Six is the first chapter detailing some of the findings of the research and concentrates on the social interactions identified as being important in the research. Chapter Seven explores further important findings of the research that arose from listening to the voices of the pupils: choice, boredom and ability. Chapter Eight concludes with an overview of the outcomes of the research and the identification and discussion of its implications.

### **Summary**

This thesis has sought to combine three fields in education previously under-researched: PE, pupils with the label BESD and special school education. It was designed to combine these elements and to provide a snapshot of what it means to be a pupil labelled BESD attending special school PE lessons. It was acknowledged that the contribution PE makes to the education of these pupils could be better examined and understood by, amongst other things, listening to and understanding the voices of the pupils as they are in a unique position to share their insights.

## **Chapter 1. Special Educational Needs, Special Schools and BESD**

### **1.1. Introduction**

The three following chapters provide an overview of relevant literature which has preceded this study. The chapters include a consideration of special educational needs, special schools and BESD, physical education and pupil voice. The chapters include discussion of the themes which run throughout this study namely the issues surrounding children who have the label BESD; their perceptions of PE lessons; the issues surrounding PE within special schools; and the use of pupil voice.

This research concerned a group of pupils who all have a 'Statement of Educational Need' and attend a special school. Children and young people labelled SEN do not necessarily have a disability. Some disabled children and young people do not have SEN; there is a lot of overlap between the two groups.

### **1.2. Research Approach**

This research values the perceptions and experiences of the pupils taking part in the research as it is from these lived perceptions and experiences that a snapshot of what it is like to be a pupil labelled BESD and attending special school PE lessons may be explored. The ideology behind this research is based on the principle that there is a need to understand that pupils should have their voice heard in all matters which affect them, and it is this principle which runs throughout this research.

In this study, the views and experiences that are of interest are those of the pupils, as they negotiate their own personal routes through the subject of PE. When research has in the past acknowledged both SEN and PE, it has commonly discussed the two fields from the perspectives of those with a physical disability of some kind (Coates and Vickerman, 2008). There has not been a proportionate amount of time devoted to research on how pupils who have some form of BESD experience the NCPE.

### **1.2.1. Relevance to Research**

There are very plausible arguments as to why the voices of the pupils should be heard on all matters relating to their lives and education. The review of the literature on pupil voice makes a compelling argument for the voices of pupils with SEN to be heard, but pupils with the label BESD are a minority group within SEN that has not been researched to a great extent. One of the possible reasons for BESD pupils being under researched has been the focus, by researchers, of exploring the perceptions of stakeholders. This has included the perspectives of parents (An and Hodge, 2013; Columna, Pyfer, Senne, Velez, Bridenthall and Canabal, 2008) and the most commonly explored stakeholder perspective within PE, that of the teacher. Qi and Ha (2012) concluded that 49% of all published studies that explored perceptions towards PE, for pupils with disabilities did so from the teachers perspective (Haegele and Sutherland, 2015). Fitzgerald (2008) endorsed this view and further stated that researchers 'dismiss disabled young people as illegitimate sources of research information' (p. 148). Fitzgerald (2008) went on to question how researchers 'can effectively advance change . . . since we know very little about their experiences' (p. 148).

PE researchers have largely ignored or marginalised disability within equality research producing research that focussed on such topics as gender, ethnicity and social class. Gender has been seen as the dominant 'lens' in research accounts of difference in PE (Flintoff and Scraton, 2006) with many studies taking a single issue focus and paying insufficient account of the ways 'in which other identity markers intersect with those of gender' (Flintoff, Fitzgerald and Scraton, 2008, p. 77). Most of the work on gender and PE has remained centrally concerned with girls and women with some research showing the interplay between gender, race and religion (Kay, 2006; Knez, 2007).

Disability has also largely been absent as a key 'lens' of difference in PE (Flintoff, Fitzgerald and Scraton, 2008) with available research focusing on difference in experiences of mainstream pupils and specific disability groups within PE (Coates and Vickerman, 2008). This type of research in PE and sport has been underpinned

by sports science and this discipline has tended to view disabled people through their functional limitations. A further aspect of research in PE is that much of the research has been conducted within mainstream schools and whilst mainstream schools do contain the majority of pupils identified as having SEN they are not exclusive. There are other educational settings in which PE takes place and it is these settings which have not been recognised in research. The special school is an example of such an educational setting.

If research is concerned with getting answers to specific questions, using research participants who are knowledgeable, articulate and responsible provides a relatively easy way to complete research. It could be argued that this explains the abundance of research in PE using adult stakeholders. Pupils with disability do not form a homogenous group and represent a group who from the researchers standpoint are hard to reach. The very nature of this groups potentially diverse disabilities provides participants who may not fit the normal research model of questioning, interviews, discussions and written responses. In addition, pupils with disabilities have been seen in negative terms, being unable to offer insights into their own lives. This insight is central to all research in PE, that aims to obtain answers to questions across the whole spectrum of pupil types. Fitzgerald (2008) stated that in her experience many researchers into youth sport assumed that pupils such as those with learning difficulties cannot be included. Fitzgerald further stated that in her experience a 'smiley face will not solve the problem of inclusion in research' (Fitzgerald, 2008, p. 149). However, it is acknowledged in the literature that pupils are the experts on their own lives and listening to the voice of the pupils will help provide an in-depth picture of the life of the child (Aldridge, 2014). If research in PE is to rise to the challenge it must identify and adopt research methods that are appropriate and effective for research participants who are vulnerable in some way (Aldridge, 2014). Aldridge (2014) underlines the importance that the chosen methods allow for the pupils voices and the perspectives to be 'heard and are beneficial to them personally and/or within community settings so that personal, social or political transformations can be realised' (Aldridge, 2014, p. 2).

This research will be conducted allowing the voice of the pupils within the vulnerable group of pupils labelled BESD to be at the forefront of any examination of their lived experiences.

### **1.3. Special Educational Needs (SEN)**

The Children and Families Act (2014b) details guidance for teachers and other professionals to help make decisions about SEN:

A child or young person has a SEN when he or she has a learning difficulty or disability that calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her (DfE, 2014b, clause 20).

The Act created the current Code of Practice which relates to children 0 - 25 years of age and provides advice to Local Education Authorities (LEAs), maintained schools and early years educational settings on how to identify, assess and make provision for children's SEN to ensure that all children 'achieve their best, become confident individuals living fulfilled lives; and that they make a successful transition into adulthood' (DfE, 2014a, p. 58).

The definition of SEN and its use in the school needs to be unpicked in order to understand better present-day pressures and difficulties.

#### **1.3.1. Development of Special Educational Needs**

SEN provision in England is governed by the Code of Practice (DfE, 2014). It is this Code which governs the principles for the organisation and management of SEN provision within schools. In conjunction with the Code, there is also the statement of inclusion. Schools have a responsibility to provide 'a broad and balanced curriculum for all pupils' (NC, 1999, p. 30 )

This statutory inclusion statement sets out three principles for developing an inclusive curriculum to provide all pupils with relevant and challenging learning. Schools must:

- set suitable learning challenges,



- respond to pupils' diverse learning needs,
- overcome potential barriers to learning and assessment for individuals and groups of pupils (NC, 1999, p. 30).

There is, however, a difference in emphasis between the two documents. An example of this is that the Code details how factors internal to the child should be considered as a prime focus, whilst the NC places great emphasis on external factors such as learning environments and the ability of teachers to be able to set suitable learning targets (Hodkinson, 2016). These factors appear to be drawn from differing models of disability, and an explanation of these differing models is important to our understanding of SEN. SEN has been the subject of differing ideologies and is seen from several different perspectives which have been identified as different models of disability: Psycho-medical; Social model; Affirmative and Rights-based model of disability.

1. Psycho-medical model – in this model the child's needs and disabilities are located within the child's impairment or the restrictions in activity caused by that impairment. As Harpur (2012) clarifies the 'medical model focuses on the person with disability as the problem and looks for cures' (Harpur, 2012. p. 2).

This model is also called the individual tragedy, deficit or medical model (Hodkinson, 2016).

2. Social model - Slee (1998) has described this model of disability as being the result of society's actions, values and beliefs which seek to enforce social marginalisation upon minority groups. It rejects the categorisation of disabled people based on their impairment and, as pointed out by Goodley (2014), 'the social model concerns itself with the real conditions of disablism' (p. 6).
3. The Affirmative model – first named and suggested by Swain and French (2000), the affirmative model identifies 'impairment as physical, sensory, cognitive and emotional difference to be expected and respected on its own terms in a diverse society' (Cameron and Tossell, 2012). This model was

seen as an intervention in the ongoing debate about the social model.

(Cameron, 2014, p. 4)

There were criticisms that the social model over-emphasised social structure barriers and ignored personal and social aspects of disability. The affirmation model was developed to answer these criticisms (Cameron, 2014, p. 4).

4. Rights-based model – this model positions disability as a dimension of human culture. From a rights-based perspective, legislation aims to ensure that all children with or without SEN, have access to mainstream schools which should accommodate them within a child-centred pedagogy capable of meeting their needs (UNESCO, 1994). Barton (2003) sees inclusive education as the only possible response to meeting our human-rights obligations. The aims of the rights-based model of disability has been defined as:

to empower disabled people and hold public institutions and structures accountable for implementing provisions of sufficient quality and in sufficient quantity to meet their human-rights responsibility (Handicap International, 2014, p. 3).

Each of these frameworks or models has had and continues to have influence on SEN provision in England. As each of these frameworks use different theories of focus, causation, intervention methods and education (Hodkinson, 2016), they need further exploration.

### **1.3.2. Psycho-medical model of disability**

The psycho-medical model has been the model that Western society has historically used to conceptualise SEN and disability. It has been argued that this model has become embedded into society and may be seen in such things as media presentations, school textbooks, language usage, images on tv and the internet, research findings, policy documents and usage in professional language. This model employs language and practices borrowed from the medical profession and sees SEN as arising from the psychological, neurological or physiological limitations displayed by the individual (Skidmore, 1996). The child's 'limitations' are judged against developmental and functional norms by developmental screening to

ascertain the degree of SEN. It is by the comparison of the child's performance against these norms in areas such as cognition, speech and language, fine and motor physical skills and social and emotional functioning that the scope and severity of the child's need is determined. The psycho-medical model identifies the child's 'limitation' as being a deficit of functioning which will need to be treated and cured by professionals (Harpur, 2012). At the end of this screening process the child's 'limitations' can be labelled and described in clinical language and may be treated by drug therapy or therapeutic/educational interventions (Skidmore, 1996).

In education the use of the psycho-medical model has long been used as a method of identification and placement of pupils within SEN provision. An early development was the use of Education Medical Officers who were involved in the process of identifying and placing pupils with SEN into separate educational provision, a practice echoed today with the involvement of health professionals in writing statements/health care plans. A weakness of this model is that it locates the causes of a child's disability within the child, it is their 'medical' problem. This model places the professional in a position of power over the whole process. The lack of rigorous co-ordination between professionals in different sectors has been identified as a weakness in this system. It has been noted that the whole system is a 'patchwork quilt . . . not necessarily with a unified outcome' (Gargiulo and Kilgo, 2014, p. 132).

The psycho-medical model is reliant upon the use of professional judgement and leads to a situation where disabled children's lives are ruled by professionals with little involvement of the child. In the eyes of Lewis (1999) this has led to disabled children being dehumanised and objectified by medical and educational professionals. Some commentators have noted that the scientific measurement used in the diagnosis process are based on vague assumptions (Lewis, 1999), since disabled children do not form a homogeneous group and as such cannot be treated as if they all conform to similar behaviours. In a damning rebuke of the system Johnson (2001) argued that, when this model is applied to special education, it can be observed to be nothing more than a mechanistic process whereby children's

symptoms are identified and diagnosed, and the condition or syndrome then treated within a specialised segregated system of education.

### **1.3.3. Social model of disability**

Much has been written about the social model of disability which emphasises that disability is caused by 'externally imposed disadvantage and social restriction rather than impairment' (Oliver and Barnes, 1998, p. 18).

Historically the social model of disability tended to focus on 'public' experiences of oppression such as social barriers rather than the 'personal' experiences of oppression which operate at an individual level (Thomas (1999).

This movement away from the medical model of disability towards making disability a social rather than an individual problem may be seen as part of the process of development of the rights of disabled people. A recent definition sees disability as caused by the way society is organised rather than a person's impairment (Harris and White, 2018). In this definition impairment is taken as the person's functional limitations. This model focuses on a concept of disability which argues that disability is not created by impairments but rather by barriers created by society (Hodkinson, 2015). The argument is that society restricts the movements and opportunities for disabled people to function as effectively as people without impairments (Morgan, 2012). The social model offered a radical alternative to the thinking that the impairment was within the individual, rather it asserted that society and external forces were responsible. This was as Morgan (2012) stated a revolution not only in the thinking of disabled people, but also a change in the attitudes and values of non-disabled people.

In addition to these barriers, Thomas (1999) argued that the social model of disability should be extended to include social processes and practices that undermine the emotional wellbeing of people with impairments. It is this psycho-emotional dimension of disability which Reeve (2002) reported as affecting what disabled people could be, rather than what they could do. This included being hurt by the reactions of others and being made to feel worthless. This has its roots in the

negative attitudes and prejudices about disabled people held by society. There is an echo here of the feeling experienced by pupils with SEN who perceive themselves to be of less worth than their peers.

The social model has become central to any development relating to disability issues and the development of inclusive education (Terzi, 2005). As an ideology it has become partially embedded into British society by helping to develop an understanding of disability and the daily problems faced by disabled people (Swain and French, 2000). However, there are two main reasons why the social model is open to criticism. The first is that if emphasis is placed upon societal issues, it can take away the important aspect of the person's own experiences of their bodies:

While environmental and social attitudes are a crucial part of our experience of disability – and do indeed disable us – to suggest that this is all there is, is to deny the personal experience of physical and intellectual restrictions, of illness, of the fear of dying (Morris, 1991, p. 10).

The second criticism of the social model is that :

it fails to take account of difference and presents disabled people as one unitary group, whereas in reality our race, gender, sexuality and age mean that our needs and lives are much more complex than that (Oliver, 2013, p.1025).

Some authors have stated that the social model's only real achievement has been to lead to a redefinition of the 'problem' of disability and impairment, and that it is a model which works in theory but not in practice (Morgan, 2012). Important work by Terzi (2010) pointed out that whilst the social model has made a valid contribution to knowledge it has, by overlooking the concept of normality, presented only a partial view of the relationships which exist between impairment, disability and society (Terzi, 2010). Terzi further argued that whilst the social model offered a form of corrective against the medical model, it did not go far enough since it needed to extend its ideological framework if it was to make an important contribution to the development of inclusive education.

It has been asserted that pupils with a disability are the poorest and most disadvantaged in their communities and that they have been systematically

excluded from education (Miles and Singal, 2010). If this contested view is correct, then education could be one of the core components in overcoming the prejudices of society shown towards people with impairments. Norwich (2014) stated that the social model makes clear that the provision of education within the social model should be very different from that provided within the medical model. He further commented that to use the social model would bring about a change in the education provision for pupils with SEN. Norwich, an exponent of inclusive education, believed that a full application of the social model would put an end to special schooling, and replace it with accessible schools for all. Schools would need to review and adapt their curriculum offer and delivery, manage the expectations of staff within the school and change the general ethos within the school if the stereotypical and discriminating attitudes that society holds in relation to disability and people with impairments is to be broken down.

#### **1.3.4. Affirmative model of disability**

The combined criticisms of the medical model and the social model has led to a development of a more positive model of disability (Johnson, 2001). This model, the affirmative model is:

essentially a non-tragic view of disability and impairment which encompasses positive social identities, both individual and collective, for disabled people grounded in the benefits of lifestyle and life experience of being impaired and disabled (Swain and French, 2000, p. 569).

This model has not been without its critics. Johnson (2001) argued that both the social and affirmative models are based upon 'liberal rather than radical conceptions of equal opportunities' (Johnson, 2001, p. 22).

The affirmative model sees disabled people as people, not as a separate group within society, and asserts the necessity of providing society with a practical and academic understanding of disablement which could result in a new level of inclusive and individual understanding (Johnson, 2001). Indeed, my research, highlighting as it does the experiences of a minority group within schools, helps to

provide an understanding that pupils with the label BESD have the same rights and needs as their mainstream peers.

#### **1.3.5. Rights-based model of disability**

The rights-based model of disability affirms that all human beings, irrespective of their disabilities, have certain rights that are inalienable (Education Links, 2018).

The rights-based model of disability stems from the fact that society is beginning to recognise that ability should not be a cause for discrimination any more than race, religion, creed or gender. The adoption of this model would have wide-ranging implications across the whole of society and would require substantive government intervention.

Critics have argued that if people with disabilities are to have the same rights as the rest of society then what is required is the politicisation of disabled people. They challenge the exclusion of disabled people from the structures of society and the perception of disabled people as helpless and defined by impairment. It is a form of disability politics which aims to hear the voices of disabled people and in so doing undermines social values, beliefs and conventions which are based upon the ideology of the medical model of disability (Allen, 2003). This model seeks through the application of equal opportunities theory to expand the social model of disability to also include the dimensions of disablement caused by civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental factors (Johnson, 2001).

In schools the rights-based model advocates that all children should be educated in a mainstream school situated in their own community and challenges the belief that some children should attend segregated education.

‘The social model was and continues to be hugely inspirational’ (Goodley, 2014, p. 7) and when applied to schools has been influential in the development of inclusive education. Inclusive education is built on the idea that children with disabilities are entitled to an education that is on a par with their non-disabled peers (Corbett and Slee, 2000). Writers such as Moore and Slee (2012) and Oliver and Barnes (2012)

have also argued that the education of children with disabilities is a civil/human rights issue. Despite this aspiration, there is an argument that some children have disabilities which need separate educational provision.

In special education children are still being diagnosed and assigned labels which identify them as 'special' and having 'need' (Benson, 2014, p. 50). Benson stated that the idea that a child had a special need was then used to justify their separation and segregation from their non-disabled peers. This separation and segregation from their peers perpetuated their exclusion and marginalisation from mainstream society (Armstrong and Barton, 2007; Barnes and Mercer, 2010). Inclusive education is based on the idea that children are entitled to an education that is equitable to that of their non-disabled peers (Corbett and Slee, 2000). Current research acknowledges that the pupils have the same rights as their mainstream peers to high-quality inclusive education, but current educational practice in some areas of the country believes that some educational needs are best met by the provision of special school education possibly not in pupils' home communities. Even so, pupils should retain the right to an education on a par with their mainstream peers. My research sheds light on whether pupils' rights are met and, in cases where they are not receiving a similar education to their peers, highlights the discrepancies.

In this research all the pupils involved had a Statement of SEN in which BESD was the principal need. All the pupils had transferred to the special school at the end of Year 6. The diagnosis of their 'need' took place whilst they were attending primary education under the SEN Code of Practice in place at the time (2001). It had been decided using the Code's criteria that each of the pupils had, 'features of emotional and behavioural difficulties' (and were) 'withdrawn or isolated, disruptive and disturbing, hyperactive and lack(ing) concentration', had 'immature social skills' and /or 'challenging behaviours' (SEN Code of Practice, 2001, p. 87).

The schools would have undertaken a thorough record keeping process before requesting statutory assessment, a process which would have involved school, parents/carers, LEA and an educational psychologist. This process, albeit with more



interested parties, is not dissimilar to that found in both the social and medical models of disability.

#### **1.4. Special Educational Needs within Schools**

The 1981 Education Act set out the framework for inclusive education. The Act formally recognised the concept of SEN and endorsed the principle of all children being educated in mainstream schools. It also introduced the statutory multi-disciplinary assessment of pupils experiencing difficulties within their education. In addition, it outlined the procedures to be undertaken by LEAs, professionals and teachers. In a radical review of SEN, Mary Warnock (2005) called for a substantial reconstruction of the current educational framework. This she argued was necessary to address the conflict which arose from attempting to treat all learners the same and at the same time 'responding to the needs arising from their individual difference' (Warnock, 2005, p. 13).

The Salamanca Statement on Inclusive Education (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 1994) is seen by many as the cornerstone of inclusive education. Ainscow and Cesar (2006) described it as arguably the most important and significant international document that had ever appeared within special education. This document outlines principles, policy and practices in SEN and reaffirms the right and commitment of education for all in schools which have an inclusive orientation. Since the Salamanca Statement, much has been written on the concept of inclusive education proposing a range of views from all schools becoming fully inclusive to the view that some pupils will always need to be educated in special settings.

This ongoing debate between inclusive schools and special school provision, in the context of individuals, has become known as the dilemma of difference. The term the dilemma of difference has often been used to describe the quandary that young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and their families face as they go through school. The dilemma is whether a young person should receive a diagnosis or label so that they can benefit from a particular support or

resource, or whether all pupils should be treated the same so that no one feels 'different' (Hoskin, 2016).

Changes in policy about inclusion has put a spotlight on the nature of SEN and has highlighted that pupils with SEN are not a simple group of pupils who can be divided up into categories using easily identifiable characteristics (physically disabled, learning difficulties etc). Historically this list of categories of 'disability' had formed the basis of the provision of special education, but there has been a move towards a more nuanced identification of SEN. The definition of SEN used by Department of Education, Department of Health (2015) is as follows: 'a child or young person has SEN if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her' (p. 15).

This definition is the same as that which was used within the Education Act (1996) but, although the definition remains the same, it has been supplemented by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001) and more recently by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 – 25 years (2015). Prior to the 2015 Code of Practice and under the Education Act 1996, there was a responsibility for LEAs to 'determine the special education provision which the child's learning difficulty calls for and to maintain a statement of his or her special educational need' (Education Act 1996, section 324 (1)).

In the last thirty years there have been substantial developments in the provision of education for children with disabilities and SEN (Benson, 2014), and there have also been parallel theoretical debates about the aims, practice and location of special education (Terzi, 2010; Dyson and Millward, 2000; Armstrong and Barton, 2007). Hegarty (2001) has described these developments as moving from a segregational paradigm through integration to inclusion.

#### **1.4.1. Statement of Special Educational Needs /Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP)**

A statement of Special Educational Needs is a legal document based on the information obtained in the course of a statutory assessment. It describes the needs of the child, how those needs are to be met and how provision is to be delivered. It is a legal document that is a way of funding children with SEN in a mainstream school in order to help them access the curriculum. Statements were first introduced in the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (2001). The Statement of Educational Need has been a feature of special needs education, and data from 2014 suggests that the number of pupils with statements in England was 2.8% of the school population. There were 1033 special schools at that time (DfE, 2014). In 2014 there were 8,331,385 pupils in English schools of which 233,279 had a statement of SEN. However, the majority of pupils with SEN are not educated in a special school but within special school provision. Behavioural issues form one of the larger groups of pupils with SEN.

The Statement outlines the additional resources that a pupil with SEN is entitled to, usually in the form of personal support within the classroom. This is an important legal right since the support must be provided for the child no matter which mainstream school they attend, and it is transferable. Interestingly, a child receiving individual support in a mainstream school on transfer to a special school loses this individual designated support as the smaller class sizes and the higher staffing ratios is deemed equivalent to the individual support (SEN Code of Practice (2001).

In 2014 a change in legislation brought in the Children and Families Act which had the effect of changing the role of SEN to incorporate aspects of mental health. The new legislation had the effect of providing a new approach to managing SEN with the introduction of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP). EHCPs are educational plans where health and social care needs are included in as far as they relate to SEN (Norwich and Eaton, 2014).

Interestingly the term BESD was no longer used but replaced by the term Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH). This research was conducted during the roll out period for EHCP; the policy of the relevant LEA for this research was that Statements would be replaced by EHCPs as they came up for renewal. All the pupils involved in my study had Statements labelling them with BESD; I have therefore used the term BESD through this thesis. Under the new legislation behaviour difficulties is no longer a designated SEN category in itself, rather behavioural difficulties come under the category of mental health. This may be way of reducing the numbers of pupils identified as having a SEN, a policy endorsed by OfSTED (2010). However, the new category SEMH is similar to the previous BESD one in that there is still not a clear process for specifying the thresholds for the identification of behavioural difficulties/mental health difficulties.

#### **1.4.2. Pupil Labelling**

Connors and Stalker (2007) indicated that the labelling of children with SEN by teachers and peers had led to an over-emphasis of difference between children, contributing to SEN children feeling negative about themselves.

Children with SEN may experience negativity and social isolation from their peers. Goodwin and Watkinson (2000) found that children described feelings of rejection, neglect and indeed bullying. This is a view supported by Connors and Stalker (2007) who stated that some children with SEN would describe what happened to them as 'discrimination due to curiosity' leading to pupils with SEN feeling embarrassed.

The labelling of children with SEN has been a subject of some controversy. One of the arguments against labelling is that it pathologizes the child rather than considering the wider social contexts within which the difficulty exists. It has been argued that attaching a label to a child often leads to stigmatisation; this is apparent within the medical model of disability where such terms as 'maladjusted' has had profound effects on some individuals (Sinason, 1992).

Research on the labelling of children with SEN has revealed that there might be a social stigma felt by the labelled child (Salmon, 2013). Salmon highlighted that

children with SEN stick together as a means of coping with the social exclusion that follows stigmatization. O'Brien (2000) found that the child's perception of being stigmatised through having the label SEN could lead to low self-esteem and self-exclusion. McKeever and Miller (2004) noted that wider society did not value learners who have the label SEN.

However, substantial amount of research has indicated that on the positive side the label of SEN has been described as the 'admission ticket' to SEN provision (Zuriff, 1996, p. 403).

The research of Broomhead (2013) explored the concept of 'blame' in the context of home/school relationships and SEN labels. There is much evidence that parents, especially mothers, are blamed for their children's BESD with frequent references made to ineffective parenting or lack of discipline. Broomhead (2013) noted that several authors had suggested that such pupils should be viewed as a vulnerable group due to their home circumstances (Francis, 2012; Peters, 2011; Moses, 2010). Broomhead (p. 15) also noted that Ellis and Tod (2012) argued that the blame culture had increased since the SEN Code of Practice (2015) in which the BESD category was removed. Parents felt blamed by professionals (Francis, 2012; Peters, 2011). Teachers attached labels to children presenting with challenging behaviour and made assumptions as to the children's future behaviour based on this opinion (O'Connor, Hodkinson, Burton, and Torstensson, 2011). O'Connor, Hodkinson, Burton, and Torstensson (2011) stated that their research suggested that teacher assumptions contributed to the development of BESD, which in turn was a factor in pupils becoming disengaged from schooling.

It has been suggested that when a child received the label of BESD this in some way might reduce the blame felt by their parent in that the diagnosis shifted the blame towards an 'uncontrollable' biological condition (Ryan and Runswick-Cole, 2008; Blum, 2007). Further research has highlighted however that, far from reducing guilt, many parents of children labelled BESD felt guilt long after the diagnosis (Broomhead, 2013).

Children with SEN have said that they compare their own ability to that of their peers and if they perceive that their own ability is not as good as their peers, they report feelings of embarrassment and a lack of self-confidence. These feelings of self-doubt often manifest themselves in poor behaviour resulting at times in lesson exclusion and could lead to what has been termed as 'smoke-screening' (Ridgers, Fazey and Fairclough, 2007). Pupils perceive that the task is difficult or that they lack the skills to perform, so getting themselves excluded from lessons becomes a way they can manage these difficulties.

Pupils who attend a special school and have the label BESD would appear to face a double stigma: that of the label BESD and the added stigma of being seen by their peers to be different by attending a school not in the neighbourhood. In rural settings, the likelihood of having to use special school transport also highlights difference.

In this research the pupils reported that they felt the stigma of attending a special school. This was evidenced by the pupils reporting that they would not want their peers in their own community to know that they attended a special school. There were also issues around being seen to be using special transport (e.g. special mini cabs) to get them to school.

### **1.5. Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD)**

BESD is an umbrella term to describe a range of emotional and behavioural difficulties experienced by many children and young people. They may be withdrawn or isolated, disruptive and disturbing, hyperactive and lacking concentration. They may have immature social skills or challenging behaviours. These difficulties are drawn from the main SEN categories of communication and interaction, cognition and learning, and sensory and/or physical needs. BESD is also known as Social, Educational, and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) or Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (EBD). Government figures suggest that around 150,000 children in mainstream and special schools are labelled as having BESD. This number of children accounts for 26.7% of all those identified with SEN, with 19.3% being educated at the secondary phase. In special schools the numbers attending is

8.8% of all pupils labelled SEN - about 110,000 pupils (National Statistics - SEN in England January 2017). Within special schools 12.5% of pupils have BESD as their primary need on their Statement of SEN with 14.8% having Moderate Learning Difficulty (MLD) as their primary need. It needs to be noted that on pupils' Statements of SEN there is a large overlap between pupils with MLD and BESD. The numbers involved within the special school population would therefore range from at least 13,750 to 41,000 pupils. Whilst it is noted that most pupils with BESD are educated in mainstream schools, pupils labelled BESD attending special schools are historically under-researched. This lack of research provides one of the main reasons for this study.

BESD as a concept has evolved over time and can be traced back to the idea, used in the medical model of disability, in which the child was seen to be 'maladjusted' (Education Act, 1944). This classification has now developed from a strict medical model. Evans et al. (2003) stated that, when considering a definition of BESD, it was important to consider the role societal, family and school environments played in creating and ameliorating young people's social, emotional and behavioural problems. This view was endorsed by O'Connor, Hodkinson, Burton, and Torstensson (2011).

The challenges within the literature are reported to be the choices which governments, LEAs and schools face in identifying and providing interventions to provide educational facilities which will allow all SEN pupils access to education. The literature reports that these challenges revolve around how best to educate these pupils and what happens when/if they become disengaged from mainstream educational provision (O'Connor et al., 2011).

This research was conducted with pupils labelled BESD within a special school and this has implications on the behaviours that were noted. The special school was rural, small and had in the Year 11 age group a high proportion of pupils with the label BESD. Whilst the potential problems of teaching pupils with the label BESD may be similar in both special and mainstream schools, special schools with their larger proportion of BESD-labelled pupils may experience different problems. This

research will provide an insight into the problems faced by pupils with the label BESD in their PE lessons. It is appropriate at this time to examine the challenges that this group of pupils may present.

#### **1.5.1. Challenges posed by pupils with the label BESD.**

The pupils in this study all had the label BESD and they acknowledged that they had experienced behavioural issues resulting in the BESD label before they came to the special school.

Children identified with the label BESD often present a challenge in schools and there is evidence that mainstream schools are becoming reluctant to admit pupils with BESD (Farrell and Polat, 2003, p. 272-292). There is also some evidence that children with the label BESD are more 'likely to be excluded from school', (Jull, 2008, p. 13-18) or go 'missing' from mainstream education (Visser, Daniels and MacNab, 2005, p. 43-54).

A review of BESD literature noted challenges facing the government and education providers in identifying and providing interventions for pupils with BESD (OfSTED, 1999). The report found the challenges posed by pupils labelled BESD are grouped around: admission to and exclusion from mainstream schools; perceptions of teachers towards these children; parental perceptions and classroom behaviour. There has been much debate relating to what constitutes BESD and how and where pupils with the label BESD should be educated (Cole and Visser, 1999; O'Connor, Hodgkinson, Burton and Torstensson, 2011. Cooper (2006) pointed to the increasing numbers of pupils identified with the label BESD who were identified as being at risk of becoming excluded from education.

Several researchers have noted the trend for schools to be reluctant to admit pupils with BESD due to their perceived anti-social or disruptive behaviour (Farrell and Polat, 2003). Anti-social and/or disruptive behaviours have been described by Ogden (2001) as possibly being a demonstration of survival skills, a result of the child feeling threatened. Maag (2004) observed that within the classroom setting some BESD-labelled children were unable to modify their behaviour to suit the



occasion. In addition, Jull (2008) found that children labelled with BESD may 'exhibit anti-social and disruptive behaviours and this may well be a function of encountering unfamiliar socio-cultural constructs that do not fit in their own conception of normalcy' (p. 13-18).

It has been noted by Jull (2008) that pupils labelled with BESD are not 'randomly' disruptive and that some of the outbursts might be predictable e.g. at the start or near the end of the school day or during transition between lessons. Therefore, the identification of these triggers and making appropriate changes should be the school's first response to addressing the issue. Jull advised that teachers needed to be aware that modifications to the classroom situation might also be a way to promote appropriate behaviour patterns. Teaching pupils with challenging behaviour is, of course, demanding as it requires teachers to not only provide appropriate lessons but also to have the emotional and professional ability to cope with challenging behaviour (Swinson and Knight, 2007). Research suggests that teachers are making an effort to adapt their professional skills so as to better include children labelled with BESD. However, the pressures of government policies regarding attainment have resulted in pupils labelled BESD being identified as a possible cause of classroom disruption and exclusion is often seen as the only solution (Jull, 2008). The challenge is to overcome problems by means that are within the grasp of schools and which do not exclude pupils.

Van Acker and Talbott (2000) reported that teachers were seven times more likely to respond negatively to pupils who had been identified by teachers as disruptive; SEN pupils encountered disapproving statements from their teachers in the ratio 15:1. Hodgkinson (2009) raised a concern as to whether lack of training has impacted on teachers' perceptions of BESD, which in turn could lead to pupils and their parents experiencing frustration and a lack of trust in teaching personnel.

Swinson and Knight (2007) pointed out the difficulties experienced by teachers of pupils with the label BESD who had to both deliver lessons and have the emotional energy needed to deal with disruptive behaviour. Burton, Bartlett and Anderson de Cuevas (2009) noted that teachers did not feel able to teach and support pupils

with the label of BESD and at the same time raise pupils' level of attainment to suit the expectations of legislation.

Sheppard (2009) found, as well as the teachers feeling pressured, that there were concerns by parents about teachers' perceptions of BESD. These parental views focused around teacher expectations. Sheppard also found that the perceptions of the parents themselves may contribute to pupil BESD (Sheppard, 2009).

Counterview evidence suggested that parental involvement in schooling might provide a positive influence on both pupil behaviour and achievement (Harris and Goodall, 2008). The challenges of educating pupils labelled BESD in mainstream schools include poor pupil behaviour, inadequate teaching practices, insufficient resources and poorly thought-out management strategies; Trotman, Tucker, and Martyn (2015) maintain the need for special schools.

#### **1.6. Special School.**

Special Education in England has been subject of many developments over the past 25 years. Two major developments are the identification of special educational needs and the emergence of inclusive education. There seems to be a mismatch between these two developments which is part of the inclusive education/need for special schools debate. Since the 1990s, the movement towards increasing provision for children with special educational needs in mainstream schools has been promoted in terms of inclusion rather than integration. Inclusion is the process of educating children in such a way so that it benefits all students and gives all pupils the right to participation. Hence, it focuses not only on students with special needs but all pupils. This is why the inclusive approach is called an 'education for all' (Norwich, 2008). Integration is the process by which students with SEN are absorbed into the mainstream education. Therefore, in this approach to education, the emphasis is on SEN pupils fitting into mainstream education. Internationally, segregated special schools have been the main setting in which young people with disabilities have been educated (Barton and Armstrong, 2008; Farrell, 2010). Despite the inclusion debate of the last few years, special schools continue to exist with the number of pupils attending them increasing. Indeed,

authors such as Norwich and Gray (2007) have argued that special schools should form part of an inclusive system working alongside 'flexible interacting continuity of provision and linked more closely to the mainstream sector' (Shaw, 2017, p. 295).

Others have perceived the mainstream versus special school debate as a debate along a continuum, with Baker (2007) proposing that special schools and inclusion should be two sides of the same coin and that the role of the special school was to provide for pupils with severe and complex needs.

However, 'Support and Aspiration: a new approach to special educational needs and disability Green Paper' (DfE, 2011) aimed to reverse the bias towards inclusive education. This Green Paper proposed that 'no one type of school placement (such as full inclusion, special schools or specialist units in a mainstream setting) is the most effective in meeting children's SEN' (DfE, 2011, p. 20). This was an attempt by the Coalition Government to put forward a 'reasonable and sensible ' (Runswick-Cole, 2011, p. 112) solution to what others had seen as the problem of inclusion (Warnock, 2005). Runswick-Cole questioned the original assumption that there had indeed been a 'bias towards inclusion'. She makes the point that whilst the UK Government is a signatory of international commitments to inclusion at a national level, there has been a failure on the part of the successive governments to:

cement the link between the politics of special education and the politics of disability and to focus on the school cultures and practices which exclude poor, non-white and disabled children (Runswick-Cole, 2011, p. 117).

In reply to the DfE (2012) Green Paper above the Alliance for Inclusive Education (ALLFIE, 2012) declared that the government was out-of-step with disabled people, their families and education professionals and concluded that building the capacity of mainstream schools was the only way to create aspiration for disabled people (Shaw, 2017). Despite this impassioned plea, the government's school census data (2015 - 2016) revealed that there had been an increase to 42.9% in special school attendance of pupils with an EHCP. According to DfE 2011 SEN Green Paper, as of January 2010, the percentage of children identified with SEN has remained relatively stable at 21% with the percentage of pupils having a statement of SEN

ranging from 0.8% to 3.9% across all 153 LEAs. Clearly not all statemented children are being educated in mainstream provision, the argument for full inclusion has not been met and discussions about the best place for pupils with SEN to learn, how they are best identified and what the curriculum should be are still open to debate (Norwich, 2007). In a wide-ranging review of the literature regarding inclusion and special schools, Shaw (2017) reported that there was an ongoing role for the special school in the form of a continuum of provision between mainstream schools and special schools to meet the needs of the children (Norwich, 2007, 2014). This factor of meeting the needs of pupils is of importance if the pupils are to receive their education entitlement.

#### **1.6.1. The Special School Curriculum.**

Access by a pupil with SEN to the full range of curricula as experienced in mainstream education is an ongoing concern amongst special school professionals and, whilst the argument as to the relative merits of inclusive mainstream schools versus special schools persists, there is a need to review the access to the curriculum. In a hard-hitting document Norwich (2014) stated that SEN and Disability policy and practice are caught up in political and economic dynamics and he further argued that schools are under pressure to raise standards which he believed left little room for pupils with SEN. One negative impact of the government's raising standards policy has been the implementation of strategies to monitor pupil progress through the publication of school league tables and the introduction of a school inspection regime. Galton and MacBeath (2015) believe that any such inspection should consider the abilities of schools to innovate in the best interests of pupils with SEN. In addition, the standards debate has led to parents being encouraged to opt for special education on the advice of mainstream headteachers who are afraid of the impact of pupils with SEN on OFSTED attainment measures (Galton and MacBeath, 2015). Shaw (2017) contended that the rise in the number of pupils attending special schools (see above) is a direct result of an educational policy of assessing school effectiveness based on pupil achievement (Norwich, 2014; Glazzard, 2014; Galton and MacBeath, 2015) and/or

on the superior nature of the special school in being able to meet the individual needs of pupils.

### **1.6.2. Curricular Concerns**

Burton et al. (2009) highlighted the concern that the pressure on LEAs and school leaders to improve academic achievement might overshadow attempts to address educational and other developmental needs of disadvantaged pupils, including those with BESD. They further conclude that:

whilst the narrowness of the performance agenda is pursued to the detriment of broader educational objectives, disadvantaged groups such as children with BESD will continue to be let down by the English educational system and will remain at the margins of education and, inevitably, society (p. 154).

The curriculum content available in special schools has been the subject of some debate with Feiler (2013) noting that qualifications matter to the special school pupil. Having a SEN does not justify the extent to which the pupils and the staff from the special school have been overlooked in debates about curriculum development, and the lack of research in this area (Feiler, 2013, p. 152). There was strong support from the pupils involved in the research that there should be an emphasis on practical content within lessons. A view also expressed by Wolf (2011) who argued for more practical and vocational skills to be included in 14 - 19 education. Criticism of the Wolf research epitomised the debate on the special school curriculum: the need to obtain examination success in order to make progress to the next stage of education versus the possibility that an education system in which low-attaining pupils were offered practical skills courses might limit the young people's aspirations for the future at an early stage (Fuller and Unwin, 2011). It has been noted that, regardless of the aspirations of the pupils, the post-school options for pupils who attend special school are limited. In a study in Norway, Myklebust and Batevikb (2009) found that attending a special school made pupils significantly less likely to find jobs and become economically independent. This situation was further highlighted by Elson (2011) who found that for pupils with severe or profound learning difficulties college courses were limited or not

available. Lundy, Byrne and Mckeown, (2012) found that for this type of pupil that there was very little choice other than staying on at school post-16.

Schools offer both children and adults in the school opportunities to develop a range of different identities and to 'succeed' in many ways, to become a myriad of different kinds of people, to recognize their interdependence in an increasingly complex world (Manchester and Bragg, 2013). A review of statements about school ethos across a small sample (not representative) of special school websites revealed interesting aspirations. There was an identification of the need to provide an educational experience to enable pupils to reach their potential regardless of any identified difficulty. Further, schools wanted to offer a place of sanctuary away from the pressures of the outside world; to provide functional life skills courses to help pupils become independent, employable and empowered to make positive choices about their lives; to enable pupils to have a voice which supports their needs and enables them to engage safely in a wider society; to support the social, emotional needs of the pupils to help them to become self-managing, self-aware and self-confident individuals. Clearly schools felt the need to develop the whole child to reach their potential across as wide a range of fields as possible.

Feiler (2013) interviewed 14-19-year-olds attending three special schools and a secure unit and was primarily concerned with the pupils' learning and achievement. All the pupils in the research had speech and language difficulties, ASD, physical disabilities and/or learning disabilities. Feiler (2013) noted that pupils placed value on academic and vocational achievement, with obtaining good grades and qualifications as being of importance. They also noted that the pupils placed importance on friendship with peers within the school justifying this by saying that journeys to school might lead to exclusion from neighbourhood peer groups. One of the significant findings of the Feiler research was that the pupils focused more on friendships within their school and tended not to mention peer relations outside school. These findings have been replicated in other research notably Lewis et al. (2007) who suggested that many pupils attending special schools had to endure

long journeys to school and this may have resulted in exclusion from neighbourhood peer groups (Lewis et al., 2005).

Pupils also placed value on small class size and the help provided by the school staff. They felt being in small classes enhanced their learning experience (Feiler, 2013, p. 146). In conclusion, Feiler (2013) expressed the view that the fact that pupils had learning difficulties should not mean that their views were not important and should be considered. Some of these general findings are not significantly different from those found in pupils with SEN attending mainstream provision (Sellman, 2009) in that the pupils reported that they valued their education and the qualifications they were working towards. The pupils were generally positive about their schooling and the support they received from the school. They did, however, identify that the barriers to learning were the nature of their SEN in that they said that they did not understand concepts quickly and needed more time to prevent being left behind.

The curriculum of the special school is not just about the academic side; there is also an important aspect which is prized by pupils and parents/carers alike, that of personal and social benefits. Lewis et al. (2007) made the point that pupils felt it was important to be given opportunities to act independently and to make choices as these were crucial to the process of such young people feeling empowered and being able to determine the direction of their lives (Lewis et al., 2007, p. 153). In the Feiler study these opportunities were provided for the pupils by visits to other education centres with the pupils reported feeling more 'grown up' when visiting nearby colleges (Feiler, 2013, p. 153).

There are concerns about the conflict between the needs of the academic curriculum and the positive benefits of a curriculum with more practical input. Which of these would provide the best access to adult life has been a rich topic in research, with the need for academic success being opposed by the need for an appropriate curriculum to suit the child. It was felt in some literature that the provision of a less academic curriculum in the special school could lead to the lessening of life chances after school especially for pupils with severe, profound or

behavioural difficulties. This argument illuminates the dilemma faced by the special school; that of providing an appropriate academic education whilst at the same time providing an education which suits the individual needs of the pupils.

### **1.6.3. The National Curriculum in Special Schools**

When the NC was introduced, it was on the basis that all children with SEN would have access to the same curriculum as other children. This was seen by some as a step forward. Hornby (2015) noted, for example that 'visually impaired pupils were now allowed to study science', but for most pupils with SEN in the form of learning difficulties it was a backward step (Terzi, 2010). Having the NC as the curriculum for the whole of their education does not allow children with moderate or profound learning difficulties to focus on opportunities which would better suit their differing needs. It might also lead to problems with pupils keeping pace which could lead to pupils becoming disaffected with school (Hornby, 2015). The insistence that a child must follow a set curriculum path on which they are clearly failing directly contributes to the development of emotional and/or behavioural difficulties, or exacerbates existing problems and could lead to dissatisfaction, disruptive and ultimate exclusion from the school. Farrell (2010) argued that meeting pupils' needs is more important to pupils with SEN than following a prescribed curriculum. Access to a broad NC which meets pupils' needs is difficult to achieve in practice, especially in special schools, since they tend to be small, have fewer resources, smaller numbers of specialist teachers and lack specialist teaching areas.

A further factor in the development of the special school has been the introduction of the assessment agenda with pupils attending a special school expected to make similar progress to their mainstream peers. There is inconclusive evidence that the advantages of the special school of providing small classes taught by teachers with appropriate experience produces comparable results to mainstream education. In the often-small size special school there is a potential lack of appropriate specialist facilities and teachers.

### **1.6.4. Schools for Pupils Labelled BESD**



Special schools are not homogenous. Within this sector of education schools cater for diverse groupings of pupils defined by their needs. Special schools for pupils labelled BESD is one kind of special education provision. Children with the label BESD are more likely to be placed in special schools from an early age although there is a notable further transfer around the time of transfer to secondary education. In a research project in the Netherlands, 235 children in special schools were researched in terms of emotional, behavioural, environmental and academic variables (Stoutjesdijk, Scholte, and Swaab, 2012). The research concluded that children coping with EBD, academic problems and disturbances in relationships with their parents/carers did not generally thrive in an inclusive setting. They further reported that inclusive education cannot be achieved for some children with EBD in mainstream schools and that they thought there was a continuing need for special schools.

A negative view of such a school is provided by Youdell (2010) in a paper describing special schools for BESD-labelled pupils as 'sites for containment and correction' and 'repositories for bodies that exceed the normative requirements of schooling' (p. 315). He described special schools as a place where:

The designated and diagnosed are corralled, monitored and surveilled, where they are made again and again as the failed, the out of control, the aberrant, the pathological. Where subject-hood is tenuous and where recognisability rests on diagnoses of disorders and difficulties (Youdall, 2010, p. 314).

This poses the question of whether all special schools for pupils labelled BESD are at the 'margins of education' (Youdall, 2010, p. 315). It is true to say that despite declared efforts by the UK government to improve the educational experience of disadvantaged and vulnerable young people, including those with BESD, there is a lack of clarity in government policy. This results in continued dilemmas and inconsistencies in provision, practice and attitudes for this historically under-served population (Burton et al., 2009). Professionals highlight confused and contradictory messages for the treatment of and priority afforded to young people with BESD within the education system.

According to Ainscow et al. (2007), although the government is simultaneously pursuing the goals of excellence and equity in education, the pursuit of equity is jeopardised by having been superimposed on policies of choice and competition which appear to have reinforced inequity and social division. The findings of the Burton et al. (2009) study heighten a concern that the pressure on LEAs and school leaders to affect academic achievement may overshadow attempts to address the educational and other developmental needs of disadvantaged pupils, including those with BESD. As a result, there was widespread underachievement of pupils with BESD; a finding supported by Hallam et al. (2005). Burton et al. (2009) also found low professional expectations of young people reflected in the curriculum offer of mainly vocational courses. There is little research evidence on the ways that special schools with large proportions of pupils labelled BESD apply their curriculum offer. What is clear is that the child who is to be educated within a special school has all the rights and entitlements as a child in mainstream education in addition to additional benefits as outlined in the SEN/EHCP.

## **Summary**

In this chapter I have presented and discussed the topics of special education and special schools. I began with a brief description of the development of special education and the tension which exists between the call for schools to be inclusive and the policy that children should be educated in environments suited to their individual needs. This led to an examination of the models of disability: psycho-medical, social, affirmative and rights-based.

I went on to consider in more detail the development of SEN in schools and the progressions which have been made in SEN up till the publication of the 'SEN and Disability Code of Practice: 0 -25 years' (2015). Some of the 2015 changes impacted on this research notably the change from a 'statement of educational need' to an EHCP. In this latter plan, the category of pupil behaviour has been largely subsumed within the category of mental health. This was not merely a change in terminology but possibly signalled how ex-BESD pupils will be categorised in schools in the future.

As this research was conducted with pupils who all had 'statements', it was appropriate to examine issues related to 'pupil labels' and the effects that these labels potentially have on the SEN pupils concerned. It is also useful to examine the term BESD and then to consider the challenges posed by BESD pupils within schools.

Although it is a contested issue in education, special schools continue to exist; this research was conducted in a special school and the issues surrounding special schools needed to be discussed. A further concern is the curriculum offer of special schools. Special school pupils have the same rights to the NC as their mainstream peers, but there is an argument that the special school curriculum should be more suited to individual pupil's needs. The NC has added to this dilemma with its emphasis on progress and attainment with all pupils following a similar curriculum.

For the purpose of this research it was appropriate to discuss research about pupils with BESD attending a special school. After having examined and considered special education and special schools together with an examination of pupils with BESD, I now move on to consider the research literature regarding PE.

## **Chapter 2. Physical Education**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Having discussed SEN, special schools and pupils with the label BESD, I will now move on to a discussion of PE in schools.

PE developed from two traditions: organised games and competitive sport as seen in 19<sup>th</sup> century private boarding schools, and physical training associated initially with military drill. PE then moved onto Swedish therapeutic gymnastics in the Ling tradition in state elementary schools from 1871 onwards (Donovan, Jones and Hardman, 2006). An amendment to the Elementary Education Act (1870), implemented the inclusion of 'drill' in the PE curriculum. These drill sessions reflected the methods used by the Army, and in the last thirty years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century part-time ex-army personnel taught much of drill syllabus in schools. In 1904 there was a move away from 'military drill' with the publication of the 'Syllabus of Physical Exercises' which contained elements of the Swedish system. The use of the Swedish system developed and by 1909 it had become a core feature in the Board of Education Syllabus for Physical Training. Interestingly at this stage it was called Physical Training and it would be some time before the term PE emerged. The 1902 Education (Balfour) Act, which was responsible for the introduction of nationwide state secondary education, also facilitated the reintroduction of the private school tradition of competitive games in the curriculum. The governmental Board of Education Supplementary Syllabus Handbook for 1927 and the 1933 Syllabus of Physical Training saw the decline in support for the Swedish system to a more 'English' system which combined imported systems with English developments and aimed at optimum development of the individual through a broad-based curriculum. It was the McNair report (1942) which brought about a change: 'this subject . . . is a fundamental and integral part of the general education' for which 'the term Physical Education is preferable to P.T.' (Donovan, Jones and Hardman, 2006, p. 18).

The next notable milestone in the development of PE came with the NC which was introduced by the Education Reform Act (1988). The introduction of the NCPE for England and Wales at this time did not appear without some ferocious debate with authors such as Alderson and Crutchley (1990) articulating a long-standing debate which asked what it was that children should know of, be able to do and appreciate about (the) activities in which they participate?’ (p. 38). They went on to report that there ‘appears to be no professional consensus regarding what being “physically educated” really means, nor how that state is achieved’ (Alderson and Crutchley, 1990 p. 38-40). This debate amongst PE professionals continued to be keenly contested and may have been a factor in the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA, 2005, p. 1) posed question: ‘What is the purpose of PE in the school curriculum?’ more than 10 years after the NCPE was introduced in England and Wales. Over the last 30 years PE professionals have sought to justify the educational worth of the subject by stressing the contribution it can make to other ‘supposedly intellectual dimensions of education’ (Green, 2008, p. 10). The discussion continues with calls being made for NCPE to be included as a core subject in the NC:

Physical education should be a core subject within the National Curriculum because it is the only subject whose primary focus is on the body and, in this respect, it uniquely addresses the physical development aim of the curriculum and it also makes a significant contribution to the spiritual, moral and cultural development of pupils (Harris, 2018, p. 1).

This ambition stems from the desire amongst PE academics to elevate the subject within the curriculum noting both the views above and also the contribution claimed for PE for the development of a healthy lifestyle. It is further claimed that making PE a core subject in the NC would stimulate significant health and educational attainment benefits, lead to the improved physical, mental and personal wellbeing of children, develop essential life skills and contribute to whole-school improvement (Harris, 2018). These are ambitious aims and the claims of potential benefits need to be explored in the light of research evidence.

PE has been sub-divided into the three areas: physical education, physical activity and school sport. A definition provided by the Association for PE (AfPE) clearly outlines this position:

Physical Education is the planned, progressive learning that takes place in school curriculum timetabled time and which is delivered to all pupils. This involves both 'learning to move' (i.e. becoming more physically competent) and 'moving to learn' (e.g. learning through movement, a range of skills and understandings beyond physical activity, such as co-operating with others). The context for the learning is physical activity, with children experiencing a broad range of activities, including sport and dance.

Physical activity is a broad term referring to all bodily movement that uses energy. It includes all forms of physical education, sports and dance activities.

School sport is the structured learning that takes place beyond the curriculum (i.e. in the extended curriculum) within school settings; this is sometimes referred to as out-of-school-hours learning. Again, the context for the learning is physical activity (AfPE, 2015).

For the purpose of this research physical education and physical activity are taken as being symbiotic since one cannot exist without the other and any discussion of the topic of PE in schools necessarily includes both PE and physical activity.

There can be little doubt that PE professionals believe in the benefits of taking part in PE and that they wish all pupils within school to experience the positive benefits of taking part in activities which are motivating, fun, enjoyable and worthwhile. If these are the achievement goals of physical education lessons, what is difficult to explain is the slow decline in participation rates as pupils get older plus the falling participation rates of PE-related activities post-school.

This chapter will examine the claims made for the beneficial aspects of being involved in PE in schools both in general and as it applies to the pupils within this research i.e. those being taught in a special school. The first part of the chapter will explore the benefits claimed for PE, followed by a discussion of some reported negative aspects of PE. The final part of the chapter will focus on the specific area of PE for pupils with SEN and those with the label BESD.

## **2.2. Benefits claimed for PE lessons**

Physical education as a subject within the school curriculum is often cited as being the source of many positive developmental characteristics (Medcalf, 2011). It is argued that PE can facilitate the development of multiple personal, physical and social qualities (Medcalf, 2010). To facilitate the development of these qualities, there needs to be positive teaching and learning environments and appropriate lesson content.

There are several multiple discourses within which it is claimed the subject develops physical skills, team building, character development, responsibility, creativity and imagination. As such PE is seen as having value (Kay, 1998). It has been claimed that PE can contribute to the overall education process, a claim not made by any other subject (Medcalf, 2010), but this point of view is not universally accepted. Penney and Chandler (2000) made the point that if PE continues to make such claims it risks the core integrity of the subject; they believed that before PE makes its various claims of benefits it should define more clearly what its primary purpose is. This discussion led Elder (2008) to express the view that PE should be a means of educating all through the PE domain. The distinctive features that PE can bring to the learning process has led many to believe that it can play an important role in achieving broader educational objectives than the traditional skills-based concept of the subject.

In a research project which took evidence from 50 countries, Bailey (2006) undertook a meta-analysis of statements of the aims of PE, standards and national curricula. The findings of this study suggest that the outcomes of PE could be understood in terms of children's development in five domains: physical, lifestyle, affective, social and cognitive. Bailey (2006) noted that the benefits ascribed to PE are by no means automatic, only that PE had the potential to contribute to overall education within the described areas. The work of Bailey (2006) was further developed by Bailey, Armour, Kirk, Jess, Pickup, Sandford and the British Education Research Association (BERA) Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy Special Interest Group (2008) who concluded that, although further research needed to take place

about some of the benefits of PE, 'there was a prevailing belief that engagement in PE and school sport is, somehow, a good thing' (Bailey et al., 2008, p. 15).

The contribution that PE is capable of making to the overall school curriculum has been a matter of discussion within PE research, with authors concluding that the long-term aim is the encouragement of continued participation in lifelong activities. There is also an appreciation of a wide variety of holistic and interdisciplinary benefits (Kay, 2003). Doll-Tepper (2005) argued that far from being a short-lived part of the curriculum, PE could make a lifelong contribution to learning and education. Houlihan and Green (2006) described how PE could play an important role in whole school improvement, community development and the fostering of positive behavioural and attitudinal change amongst school pupils.

The discussion has continued with Evans and Davies (2010) considering various assumptions that underpin the alleged capacity for PE 'to affect the dispositional resources, motivation, attitudes, willingness, desire - all fundamental cultural capitals of pupils for performance or participation in sport in and out of school' (Evans and Davies, 2010, p. 768).

A briefing document prepared by Public Health England, the Youth Sport Trust and the Association of Colleges Sport made some interesting claims for the benefits of physical activity which have implications for the teaching of PE in schools. The document contained references to research findings suggesting that physical activity enhanced cardio-metabolic health, musculoskeletal health/muscular strength, bone health and cardio-vascular fitness. In addition, physical activity could enhance mental wellbeing including the promotion of positive self-esteem and the lowering of levels of anxiety and stress (see below). Claims were also made that there is an emerging association between physical activity and attainment (see below). It further reaffirmed the NCPE (2013) aims to inspire all pupils to succeed and excel in competitive sport and other physically demanding activities, and to be involved in a range of activities that developed personal fitness and promoted a healthy active lifestyle. In addition, and as a means of attaining these high ideals, it proposed increasing the amount of time spent being physically active during PE. It is



interesting to note that this is a return to 'physical' 'organised' PE and overturned the PE philosophy of the 1980s when PE teachers had control over the PE curriculum in their individual schools.

Bailey (2012) pointed out the dangers of the benefits claimed for PE becoming too pervasive with the use of language such as 'society needs to combat obesity' or it needs to 'fight and defeat heart disease' (Bailey, 2012, p. 1053). The use of such language is understood in the light of the perceived deteriorating health of the nation, but do frame the argument for PE as being able to cure the nation's ills.

### **2.2.1. Physical/ Health Benefits**

The link between activity and bodily health in 2019 has reached the point of consensus:

Physical activities are an important feature of healthy development, and inactivity is a risk factor for a range of serious conditions which can develop during childhood, adolescence and adulthood (Bailey, Hillman, Arent and Petitas, 2013, p. 293).

The health of the nation has been a recurrent theme for successive governments, making PE part of a national debate. Governments, acknowledging that PE has a part to play, have produced a number of schemes designed to improve the health of the nation both young and old. The 'Choosing Health Project' (Department of Health [DOH], 2004) is an early example of this. The DOH set out its overarching priorities which included reducing obesity, increasing exercise, a National Healthy Schools Programme and the promotion of the 'National Strategy for PE, School Sport and Club Links' (PESSCL). The NCPE required PE teachers in England and Wales to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of the impact of exercise and health as well as developing pupils' ability to take an active part. In a review of school-based interventions, Doak, Visscher, Renders and Seidell (2006) however cited PE as being only one of several factors that could potentially affect children's health outcomes. Another was, for example, reduced television viewing.

Green (2008) believed that it might be assumed that PE provided an appropriate setting for health promotion through physical activity and exercise in a variety of

ways. He saw PE as the means of pupils engaging in physical activity in school time and, possibly more importantly, that PE can help to prepare children for a lifetime of physical activity by developing appropriate knowledge and skills. However, he also acknowledged that there is still little compelling evidence that physical activity during childhood had a major impact on future health status.

The majority of children attend school and are involved in PE lessons, so schools and especially PE lessons have been considered a suitable context to introduce school-based approaches to improve children's health and, since the whole range of school pupils could potentially be involved, have also been seen as a cost-effective solution to improving the health of the nation (Davidson, 2007). PE lessons may be able to help to bring about a positive effect, but it should also be appreciated that time spent in PE lessons only accounts for some 1% of a child's waking time (Fox, 2004) and that the lessons involved may only involve a limited amount of physical activity. In the UK, a review of primary-aged children found that they were moderately to vigorously active for only 20% of PE lesson time (Waring, Warburton and Coy, 2007). Research conducted by the University of Cambridge found that the World Health Organisation's recommendation that young people aged 5 to 18 should do at least an hour of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day was not being met globally by 8 out of 10 adolescents. The research also found that girls and children from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds were less likely to be physically active. In the UK, funding for such initiatives as covered by the Cambridge study has reached £320m but, whilst this sounds favourable, the Cambridge study noted that robust evidence on the effectiveness of such activities was lacking (Love, Adams and van Sluijs, 2018).

The document 'Childhood Obesity: A Plan for Action' (Gov. UK, 2016) reaffirmed that there is a strong belief that regular physical activity is associated with numerous health benefits for children. In this document the UK Chief Medical Officers' recommended that all children and young people engage in moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity for at least 60 minutes every day. The Chief Medical Officer noted that, although many schools already offered an average of

two hours of PE or other physical activities per week, there was a need to do more to increase children's daily activity levels. They recommended that at least 30 minutes should be delivered in school every day through active break-times, PE, extra-curricular clubs, active lessons or other sport and physical activity events. The remaining 30 minutes should be supported by parents and carers outside of school time. Clearly PE is not able to provide the whole activity goal, as curriculum time on its own is not enough to begin to meet the desired recommendations.

Following on from 'Childhood Obesity: A Plan for Action' the University of Birmingham, the West Midlands Active Lifestyle and Healthy Eating in Schoolchildren (WAVES) undertook a trial funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). This trial aimed to assess the clinical and cost effectiveness of a programme of activities designed to support children aged 6 and 7 to keep their weight at a healthy level by promoting healthy eating and physical activity. The 12-month WAVES study included a daily additional 30-minute school-time physical activity opportunity and a 6-week interactive skill-based programme in conjunction with Aston Villa Football Club. It also included signposting of local family physical activity opportunities through 6 months of regular mail-outs and termly school-led family health cooking skills workshops. Almost 1,500 pupils from 54 primary schools took part in these trials. Measurements including weight, height, percentage body fat, waist circumference, skinfold thickness and blood pressure were taken at the start of the trial. Pupils also wore an activity tracker for 5 days, recorded their dietary intake and took part in quality-of-life assessments. Measurements were retaken after 15 months and 30 months and were compared with control pupils not involved in the trial.

The results of the randomised controlled trial found that there was no significant positive effect on the weight status of the intervention group. These findings led Professor Peymane Adab, of the University of Birmingham's Institute of Applied Health Research to report their 'research, combined with wider evidence, suggests that schools cannot lead on the child obesity prevention agenda' (University of Birmingham, 2018).

Professor Miranda Pallan, also of the University of Birmingham, commented that:

Whilst schools are an important setting for influencing children's health behaviour, and delivery of knowledge and skills to support healthy lifestyles is one of their mandatory functions, widespread policy change and broader influences from the family, community, media and the food industry is also needed (University of Birmingham, 2018).

There is an ongoing debate amongst PE professionals about the perceived importance of being physically active in school and how much this might influence future active lifestyles. There is some evidence that behaviours learned in childhood are often maintained into adulthood (Kelder, Perry, Klepp, and Lytle, 1994). In contrast, other researchers have not found this link (Wiltshire, Lee and Evans, 2017; Quarmby, Sandford and Elliot, 2018). This later research suggested there was a rejection on the part of pupils of the value of taking part in PE. This is important since it seems to suggest that the characteristics of PE as described by PE teachers of enjoyment, teamwork, physical achievement, fun, personal and social development etc. are either not being achieved or are not sufficient in themselves to foster a desire for an active lifestyle in adulthood (Bailey, 2007). This is a contested area, but the evidence from schools seems to suggest that pupils need something different from their PE lessons in order to make lifelong physical activity desirable (Quarmby, Sandford and Elliot, 2018).

What is not a contested area is the importance of the development of motor skills, since childhood up to puberty is a sensitive period for skills development. These skills form the basis of engagement in PE and are best developed when the child finds the learning of such skills easy. Some have argued that if children do not learn these skills at an appropriate age, then they never will (Bayli, 1998). This is because the learning of a broad base of skills in childhood creates opportunities to take part in a vast range of activities later in life, and the absence of these skills leads to the pupil having an impoverished range of options to be active in later life (Bailey et al., 2013). This is an important area in which the school PE programme can make a significant contribution.

### **2.2.2. Emotional Benefits**

Physical activity has been linked to a variety of mental health outcomes including increased levels of self-esteem, reduced social isolation and social benefits such as the making of new friends and learning about positive and negative emotions (Scanlan, Babkes, and Scanlan, 2005)

### **2.2.3. Affective Benefits/ Self-esteem**

Affective development is difficult to define owing to its subjective, imprecise and personal nature. It is generally seen as synonymous with psychological and emotional wellbeing and encompasses a range of assets that include mental health, positive self-regard, coping skills, conflict resolution skills, mastery motivation, a sense of autonomy, moral character and confidence (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (NRCIM), 2002). There is consistent evidence that taking part in physical activity can have a positive effect on the psychological wellbeing of children and young people. This evidence is particularly strong for self-esteem (Fox, 2000) where the degree that pupils feel positively about themselves influences their mental wellbeing (Wilson and Kendall-Seatter, 2010). Physical activity has been found to enhance both psychological wellbeing and self-esteem (Laker, 2000), a view which has been endorsed by the Mental Health Foundation (2013).

Self-esteem is defined as the way we see ourselves and the impact this may have on our mental wellbeing (Wilson and Kendall-Seatter, 2010). Enhanced self-esteem generally occurs when an individual succeeds, is praised, or experiences love from another and is lowered by failure, harsh criticism and rejection. Self-esteem is often seen as both a marker for general wellbeing and by some psychologists as the core to mental health (Landers and Arent, 2001). There is also a widely held belief that self-esteem significantly influences achievement in education and other areas of life (Medcalf, 2010). Howells and Bowen (2016) reported that physical activity has been found to enhance both psychological wellbeing and self-esteem. There are studies that have noted a positive relationship between high self-esteem and other variables which may be related to educational achievement, such as persistence

and the ability to work independently (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, and Vohs, 2003). The development of these qualities lies at the heart of education and can lead to a feeling of personal effectiveness and autonomy. It has also been suggested that there is a causal relationship between self-esteem and pupils' academic aspirations (Chiu, 1990).

Wilson and Kendall-Seatter (2010) went further in proposing that higher self-esteem is likely to be achieved when pupils' basic needs are realised, building towards self-actualisation and fulfilment which will in turn help pupils overcome challenges.

Low self-esteem is often seen in pupils identified with SEN especially if their experience of the education system has not been positive including having experienced many different schools. The characteristics of low self-esteem include a reluctance to take part and pupils holding back, even loudly proclaiming that the activity at hand is ridiculous and that they do not care to join in. This may be interpreted as signs that they do not want to participate because they fear failure if they do (Goleniowska, 2014). Research has indicated that, within PE lessons, self-esteem might be improved if lessons promoted the mastery of physical skills (Chen, Sun and Wang, 2018). Pollard (2010) proposed that highlighting a physical skill and celebrating the development of that skill can be an empowering experience for pupils with low self-esteem, allowing pupils to recognise their strengths. This effect is enhanced if the pupil succeeds, is praised and generally helped to feel good about themselves but can also be weakened by failure, criticism and rejection. A high level of self-esteem is associated with emotional stability and adjustment, whereas low self-esteem features in many forms of mental illness and poor health behaviour (Fox, 1997).

Physical competence, especially in boys, is prestigious particularly amongst their peers and may lead to a sense of personal effectiveness and autonomy which promotes self-esteem. There is evidence that physical activity can help to strengthen the individual's self-worth which in turn is an important factor in the development of a positive view of oneself (Sonstroem and Potts, 1996).

For young people, the relationship between sport participation and self-esteem seems to be heavily reliant on acceptance by their peers, and it should be noted that girls are particularly vulnerable to negative peer judgements when participating in sport (Daniels and Leaper, 2006).

#### **2.2.4. Physical Competence**

Physical competence and appearance are a prestigious factor in social culture. Competence may lead to a sense of personal effectiveness and feelings of autonomy and these characteristics are associated with positive self-esteem. It has been noted that amongst young people the physical self is particularly important in the development of self-esteem, but it must also be remembered that this is a complex area of study since self-esteem can be measured and expressed in a variety of ways (Ekeland, Heian and Birger Hagen, 2005). Despite the difficulties, there is evidence that physical activity can strengthen an individual's self-worth, and this is important in developing a positive perception of oneself (Sonstroem and Potts, 1996).

Self-efficacy is a measure of pupils' confidence to perform specific tasks. It is the belief the individual holds as to their likelihood of successfully completing a task. What makes this important is that there is a growing body of evidence of a relationship between self-efficacy and academic performance (Pintrich, Roeser, and De Groot, 1994). Research has further demonstrated that regular physical activity can support the development of self-efficacy (Bailey, 2016). Indeed, a high-quality systematic review found most pupils reported physical activity was positively associated with self-efficacy, while a minority saw no effect (Cataldo, John, Chandran, Pati, and Shroyer, 2013).

#### **2.2.5. Enjoyment.**

Enjoyment is a major factor in the development and reinforcement of self-esteem, which in turn can lead to enhanced motivation for further participation. Kimiecik and Harris (1996) suggested that enjoyment fostered the development of intrinsic motivation and supported the view that high levels of intrinsic motivation were a

consequence of feelings of enjoyment and low levels of anxiety (Deci and Ryan, 1985). Enjoyment has been identified by teachers as an important outcome of planned PE lesson activities (O'Reilly, Tompkins and Gallant, 2001), whilst pupils themselves often rate enjoyment as being an important factor in their perception of sport (Scanlan and Lewthwaite, 1986). The enjoyment of physical activities especially within schools is not universal, and it has been argued that developed helplessness, development of a negative self-concept and avoidance of the activity may be outcomes of negative PE lesson experiences (Biddle, 1999). There has been a concern that girls, especially those attending secondary school, experience progressive disillusionment with PE (Fuchs et al., 1988). However, when activities are presented in attractive, meaningful and relevant ways to pupils, boys and girls of all levels of ability and dispositions towards movement enjoy participation (Sabo, Miller, Melnick, and Heywood, 2004).

There is some evidence that taking part in physical activity by members of a socially marginalised group such as at-risk youth and disabled people may contribute to a more generalised feeling of empowerment. It has been noted that:

by promoting physical fitness, increased physical performance, lessening body mass and promoting a more favourable body shape and structure, physical activity will provide more positive social feedback and recognition from peer groups, which will subsequently lead to improvements in the individual's self-image (Bailey et al., 2013, p. 297).

It must be noted that the case for positive movement experiences can form a 'virtuous circle' (Bailey et al., 2013, p. 297) in which physical, psychological and social skills interact and reinforce each other through a positive feedback loop. The key part of this circle is the positive experience and, if this is missing, the circle may turn into a 'vicious circle' with young people becoming disaffected with physical activity. It is this concept of meaningfulness that has been demonstrated by Beni et al. (2016) to be an essential attribute of all successful PE lessons, with the pupils seeing value in activities that have personal meaning and rejecting other activities which they perceive to be meaningless.

### **2.3. Social Benefits**



Social benefits focus on developing young people's abilities to interact positively with others, which may result in gains for themselves, their schools and communities (Bailey et al., 2009). Engagement in PE provides the opportunity for the promotion of personal and social responsibility and the development of pro-social skills (Parker and Stiehl, 2005). In many cases it develops the skills for individuals to work collaboratively, cohesively and constructively and is believed to encourage the development of trust (Priest, 1998), sense of community (Moore, 2002), personal and social corporate responsibility (Priest and Gass, 1997) and co-operation (Miller, Bredemeier, and Shields, 1997). It is these skills that Bailey (2005) believed could function as a form of social capital for individuals to help them develop resilience to difficult life circumstances. The process of socialisation through sport has been widely acknowledged and Coakley (2007) defined this as the 'active process of learning and social development which occurs as we interact with one another and become acquainted with the social world in which we live' (Coakley, 2009, p. 90).

Processes which occur during PE lessons in the interactive nature of the learning allows social development to take place. This may be seen in the work of Wright, White and Gaebler-Spira (2004) who, when working with a group of children with disabilities in an adapted martial art setting, found that the children showed positive social interactions, an increased sense of ability and positive feelings about the programme.

### **2.3.1. Social behaviour/Social inclusion**

In the research literature, the relationship between participation in physical activity and social development is at best equivocal (Bailey et al., 2013), with some evidence that behaviour can deteriorate as a result of badly-planned experiences (Bailey, 2006). There are other studies which have provided a link between positive experiences of activity and contributions to positive social behaviours. The notion that PE can provide a setting for young people's social development has led to several schemes aimed at using differing forms of physical activity to re-engage disaffected pupils and to encourage the development of positive skills and

attitudes. The problem of disaffection has been of concern to policy makers since it affects educational attainment. Positively motivated pupils are happier in the school situation than their disaffected peers. There is evidence that disaffection/truancy/exclusion has been identified as a significant antecedent in delinquency, dropout and undesirable outcomes (Maynard, Salas-Wright, Vaughn and Peters, 2012).

Research has found that social benefits might accrue from physical activity particularly in such areas as co-operation, teamwork, empathy and the development of a sense of personal responsibility (Wright, White, and Gaebler-Spira, 2005). The most favourable results regarding improving social behaviour have come from school-based studies in which aspects of the PE curriculum have been modified e.g. Youth Sport Trust/BskyB Living for Sport (Armour, Sandford and Duncombe, 2013). It has also been suggested that findings from school-based studies in PE can make a contribution towards a school-wide approach to the teaching of social skills. These schemes have produced results which are broadly favourable with noted improvements in moral reasoning, fair play, sportsmanship and personal responsibility (Armour et al., 2013).

### **2.3.2. Social Networks**

The research literature on social development demonstrates the contribution that PE can make to the developments of social networks. PE offers the opportunity for pupils to develop a sense of belonging within the group or team and for the bringing together of pupils from different social backgrounds (Bailey et al., 2009)

### **2.3.3. Peer Relationships**

It is not surprising that peer relationships play such an important role in young people's development since they spend more time with their peers than with any other group. Peer acceptance plays an important part in all aspects of school life and provides emotional support. It has been noted by Carroll et al. (2009) that peer relationships influence current and future wellbeing and academic achievement. Ryan and Ladd (2012) have demonstrated a significant link between peer

relationships and success in schools. It is during adolescence that peers and friends exert significant pressure on individuals regarding levels of engagement with resulting positive or negative effects. It has been noted that physical activity can provide a catalyst for the development of friendships during childhood and it has been found that playing and physical activity play at an early age may help children develop friendships. This is a helpful strategy for children with poor or limited social skills.

In a study by Woodward and Ferguson (2000), it was found that secondary age children who were not well accepted by their classmates tended to do less well than more popular children and that they had a greater risk of opting out of secondary education. There is a widely-held belief that sport and other socially-orientated activities are natural settings for the development of friendships (Denault and Poulin, 2009). Weiss and Petlichkoff (1989) attempted to map out the dimensions of young people's views on friendship in sport and noted the complexity of the area. Despite these complexities, this research affirmed the importance of physical activity contexts in the development of friendships throughout childhood.

If having friends influences pupil progress then in a small rural special school where the current research took place, these friendships and peer relationships take on a special significance since the possible stigma of attending a special school and the travel involved to the school renders school friends as possibly special school pupils' only friends.

In PE lessons, which involve working as individuals, working in small groups and being members of teams, being educated within a special school and surrounded by your friendship group might be a positive advantage.

#### **2.4. Individual Values**

It has been suggested that the idea of collaborative physical play and activity offers learning contexts that facilitate the development of attitudes and skills such as trust, perseverance, empathy, leadership and cooperation (Sandford et al., 2006).

The desire to develop such attitudes and skills has all helped to renew interest in the positive contribution of competitive team sports.

#### **2.4.1. Competitive Team Games**

Team games have been regarded in recent government documents as providing contexts for the development of favourable characteristics such as the opportunity to compete in sport and other activities. These are thought to build character and help to embed values such as fairness and respect (NCPE, 2013). This view is challenged with the oft-cited issues of bullying, over-emphasis on competition, the narrow range of competitive team games on offer in schools and the popular perception that team games are particularly suited to boys. Despite these criticisms, there is evidence that children who play regular sport are more likely to be active in adulthood than those children who do not take part in sport (Zimmermann-Sloutskis et al., 2010). Since child development is multi-faceted, it is not surprising that children seem to benefit from participation in a variety of activities (Cote, Strachen and Fraser-Thomas, 2008). This argument makes the case for a wide range of team games to be part of the school curriculum with the possibility of pupil choice being offered as pupils get older.

Participation in team games and competitive sport has been linked with positive social and psychological outcomes beneficial for the success of schools such as improved self-esteem, self-regulation, goal attainment and leadership skills (Bailey et al., 2013). Participation in team sports has also been shown to build skills such as preparation and persistence and to foster an increased sense of belonging (Rosewater, 2009). It has been claimed that team sports which are appropriately presented do offer a positive addition to social cohesiveness (Cox, 2012). This argument needs to be challenged since there is little evidence to suggest that involvement in sport leads to positive outcomes. Participation in sport may contribute to positive outcomes but the relationship between sport and positive outcomes can be difficult to achieve in practice and may only be realised through a series of 'conductive change mechanisms' (Whitelaw et al., 2010, p. 65). The argument is developed by the recognition that there is 'a complexity within the

physical activity/mental wellbeing link’ and propose that there ought to be a re-organisation in the language used from ‘there is an association between physical activity and mental wellbeing’ to the more cautious and provisional ‘there could be a relationship that is achievable under conducive conditions’ (Whitelaw et al., 2010, p. 65).

In studies of school sport there is little evidence that factors such as the overall experience of the school team games programme or the social environment within the team has been considered. It may be that received opinions are skewed positively towards involvement in team games, whilst any negative findings which may point towards the dangers of ill-thought-out provision have not been fully acknowledged. The complexity of the issue requires a more cautious stance on the benefits or otherwise of team games with more research being needed into the context of school team games.

## **2.5. Environment**

There is some evidence that teachers and coaches believe that engagement in physical activity develops life skills (Holt, Tamminen, Tink and Black, 2009), but other literature shows that the pedagogy of the teacher and the social environment in which the sessions take place are more important than the activities themselves (Petitpas, Cornelius and van Raalte, 2008)

One of the positive effects of taking part in PE lessons is that it offers a very different environment from other curriculum subjects. Teachers of PE claim that it offers freedom from classroom constraints, opportunities to experience decision-making processes and the opportunity to work with different pupils in a variety of different situations. These factors are all claimed to facilitate friendships and peer relationships (Bailey, 2016).

PE outdoors is far removed from the classroom situation and may help to reduce disruptive behaviour. Kuo and Taylor (2004), who worked with pupils identified as having Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), found being outdoors reduced negative behaviour symptoms but this effect could also have been due to

other variables. Being outdoors only plays a small part in the wider picture. Teaching practices and curricula may mitigate against the potential benefits of being in a large outdoor space and may actively deny pupils power to engage and learn (Medcalf, Marshall and Rhoden, 2006, p. 169).

This research is situated in a small rural special school with access to its own outdoor spaces and playing fields which offer a wide variety of possible learning experiences not solely games-teaching situations. The indoor PE space within the school is limited so it was interesting to explore pupils' experiences of the use of the available PE spaces and the effect, if any, this has on the pupils' perceptions of PE.

## **2.6. Intellectual Benefits**

The debate amongst PE academics as to whether PE should be a core part of the NC relies in a small part on the claims made for PE that it is positively associated with academic achievement (Harris, 2018). There is evidence of a wide-scale anecdotal assumption that in some schools PE is either seen as an irrelevance or an interference in the academic life of the school (Harris, 2018), but much research evidence seems to repudiate this claim with PE being seen as a curriculum essential (Harris, 2018). Research into the cognitive link with physical activity tends to fall into two main categories: studies exploring physical activity and brain cognitive functioning and studies of physical activity and academic performance.

### **2.6.1. Cognitive Functioning**

Academic engagement is concerned with factors such as attendance, participation in school and achievements gained. It has been claimed that school-sponsored sports programmes may also build a school spirit which may be described as school engagement. Academic achievement is highly desired by policy-makers and also by schools, teachers and parent/carers. Academic subjects such as Mathematics and English have been seen by policy makers and hence schools as having a greater

educational value and therefore needing to be prioritised. The inclusion of the 'core' subjects of English, Maths and Science in the NC undoubtedly influences these views (NC, 2013). This forms part of the 'standards agenda' in which the NC 'makes expectations for learning and attainment explicit to pupils, parents, teachers, governors, employers and the public and establishes national standards for the performance of all pupils on the subjects' (Parliament. UK., 2009). This policy has led to the notion that time spent on core subjects should be ring-fenced. Schools are under pressure to prioritise academic subjects which leads to squeezing timetable time for non-core subjects like the arts and PE. An example of the importance placed on core subjects was the guidance document produced by the QCA in which it proposed, admittedly allowing for individual school flexibility, that at KS2 English should have 21% - 32% of the curriculum, Maths 18% - 21%, Science 9% with other non-core subjects only being allocated 4% - 5%. PE with only 5% curriculum time (QCA, 2002, p. 36). This policy has undoubtedly led to some parental fears about time spent away from academic subjects. The result of this has been that PE tends to be seen as an enjoyable subject which is not involved in the main academic ethos of the school.

There have been many pieces of research that have examined the relationship between physical activity and academic ability. One of the most influential is the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children based at the University of Bristol, a study of birth cohort of 14,000 pregnant women whose children and partners were tracked over two decades (Boyd et al., 2012). The researchers measured 5000 children's physical activity over a week at age 11. The findings were that at 11 years of age, girls who were more active were performing better in standardised school tests in English, Mathematics and science. In addition, this was a predictor for later success, with the most active doing better at school as teenagers. The results were adjusted to allow for other factors that could affect school performance e.g. birth weight, socio-economic status and mothers' smoking habits whilst pregnant. The conclusion was that physical activity had either a direct or indirect effect on educational achievement recorded (Bailey 2016, p. 12).

### **2.6.2. School Engagement**

Bailey (2017) saw school engagement as being an umbrella concept which contains several different components of pupils' behaviours attitudes and feelings – psychological, cognitive and academic. Psychological in this context refers to a feeling of belonging to the school and feeling a connection with the teachers.

School engagement is a measure of how much the pupil feels they have a sense of belonging or emotional engagement in the life of the school. Engagement is the pursuit of goals that are beneficial to the pupil personally, and to the school and other significant stakeholders. This is an important factor in pupils' school life since positive outcomes for pupils is linked to successful completion of schooling.

Research has shown that engaged pupils achieve more and are happier in school than their disaffected peers (Ackerman, 2013). Hughes, Luo, Kwok, and Loyd (2008) found that the pupils who are the most engaged with school outperform peers who are less engaged or absent, because engaged pupils are likely to have positive behaviours relating to their education such as concentration, the exertion of effort, being capable of taking the initiative and persistence (Hughes et al., 2008).

Fredericks, Eccles and Garcia Coll (2006) believe that time spent in organised sports activities predicted a positive attitude to school engagement and higher educational achievement in later years. There are findings which suggest that pupils who engage in school sport experience a greater feeling of belonging to a school compared to unstructured activities such as watching television or spending time with friends (Blomfield and Barber, 2010). Eccles, Barber, Stone and Hunt, (2003) found that adolescents who had a positive involvement with their school found the latter part of their school career to be one of greater enjoyment.

Studies have found that pupils feel motivated to engage with school when they feel that they are being supported by adults and that there is value in what they are doing. A disconnect occurs when pupils feel that they are not being supported and this may lead to disaffection, truancy and dropout (Archambault, Joanosz, Fallu and Pagani, 2009). The link between motivation to learn and positive factors which influence pupil motivation are interconnected: good outcomes encourage pupil



motivation whilst poor results have negative effects on pupil motivation. Two cycles are at play here with positive outcomes encouraging engagement in schooling and negative outcomes fostering discouragement, disaffection and dropout.

In a Canadian study to examine the relationship between school engagement and enjoyment in several school subjects, it was found that enjoyment of PE and art education were amongst the top factors contributing to school engagement. Bengoechea, Lorenzino, and Gray (2019) found that enjoyment of PE was the strongest contributor to school engagement in early adolescence. They stressed that curricular factors, and in particular the quality of pupils' experiences in PE, may be more important than had previously been recognised in terms of 'understanding and promoting school engagement in early and middle adolescence . . . specifically that a positive experience in PE . . . can contribute to pupils' engagement and valuing of school' (Bengoechea, Lorenzino, and Gray, 2019, p. 301).

## **2.7. Active Participation**

The main thrust of the research in this area has focused on physical activity and its effect on educational attainment, but this type of research is not without difficulty since there are many variables which need to be considered. One of these is socio-economic status since it could be argued that children from higher economic backgrounds have access to a greater range and quality of physical activity, with the reverse also being true that pupils from low socio-economic backgrounds have diminished access to physical activity settings.

In the school setting, a recent development has been research into the effects of short-burst activity on academic performance. A two-year study in a primary school found that when the pupils were involved in a daily 10 - 15 minute activity session of classroom-based physical activity matched to core classroom activities such as spelling and mathematics, they were more likely to achieve higher scores than if they had not participated (Holler et al., 2010). Pontifex, Saliba, Raine, Picchietti and Hillman (2013) reported that even moderate intensity activity in bursts as little as five minutes increased brain processes, improved focus and enhanced cognitive

control for up to one hour afterwards. This type of research has led some researchers to believe that physical activity should be scheduled before important subjects like mathematics and not at the end of the school day (Kubesch et al., 2009). More recently there have been several studies exploring the relationship between physical activity during the school day and educational attainment. The consensus of these studies has been that replacing some of the time spent in classroom activities with PE activities did not harm performance in the classroom activities and in some cases might improve performance (Booth, Tomporowski, Boyle, Ness, Joinson, Leary and Reilly, 2013).

This concept of either using short-burst activity or the refinement of the curriculum to include more PE time has interesting potential for pupils labelled BESD, since it has already been noted that PE may lead to improved self-esteem and the development of friends and peer relationships in addition to possible gains in academic performance.

Other research has approached this subject from a different angle by asking how physical fitness as opposed to physical activity affected educational performance. This is a problematic research area since, it is clear that physical fitness has a close link to being physically active. Since pupils only attend school for part of their day, out-of-school and weekend physical activity plays an important part in their physical fitness. Despite these extraneous factors, numerous studies have found that physically fit children outperform their less fit peers. Fedewa and Ahn (2011) undertook a meta-analysis of the research and found increased fitness was associated with better grades in mathematics, reading and IQ scores. Telford, Cunningham, Telford, Abharata and Cunningham, (2015) found that both activity and fitness levels correlated with government test scores and that schools with fitter children performed better.

A positive relationship between increased physical activity and concentration has been found (Entier, Nowell, Landers and Sibley, 2006). Whilst this gain was achieved through short burst activities, it is suggested that the effects are more likely to be sustained when physical activity is maintained over a longer period.

Many researchers have reported that physical activity and fitness are elements of schools that tend to be supportive of educational achievement and success. Bailey et al., (2013) noted that there is now enough evidence to suggest the claim that a well-planned and well-delivered physical activity programme, offering opportunities for intense and sustained physical activity, positively contributed to academic performance (Bailey et al., 2013).

As previously noted, there is a paucity of literature regarding special school PE. There is, however, some research (Sit, McKenzie, Cerin, McManus, and Lian, 2013) into activity levels with pupils in a special school environment. As this research was conducted in Hong Kong schools any conclusions need to be cautious. In addition, pupils with behavioural difficulties were not part of the research. One of the report's key messages was that children with disabilities were less active when compared to their mainstream peers, and were more active in their break times than they were during their PE lessons (Sit, McKenzie, Cerin, McManus, and Lian (2013). These research findings focussing on pupils with no behavioural disabilities do not add much to the discussion about pupils with the label BESD. It could be argued that within SEN, pupils with the label BESD form a homogeneous group that should be considered in its own right. Medcalf, Marshall, and Rhoden (2006) indicated that there might be a relationship between PE and the behaviour patterns of pupils with the label EBD. It noted that the increase in time spent 'on-task' after a PE lesson indicated that 'pupils may be exhibiting a significant improvement in their concentration and task compliance' (Medcalf, Marshall, and Rhoden, 2006, p. 173). It must be noted that the authors agree that there could be many possible explanations for this change in behaviour, but it is acknowledged that PE could constitute a 'unique environment and a vital tool in the education for pupils with EBD (Medcalf et al., 2006, p. 173).

## **2.8. Alienation in PE**

The benefits of PE for children have been widely documented with PE in schools designed to develop the whole child physically, cognitively and affectively and to make a positive impact on the child's overall quality of life (Gallahue and Cleland

Donnelly, 2003). This ought to lead to a positive and memorable experience for all children that would encourage lifelong engagement in activity. In a review of how PE teachers describe their lessons, the terms 'learning', 'happy pupils', 'busy' and 'good' were high on the list (Bailey, 2007), yet there is research evidence to suggest that the ambitious ideas set out by Bailey et al. (2013) and the descriptions provided by PE teachers of their view of their lessons are not met for many pupils. Some pupils have been reported in the literature as being alienated from the subject in a variety of ways.

PE literature regarding alienation has largely been divided into the various categories or degree of alienation: alienation associated with boredom (Carlson, 1995; Gibbons and Humbert, 2008); lack of meaning or lack of relevance (Carlson, 1995); teacher behaviour (Carlson, 1995; Martel et al., 2002); low skill or perceived ability (Carlson, 1995; Olafson, 2002; Portman 1995); embarrassment (Couturier et al., 2005; Olafson, 2002) and competitive class environment (Garn and Cothran, 2006; Halas, 2002). Most of these studies investigated pupils in secondary schools with a few investigating junior-age groups or pupils with SEN.

Graham (1995) found that many children did not equate PE with a positive, enjoyable experience. For many PE is a 'distasteful and discomforting experience' (p. 479). Several other researchers also found this situation with children reporting that they did not like PE (Carlson, 1995; Olafson, 2002). Children often perceived PE to be lacking in fun, fairness and safety (Gibbons and Humbert, 2008). These negative feelings towards PE, if allowed to develop, might as pointed out by Hallas (2002) escalate into a phenomenon identified as alienation. Alienation in PE has been outlined by Carlson (1995) as 'the persistent negative feelings some pupils associate with actively aversive or insufficiently meaningful situations (which pupils often label with the all-purpose adjective boring)' (p. 467).

The work of Carlson refers to the original work on alienation by Seeman (1959) in that it identifies three of Seeman's original constructs: powerlessness, meaninglessness and social isolation. Powerlessness is seen by Carlson as a lack of control, meaninglessness as there being no apparent purpose for PE and it lacking

personal value and social isolation the feeling of not being involved in a valued activity. Carlson (1995), using interviews with children, revealed that persistent negative behaviours associated with PE included a range of behaviours and coping strategies. These included trying to blend into the background, pretending to be sick or injured, missing school on PE days and a willingness to accept low-grade outcomes rather than participation in lessons.

In a study carried out by Spencer-Caveliere and Rintoul (2012), 10 and 11-year-old children were asked to give their perspectives about the three constructs of alienation: powerlessness, meaninglessness and social isolation. Their findings reflect the previous research, with children reporting that low skill often led to possible negative judgements by their peers, embarrassment, ridicule and not being selected for teams. All these were factors in the non-enjoyment of PE. Boys with low skills were particularly vulnerable.

The children in the above study often spoke of lack of choice leading to frustration, lack of effort and disengagement. A lack of meaning in PE is associated with boredom and repetition of activities, what Siedentop (2002) described as the same introductory unit again and again. Lack of meaning is also associated with not learning anything and equating PE with not having a relevant meaning in a vocational sense. The children in the Siedentop study associated lack of meaning with activities such as running, whilst Pagnano (2006) stated that if such activities were to be seen as meaningful, the teachers had to employ the best pedagogical practices, such as co-operative learning, critical thinking, pupil-centred learning and better curricular models such as Teaching Games for Understanding (Kirk and MacPhail, 2002) as ways to promote meaning in the PE lesson.

The social factors reported by the Spencer-Cavaliere study centred around the need to have friends as a significant factor in the enjoyment of PE. Conversely rejection was linked to feelings of being left out, which was often associated with having low skill, not being chosen for teams and being ridiculed or bullied.

The study noted that some of these negative feelings might be the result of ineffective PE lessons that did not promote positive social interactions because of their emphasis on competition or the inclusion of alienating practices such as partner or team selection. This latter issue of team selection is a recurring theme throughout the literature since any peer-selection of teams inevitably means that there must be a last pick, usually the low-skilled child, leading to negative feelings. Carlson (1995) stated low-skilled children felt isolated in their PE class and, according to Gallahue and Cleland (2003) are not part of lessons' social interaction.

## **2.9. Power Relationships**

It has been recognised that the teacher interaction with pupils is of great importance as it affects pupils' learning, enjoyment and engagement (Hamre and Pianta, 2001; Wentzel, 2002). It is also important to consider pupils' perception of teacher power which reflects teachers' influence or control over their pupils (Zhang, Jiang, Lei and Huang, 2019). Generally, pupils are able to understand the different types of teacher power, such as legitimate or expert power (Elias and Mace, 2005). This ability to discern teacher power may be beneficial in terms of promoting good behaviour or in building positive teacher/pupil relationships (Bugental, Lyon, Lin, McGrath and Bimbela, 1999). When the various teaching styles were analysed, it was found that a large proportion have focused on need-supportive teacher behaviours 'motivating teachers manage to support students' basic psychological needs for autonomy' (Aelterman, Vansteenkiste, Van Den Berghe, De Meyer, and Haerens, 2014, p. 595), at the expense of need-thwarting 'demotivating' teacher behaviours (Aelterman et al., 2014, p. 606). They noted that autonomous-supportive teachers tried to foster pupils' 'sense of volition and willingness to put effort into their study' (Aelterman, et al., 2014, p. 596). In contrast controlling teachers made use of pressurising practices to make pupils 'think, feel or behave in a specific way, therefore bypassing the pupils' viewpoint' (Aelterman et al., 2014, p. 541).

Another aspect of school behaviour is surveillance, where pupils perceive that they are being watched. The concept of surveillance stems from writings on the

Panopticon and has echoes in the modern school. It has now become commonplace for researchers to refer to schools as being Panoptic, providing a wide range of observations to support this claim (Bushnell, 2003; Blackford, 2004; Azzarito, 2009, Gallagher, 2010). There is widespread consensus amongst scholars that this account of the Panopticon is to be understood as an ideal model of power rather than a description of an institution. The word Panopticon means 'all-seeing' and was used by Bentham as the name of a design of building in which prisoners could be watched by a single supervisor within a watch tower. The person inside the watch tower could see out but the prisoners could not see into the tower, so they never knew when they were being watched. This is a clear example of power being exercised by surveillance and one which may be used to describe the experiences of pupils who perceive that they are constantly being observed by their teachers (Gallagher, 2010).

A further aspect of surveillance is that of 'gaze' (in its simplest form, being looked at by others). Gaze in the context of PE is an oft-cited reason for children not wishing to take part, especially in cases where children with low ability feel that the other pupils within the class are looking at them. The act of performing or being required to perform in front of their peers may leave the performer feeling ashamed and vulnerable, and may contribute to the psycho-emotional dimensions of disability (Reeve, 2002). The act of being expected to perform in front of peers is an established part of PE lessons and is possibly inevitable in the teaching of skills in a classroom setting.

Pupils are being seen by others or required to be seen by their teachers does bring into context the work on power, knowledge and subjectivity

A further form of power is that of disciplinary power which classifies and places individuals under continuous forms of surveillance. This power turns the subjects into objects of power/knowledge. The most prevalent form of surveillance power was from the top down, and this is the form most commonly talked about by school pupils. However, power does not always operate from positions of authority with research by Webb, McCaughy and Macdonald (2004) showing that teachers were

able to re-focus surveillance to 'reduce its negative effects or to induce positive regard, recognition and reward' (Webb et al., 2008, p. 219).

Several commentators have insisted that the description of the Panopticon can best be understood as:

- a) one part of a much wider body of work,
- b) an idealised theorisation of a program of power (Gallagher, 2010, p. 270).

Gallagher noted that this was a good description of disciplinary power and provided a basis for how surveillance functioned or failed to function in schools. In practice this is not so, with many schools developing a more pragmatic view of school discipline that is 'good enough' for purpose. An example of this is choosing to ignore minor breaches of discipline in favour of the smooth running of the classrooms.

In the school situation power relationships with the teachers are very important and have both positive and negative attributes. Clearly disciplinary power is at the heart of the classroom, with the school and the staff being the instigators of this power. Power relationships which exist within the classroom are fostered by the school ethos and the individual teacher's stance. In PE, as in other subject areas, the individual teacher sets the tone for the pupils within the class on a continuum from supportive to non-supportive. Pupils' sense of self will be impacted by teacher comments both positive and negative, by views about their own perceived abilities and by the perceived views of their peers on their abilities and context. The positive and negative attributes are never more clearly defined than in the situation where the 'good' performer receives praise and positive feedback leading to greater encouragement but with the perceived 'poor' performer receiving negative comments from the teacher and indeed their peers with resultant disillusion (Reeve, 2002). The style the teacher adopts is an important source of influence on the quality of pupil motivation. Research in PE has shown that high-quality motivation in PE is a determinant of both activity levels and engagement in class (Aelterman et al., 2012), and may influence the degree to which the pupils adopt an



active lifestyle post-school (Haerens, Kirk, Cardon, De Bourdeaudhuij and Vansteenkiste, 2010) .

The children involved in my research all attended a special school, and all had learning disabilities and the label BESD. A definition of the social model of disability is 'social practices and attitudes render people disabled by making it difficult or impossible for those with physical or mental impairments to participate fully in social and economic life' (Heery and Noon, 2017). The implication is that social practices should be adjusted to allow the full inclusion of disabled people in social activities. In the classroom situation these personal experiences are very important to the individual child. Reeve (2002) wrote about the way gaze and self-surveillance operated on the bodies of people with impairments to leave them feeling worthless, unattractive and stressed. A similar argument could be applied to pupils of low-ability in PE under the constant gaze of their teachers and peers.

#### **2.10. Pupils with SEN views of PE**

In a systematic review of the research literature on the views of pupils with SEN about PE, Coates and Vickerman (2008) list only seven empirical studies which explored the perceptions of PE by children with SEN. They analysed these studies and developed six key themes related to the experiences of PE by children with SEN: experiences of PE; experience of PE teachers; discrimination by others; feelings of self-doubt; barriers to inclusion and empowerment and consultation. There has been little research into the perception of pupils with SEN regarding PE compared to the amount exploring the perceptions of teachers teaching pupils with SEN (Hodge et al., 2004; Lambe and Bones, 2006; Vickerman and Coates, 2009).

When pupils with the label SEN have been involved in research on their perceptions of PE, they reported that they had both positive and negative days in their experiences (Goodwin and Watkinson, 2000). The positive days occurred when the children had participated well in the activities and had felt a sense of belonging with their peers. Negative days occurred when the children had not participated well in the activities or were at odds with their peers or had had their competence

questioned (Goodwin and Watkinson, 2000). In relation to special schools, Fitzgerald et al. (2003) reported that the children in their study enjoyed taking part in PE and highlighted favourite activities as team sports e.g. basketball.

Research into pupils deemed by their school to have EBD by Medcalf et al. (2011) found that PE was a distinctive part of the lives of their participants and there was broad agreement amongst them, irrespective of lesson content or teaching style. They reported that the research participants, often boys, commented on the unique opportunities taking part in PE offered. These responses were complex and highly individualized but did produce broad themes similar to those outlined by Coates and Vickerman (2008). There was a link between the physical nature of the subject and the boys in the research, with one boy noting that the physicality of the PE lesson gave him not only the opportunity to exhibit some of his more negative behaviour characteristics but also the ability to gain satisfaction by being able to accomplish a physical task.

Coupled to this was the status attached to physical prowess of individuals. Some of the participants recognised that being able to show off their skills helped them moderate inappropriate behaviour. PE was a form of escape from the confines of the classroom. Jones and Cheetham (2001) showed that participants felt that 'time out' from the perceived static learning experience of the classroom would be helpful. The aim of the Jones and Cheetham research was to give the pupils a greater voice in exploring their perceptions of the PE programme. The research was conducted with a group of Year 11 pupils in a school in Basingstoke, Hampshire. 10 pupils out of a class of 21 were randomly selected. Their research covered all aspects of PE as it was delivered in their school as part of the NCPE. The school involved was a mainstream secondary school and none of the research participants were stated to have SEN. The research is relevant since it highlighted the perceptions of Year 11 pupils within NCPE, the same age group as my research.

One of the findings of the Jones and Cheetham research was that there were elements of 'acting up' on the part of some participants who 'mucked about' on purpose in PE. The reason cited was that PE, a subject where effort and activity

were rewarded, also provided the opportunity for negative behavioural tendencies to manifest if the participants experienced challenging situations. Interestingly, and in contrast to the PE teachers' views of their subject, the research participants saw PE as involving little cognitive effort (Jones and Cheetham, 2001).

Wright and Sugden (1999) cited how for all pupils, but especially those with SEN, PE was not simply education of the physical, but also included education involving language, cognition and socialization. Activities that are physical in nature may encourage many positive educational and behavioural outcomes but for SEN pupils these activities need to be carefully selected since 'the apparent emphasis placed upon sport and team games within the PE curriculum appears to do rather more to exclude, than include, some pupils from learning situations in PE' (Smith 2004, p. 51).

Previous research, according to Medcalf, Marshall, Hardman and Visser (2011, p. 190) neglected to investigate how children with BESD experience PE. When research into PE has investigated pupils identified as SEN, it did so mostly from the standpoint of physical disability e.g. Coates and Vickerman (2008). Medcalf et al. (2011, p. 170) concluded that 'this may not prove representative of the full sphere of SEN'.

#### **2.10.1. Experiences of PE by pupils labelled BESD**

A rare research paper which studied how pupils who have the label BESD experience NCPE (Medcalf et al., 2011) noted the differences between the experiences of pupils with SEN and those specifically with BESD. The authors stated that the findings were broadly 'in line with the expectations of an interpretivist study . . . the study showing a mixed economy of experiences that each participant had in PE' (Medcalf et al., 2011, p. 189).

Previous studies on PE and aspects of pupils labelled SEN had noted that these children's experience of PE was limited and somewhat restricted by the behaviour

of others. Some experiences were shown to lead to negative self-image and emotional distress (Blinde and McCallister, 1998; Goodwin and Watkinson, 2000; Fitzgerald et al., 2003; Fitzgerald, 2005). However, the Medcalf study did not corroborate these findings, which is an important point. Medcalf et al. (2011) noted that the curriculum aims and the motivation to participate were positive attributes as was the expressed desire to be away from normal classroom-based lessons. Pupils said PE was a time to escape from the classroom. This finding agreed with an earlier one of Cole and Visser (1998) who found that a curriculum that concentrated on practical, physical, and creative experiences in place of Shakespeare, a modern foreign language and conventionally delivered humanities could often be more effective in meeting the needs of pupils with BESD (Cole and Visser, 1998, p. 39).

The lack of research into the perceptions of PE by pupils with the label BESD means that researchers and teachers, parents/carers etc do not have a complete picture. It has been noted that pupils with the label BESD may also experience difficulties in learning (Cooper, 1999) and that the label BESD is not a finite category. For many pupils, the label BESD may be only one of their educational needs and additional needs might affect the changing and complex nature of pupils' experiences of PE. The positive elements of taking part in PE have been previously discussed and the Medcalf et al. (2011) research reiterated that there was not a linear relationship between participation in PE and beneficial responses. Pupils with the label BESD often have difficulty maintaining appropriate behaviours, and this affects their education. This hierarchy of behaviour within a class also affects their peers. Despite this, Medcalf et al. (2011) concluded that PE should be a key aspect of the educational provision for pupils with the label BESD. Medcalf et al. (2011) reported that the boys in the study appreciated the feeling of space and freedom which, they felt, was not available elsewhere in the curriculum. There was some discrepancy between what the boys saw as the aims of the PE curriculum and those of the NCPE, with the NCPE recommending a formalised programme of study whilst the boys desired more informal situations. Pupils believed that PE did contain valuable experiences, some of which could not be obtained elsewhere in the school.

The study by Medcalf et al. (2011) focussed on a small collection of six case studies of individual pupils and so cannot be used to provide generalisations of the findings across the population of pupils with the label BESD within schools. Medcalf et al. (2011) acknowledged the highly-contextualised nature of the research responses and some of the common difficulties that faced the research pupils, but stated that their findings had highlighted a significant gap in the understanding of how such pupils experience PE. They commented on the need to continue to work alongside pupils with the label BESD and to find ways to further understand the nature of 'the perceived relationships between their challenging behaviours, and their educational and sporting experiences' (Medcalf et al., 2011, p. 203).

There has been little research on the experiences of PE by pupils labelled BESD who attend a special school. Finding out about the lived experiences of these pupils is best achieved by developing ways to explore their experiences though theorising the socio-cultural foundations of their perceptions in PE by using inventive and participatory methods (Medcalf et al., 2011).

This current research aims to make a contribution to the knowledge of the experiences and perceptions of PE by exploring the perceptions of pupils attending a special school, with the label BESD.

#### **2.10.2. Teachers, SEN and PE**

The NCPE (2000), required that teachers design and deliver a PE curriculum taking into account the issue of equal opportunities. Vickerman, Hayes, and Whetherly (2003) stated that these principles would provide: entitlement (to access learning and assessment in the PE curriculum), accessibility (placing responsibility on the teacher to provide lessons to suit the needs of the pupils), integration (educating SEN alongside other children and catering for the needs of all) and integrity (a commitment to the goals of mainstreaming) (Vickerman et al., 2003).

In a literature review which highlighted inclusion in PE, it was found that some PE teachers expected children with SEN to adapt to the existing programme rather than the alternative of teachers adapting the programme. Hodge et al. (2004) found such a situation with children with SEN having to try to participate in a lesson aimed at their peers rather than having full inclusion. Indeed, some children reported that PE teachers seemed to lack appropriate training and experience of teaching SEN children (Morley et al., 2005). Studies examining the training of PE teachers have highlighted that teachers often feel unprepared to teach children with SEN (Vickerman, 2002; Hodge et al., 2004; Morley et al., 2005).

A study by Vickerman (2007) examined the perspectives of teacher education providers and proposed suggested methods of training teachers for the inclusion of pupils with disabilities. Qi and Ha (2012) reviewed 75 studies from 1990 to 2009 from a variety of countries, with 76% coming from United States and United Kingdom. They found that some of the studies indicated that several pupil-related and teacher-related variables influenced the attitude of PE teachers towards teaching pupils with mild disabilities, in contrast to those with severe disabilities (Block and Rizzo, 2000). The type of disability influenced the attitudes of teachers. Teachers held more favourable attitudes towards teaching pupils with learning difficulties than teaching those with emotional and behavioural difficulties (Obrusnikova, 2008). Research on teacher attitudes towards pupils with disabilities continues to grow but 'more qualitative research is needed to examine teachers' perceptions and their influencing factors relevant to effective inclusive practices' (Qi and Ha, 2012).

There has been a concern to identify factors contributing to positive teacher attitudes towards including pupils with disabilities. These potentially facilitating factors according to Qi and Ha (2012) are professional preparation, perceived competence, previous teaching experiences and available support within the school. Vickerman (2007) found that teacher educators support inclusive PE, although there was inconsistency in the amount of time spent addressing this issue and the nature of the curriculum content. Qi and Ha (2012) concluded their study

by pointing out that, whilst much research they reviewed had focused on attitudes and perceptions of the teachers towards inclusion 'future studies are still needed to identify the factors contributing to the development of positive attitudes towards inclusive PE in in-service and preservice teachers' (Qi and Ha, 2012, p. 275).

Despite research into teacher perceptions and attitudes and the lessons which have been learned, it cannot be denied that for some pupils with SEN and disabilities, PE lessons remain a cause for anxiety (Goodwin and Watkinson, 2000).

There is limited research on the perceptions and attitudes of special school PE teachers, but it is possible to gain some insight from reports of initial teacher training given to special school PE teachers. In a very small study (six respondents) Maher and Fitzgerald (2018) conducted semi-structured interviews within six special schools in Yorkshire. They found that in initial training there was little specific training for work in a special school and what training there was in such areas as behaviour management or SEN was generic and non-specific. The respondents felt that they were ill-prepared for special school PE and needed to be exposed to the 'realities of working in special schools' (Maher and Fitzgerald, 2018, p. 9).

When asked about Continued Professional Development (CPD), the respondents noted a general lack of PE-specific opportunities and said that the training that was available was usually reactive and needs-based. It was felt that CPD was mostly informal, through conversations with staff within and across other special schools. When asked what CPD they would be interested in taking part in, one of the respondents talked about the need for the school to provide pupils with access to a wider range of sporting activities. This would be achieved by providing within the curriculum the building blocks of fine and gross motor skills, balance and co-ordination. One respondent stated that she had no idea how to teach pupils with autism and to make PE effective and relevant to them, since her training had not covered this topic (Maher and Fitzgerald, 2018). This very limited study provides some insight into the world of the PE teacher in the special school and may act as a springboard for future research in this area.

My research adds to the knowledge base, not only about the PE experiences of pupils who attend a special school but also by increasing understanding of the perceptions and experiences of pupils within a specific group, those pupils with the label BESD.

## **Summary**

This chapter began with an examination of some of the claims made about the potential benefits that might be obtained through taking part in PE in school. The claims varied which was to be expected given the highly individualised nature of PE in schools, the differences in facilities, staff expertise and experience, and the differences which occur across the differing sectors of education. The majority of the claims for PE are positive and it would appear from the arguments that the inclusion of PE in schools might form the basis of curing the ills of the nation. There is, however, a powerful counter-argument that, far from being a source for good, PE for some pupils is a source of alienation with practices that pupils perceive as not holding meaning. Teaching styles and use of power teacher/pupil relationships also play their part in pupils' negative experiences of PE.

The second part of the chapter moves away from generic research on PE and examines the potential benefits of taking part in PE for pupils with SEN. It is noted that much of the literature concerning pupils with SEN in PE was conducted with pupils with physical difficulties exploring their inclusion into mainstream PE lessons. The literature notes that these pupils report generally similar experiences to their non-disabled mainstream peers. Notable exceptions include pupils' perceptions about their ability and how this affects their perceptions of PE. Within research about pupils with SEN, pupils reported that their experiences were somewhat restricted by the behaviour of others and this led to negative self-image. The research of Medcalf et al. (2011) demonstrated that there was a significant gap in the understanding of how pupils with the label BESD experience PE. They recommended that more research was needed to address 'the perceived relationships between their challenging behaviours, and their educational and sporting experiences' (Medcalf et al., 2011, p. 203).



This research aims to build on the work already achieved in this field and address an area that is under researched in order to provide further knowledge about the PE experiences of pupils with the label BESD attending a special school.

## **Chapter 3. Pupil Voice.**

### **3.1. Introduction**

A discussion of pupil voice sits uncomfortably as part of a literature review since it is often considered to be a research method but, in this research, it is an essential feature of the research and as such needs to be thoroughly examined.

### **3.2. Development of pupil voice**

There have been a growing number of authors who have affirmed the need for research with children to include the children's input and for research not merely be conducted on the children (Fielding and Bragg, 2003; Leitch and Mitchell, 2007).

Pupil voice in its widest sense can be defined as 'every way in which pupils are allowed or encouraged to voice their views and preferences' (Cheminais, 2008, p. 6).

Use of pupil voice has been at the forefront of the development of participatory research methods with school pupils and has the potential to be used in research with pupils labelled BESD and within their PE lessons.

Pupil voice has developed out of a growing number of legislation and guidelines which have been important in the development of the concept of voice within pupil populations. The first of these documents, and possibly the most frequently cited, is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [UNCRC] (UN, 1989). It is within this document that articles 12 and 13 refer to the value of listening to and respecting the rights of the child. Article 12 states that the children must have the right to express their views freely on all matters affecting them (United Nations, 1989).

The UNCRC, ratified by the UK government in 1991, enshrines an important number of rights for the child (Alderson, 2008). Article 13 concerns the rights of the child to have freedom of expression regardless of barriers and through any medium of the child's choice. Arising from this document, there has been guidance from the UK

Government (DfES, 2001) together with advice from such bodies as the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust and National College of School Leaders encouraging schools to consult with pupils.

In the forward to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (2008) *Working Together: Listening to the Voices of Children and Young Children*, the then minister stated that giving:

children and young people a say in decisions that affect them can improve engagement in learning, help develop a more inclusive school environment and improve behaviour and attendance. Through effective pupil participation, schools give young people the opportunity to develop critical thinking, advocacy and influencing skills, helping every child to fulfil their potential (p 1).

The UNCRC (United Nations, 1989) is cited by many as being the cornerstone of the idea that children should participate in discussions regarding decisions that affect them. The Convention provides a focus around which pupil voice and participatory research have been developed in schools. It would be wrong to assume that because the UN Convention provided a framework for the use of pupil voice that it became an approach adopted by schools. As Rudduck and Fielding (2006) noted there are dangers in the 'simplistic surface compliance' that has arisen from the rapid uptake of the Convention. Other authors (Lundy, 2007) have noted that Article 12 offers a much wider perspective than the mere use of pupil voice; it offers the opportunity for the development of the individual human rights of the child. This interpretation of the Convention has the implication that it is not simply a matter of listening to the child but rather allowing the child to become a full participant in all discussions that are pertinent to the child. These rights were recognised by Huddleston (2007) when he described what he called the normative argument, that children are participants with rights. Bron and Veugelers (2014). Kirshner and Pozzoboni (2011) described rationales for pupil voice work which included the normative argument made by Huddleston. These five rationales were: normative, developmental, political, educational and relevance.

The normative argument stated that pupils were entitled to participate in decision making in their education 'both from the perspective of children's rights as well as the perspective of being citizen in their own right instead of a citizen-in-waiting' (Bron and Veugelers, 2014, p. 128). They further stated that pupil voice overlapped with pupil participation in that it had 'the potential to promote democratic attitude through education' (Bron and Veugelers, 2014, p. 128). Pupil voice has become much more important since the ratification of UNCRC and schools have been urged to find creative ways to provide pupils with opportunities for active citizenship and participation. All the developments in pupil voice share the common view as expressed by Thiessen and Cook-Sather (2007, p. 7) that pupils are:

knowledgeable and collaborative actors whose insights into and expertise in their own ideas, comments, and actions are critical to the full understanding of what transpires and changes at school.

The developmental argument argued that pupils within school frequently assume more responsibility and autonomy outside school than they were allowed within. Bron and Veugelers (2014) contended that young people today have 'increased economic powers, social maturity, access to information and knowledge derived from the ever-increasing media culture' (p. 129). Yet many schools still provide few opportunities for pupils to be 'knowledgeable and collaborative actors' (Thiessen and Cook-Sather, 2007).

The political argument noted that children were often seen as a homogeneous group, but in fact they were not (Bron and Veugelers, 2014). Thomson (2011) describes a conceptual problem of voice: 'the singularity of voice, as if there were only one voice instead of many' (Bron and Veugelers, 2014, p. 130). Davey, Burke and Shaw (2010) made the distinction between involved and not involved youth. McIntyre, Pedder and Rudduck (2005) stated that, in their experience, teachers noted that although some pupils' responses were thoughtful and constructive, it was difficult to access the views of the pupils who were not involved. This was especially difficult for pupils with SEN who historically have not had their views heard possibly due to the teachers' perception of their learning difficulty.

The educational argument for the use of pupil voice centred around the development of opportunities which might lead to the development of numerous participative and democratic skills (Bron and Veugelers, 2014). These included knowledge, skills, attitudes and sense of belonging which schools find to be a 'challenging task' (Bron and Veugelers, 2014, p. 132). Dykes, Furdyk and Corriero (2013) noted that the implementation of pupil voice might:

improve learning by bridging the gap between how students live and how they learn, thus making education more relevant in the learner's world and encouraging the skills needed to adapt to changing global conditions (Bron and Veugelers, 2014, p. 133) citing Dykes, Furdyk and Corriero (2013).

The relevance argument is the importance of pupils being involved in curriculum design rather than the curriculum being the product of a fixed set of requirements. Several authors have emphasised the dynamic character of a live or enacted curriculum where teachers and pupils engage together in developing meaningful activities (Joseph, 2010).

These are the underpinning theoretical arguments for the incorporation of pupil voice into schools. Pupil voice was seen by Fielding (2007) as being about much more than an openness to hearing pupils' perspectives but rather that pupil voice was about reconfiguring schooling and education such that they come to model and mirror democracy itself. Flutter and Rudduck (2004) noted that:

the school becomes a community of participants engaged in the common endeavour of learning. Where pupil voice is attended to, learning comes to be seen as a more holistic process with broad aims rather than a progression through a sequence of narrowly focused performance targets (2004. P. 135).

This quotation from 2004 still has echoes today in the contribution pupil voice may make to present day schools. The development of pupil voice in schools has rightly involved pupils not only being asked for their views on a variety of topics but also their involvement in forms of research within their school.

Rudduck and Fielding (2006) commented that pupils had a low expectation of school managers listening and valuing their experiences, even within a 'School Council', a regular forum where elected pupils meet with a specified member of the teaching staff to discuss school issues. If these issues were seen by pupils, as Lodge (2005) stated, to be related to 'comfort' issues, this could lead to frustration and ultimately scepticism on the part of pupils. It is what MacPhail (2010) labelled as 'a tokenistic approach to consultation, where pupils' contributions are directed and structured by the teachers' (p. 9). A further negative aspect from the perspective of the school was that the School Council might raise issues that schools were not willing to take onboard. This raised the important issue of power relationships between teachers and pupils. Pearce and Wood (2019) stated that power in the traditional classroom was not shared evenly since not only did teachers exert coercive power, but they also exerted power through their position as experts. This power was not something that could be given away or shared so attempts to empower pupils might result in pupil voice taking on the role of 'tokenistic intervention' (Taylor and Robinson, 2009, p. 166). This did not mean that schools should not implement strategies to enable the voice of pupils to be heard, but that all participants should possess the critical tools needed to allow them to examine their relative positions (Taylor and Robinson, 2009).

Clearly, if there is to be pupil participation in school improvement, then it depends to a large degree on teachers being able to acknowledge and give credence to pupil voice. Both teachers and pupils have much to contribute but, as reported by Rudduck and Fielding (2006), each have their own views on their own contributions and those of others. Pupils have much to contribute since they are on the receiving end of the teaching and learning, but it is often unclear how their views might be solicited or in which forum. On the other hand, teachers might find the whole process difficult since they might be anxious about what pupils might say about their professional skills. Pupils could also be anxious since they might feel that talking about teachers is 'rude' and 'wrong', with older pupils being concerned about possible retaliation (Rudduck and Fielding 2006). The use of pupil voice in schools is often 'highly managed by adults who hold a disproportionate amount of

power' (Groundwater-Smith, Dockett and Bottrell, 2015, p55-74). As previously stated, some teachers find the process of giving pupils a voice involves the relinquishing of something of their power in the classroom (Bragg, 2007). Teachers are accustomed to not only evaluating pupils' work but also the pupils themselves. When Bragg (2007) observed pupils producing report cards not only regarding the teaching but also giving targets, she observed that this was 'pupil voice turning things on their head ' (Bragg, 2007, p. 513). If pupils are to be involved in research then it would involve:

a sensitivity to power differentials in order to engage in planning roles and also enactment .... but whilst there is an effort to establish a parity of esteem there are power differentials that need to be acknowledged and understood (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler, 2015, p.166).

Cook-Sather (2002) acknowledged that the value of the views of pupils would involve changes in mindset as well as a change in the structure of educational relationships. However, pupil voice advocates have noted apparent 'inconsistencies' (Robinson, 2014, p.9) and 'contradictions' (Rudduck and Fielding, 2006, p. 223) as schools attempt to employ pupil voice as a reform strategy (Mayes, 2018, p.2). Taylor and Robinson (2009) noted the difference between the ideals of pupil voice and actual practice in schools. Schools have found that strategies that make the most of pupil voice difficult to put into practice. Cremin, Mason and Busher (2011) provide a reason for this difficulty:

In an educational climate where the degree of central control over what happens in school on a day-to-day basis has reached unprecedented levels, is there really a political and professional will to hear what young people have to say? (p. 587).

There is an increasing amount of government control over education with the result that teachers have less control over what they teach and therefore perhaps a decreasing ability to introduce methods that take pupil voice into account. However, Cook-Sather (2006) asserted the vital importance of listening to pupil

voice, noting that when this was done effectively, it led to useful collaboration between staff/pupils and the development of pupil agency. Mitra (2007) further noted that without pupil voice, schools were denying themselves access to data that could not be obtained elsewhere.

Pupil voice in schools provides a way in which the pupils involved are able to take greater responsibility for their learning and, as indicated by Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2015), pupils were beginning to own their learning. If the process involves the pupils undertaking research this raises the issue of who 'owns' the research. This issue of ownership needs to be considered by addressing the continuum of types of research involving pupils. At one level the use of pupil voice might be what has been previously described as 'tokenistic', merely asking for the views of the pupils. Beyond this is a continuum of pupil experience and degree of involvement where pupils actively research a topic and, in conjunction with the adults of the school, the research may then be actioned. A further scenario is pupils actively using their voice and researching a topic that has been provided by an agency outside of school, such as a university or national project. In this latter case, Eilertsen, Gustafson and Salo (2008) note that in this case the micro-politics of the school are ignored as researchers build their case. They point to the issues of politics involving outside researchers with headteachers and teachers. Jones and Stanley (2008) pointed out the additional balancing act which was required when the voices of pupils are involved. This is emphasised further when researchers wish to give voice to vulnerable, marginalised or disenfranchised pupils. The issue of ownership is clearly the core issue when it comes to matters of the voices of children as participants in studies and will need to be given due consideration in all research involving pupil voice. Cook-Sather noted that there are 'particular methodological and epistemological challenges to pupil voice research with very young children' (Cook-Sather, 2014, p. 135). In order to reach these pupils, researchers have employed participatory and visual methods (Clark, 2011; Rizvi, 2011).



It is also interesting when discussing pupil voice to consider pupils' silence in the face of opportunities to contribute their views. Many factors might contribute to this e.g. fear, stubbornness, not knowing what to say, and not being willing to be part of a dialogue (Cook-Sather, 2006).

### **3.3. Participatory Action Research**

A development of pupil giving voice to their views is pupils taking a role in leading a form of research within their school. This form of research has become known as participatory action research (PAR). PAR developed from small projects into mainstream research practice across a broad range of academic disciplines amongst those interested in the lives, views and well-being of children and young people (Kim, 2016). This type of research was collaborative: adults and pupils work together to gather information to promote change. It involves pupils who are concerned about or affected by an issue taking a leading role in producing and using knowledge about it. There has been a wealth of literature regarding researching with children for example, Alderson and Morrow (2011), Bradbury-Jones (2014), Coad, (2012), Coad and Evans (2008), Kellet (2010, 2011), Lundy and McAvoy (2012). This literature brought with it a 'new discourse with which researchers have had to become familiar' (Fox, 2013, p 81). As the research community has become more familiar with using participatory approaches, there has emerged a consensus view that participatory research with children is ethically, methodologically and practically complex. Fox (2013) describes it as a 'messy reality' and one which lacks clear and reflexive reporting about the challenges as well as the advantages (McCarry, 2012; Bishop, 2014; Thomas-Hughes, 2017), and is replete with 'issues and ambiguities' (York and Swords, 2012, p96). Authors have noted that common problems involved in this type of research include the securing of additional time and resources to carry out work that is often relationship-based, and that the pupils taking part are not and should not be taken to be a 'representative' of a larger group (Uprichard, 2010).

A further challenge is the questionability of children's contributions since the interpretation and dissemination of participatory research is still overwhelmingly carried out by adult researchers (McLaughlin, 2006).

When considering the reasons for involving pupils in PAR the main consideration is that the pupils hold some knowledge, when given the opportunity to voice their experiences, which is both unique and rich (Medcalf, 2011). These expressions of experiences have meaning which are rarely the same as those experienced in similar situations by others. It is the analysis of pupils' experiences which allow an insight into the ways in which pupils' knowledge is formed. Pupils' unique experiences can be accessed through the justifications that the pupils give in discussions of their beliefs, perceptions and behaviours. The 'new' sociology of childhood poses a significant challenge to existing discussions by stressing the importance that social research and education policies contribute to the construction of childhood. There is a democratic impetus to allow children to 'define themselves rather than subjecting them to the assumptions and prescriptions of adults' (Grover, 2004, p. 83). According to Lloyd-Smith and Tarr (2000), adult researchers could not assume that observation and the subsequent meaning and understandings that adults bestowed on children's lives were necessarily the meanings that children themselves would have ascribed to their experiences. Therefore, it had to be recognised that children had the capacity for and the entitlement to participation in knowledge production and, as the key stakeholders and supposed beneficiaries of education, it was important that children's voices were heard.

An example of this is provided by Goodnough (2014) where the young participants developed their own research questions into smoking in school and the ways to make the school environment safer and healthier. In this example teachers and an academic partner acted as mentors rather than as research leaders, with all participants working towards a shared goal. However, the pupils who had formed the research group decided to expand the consultation by surveying the whole

school regarding how the school could be made better. Goodnough further claims that the:

processes which were adopted allowed the participants to see themselves as members of a community of practice whose intention was to improve the health and well-being of young people and adults alike (Goodnough, 2014) p. 378).

Brydon-Miller and Maguire (2009) have acknowledged that schools are the ideal site for social change efforts and that PAR is central to that struggle in terms of 'variety and richness of data, important questions and number of potential researchers' (Jacobs, 2016, p. 51). Schools are also workplaces which have influence on pupil learning and teacher behaviour. Teachers are used to being the 'expert' and having 'power' in the classroom but the process of PAR research calls for the teacher to come down from 'their expert mantle in order to adopt a curiosity which all stakeholders bring to a PAR project' (Jacobs, 2016, p. 51). PAR lessens the expert hierarchy by advocating that all participants bring knowledge and experience to the research process (Pine, 2009). That is, far from controlling the research, the teacher adopts an awareness and respect for the process that ensures that all voices are heard. Maguire (1987) referred to this process as one in which teachers and pupils both know some things, neither knows everything. PAR has been seen as beneficial to both pupils and teachers who may gain just as much from the research process as they do from the research findings (Pine, 2009). PAR literature also states that one of the advantages of PAR is that the process is cyclical and not static or linear in nature emphasising the research process as well as the findings (Lykes and Hershberg, 2012; Noffke and Somekh, 2011). Savin-Baden and Wimpenny (2007) state that a PAR project is tasked with producing knowledge and action that is directly beneficial to a school and is empowering through the value of its consciousness-raising.

As research using pupil voice and PAR in schools has developed, questions have arisen about which voices are elicited and listened to (Cook-Sather, 2014). A particular challenge in educational research using pupil voice has been the

tendency to exclude underrepresented or hard to reach pupils in the research. Kellett (2010) noted that there was a lack of pupil voice in literature especially from voices that are harder to hear. The voices of pupils within special schools are one situation in which the voices of pupils are under-researched. In one of the few studies that have been reported, Prunty, Dupont and McDaid (2012) undertook research within schools in Ireland. They obtained the views of 38 children on a variety of issues concluding that there was more favourable support for social issues and learning within the special school than in a mainstream school. Many children reported that learning support was the main reason for choosing a special school. Children also felt that there was a need for the professional development of teachers. Prunty, Dupont and McDaid (2012) noted that these findings demonstrated the ability of pupils with SEN to provide valuable insights into their education.

Cefai and Cooper (2010) pointed out that what pupils with the label BESD have to say about their learning and behaviour in school was not only valid and meaningful but might also contribute to a better understanding and resolution of difficulties. They also make the point that in many schools the 'opportunities for students with SEBD to make their voices heard are still very limited' (p. 184). Cooper (2006) and Lewis and Burnham (2008) all contended that this group of pupils were the least listened to, empowered and liked group of pupils.

Nind, Boorman and Clark (2012) have suggested that those pupils excluded from mainstream education and/or with the label BESD are not being heard. They argue that the voices of these young people are often hidden or unheard in both education and educational research. Seale (2009) makes the point that under-represented pupils need to be included in classroom research, arguing that the inclusion of these pupils for reasons of equity, for the particular insights they offer and for the ways that pupils positioned outside of mainstream education can make all 'educational practices more informed and effective' (Cook-Sather, 2014, p.141). There are further challenges when participatory research methods are employed with vulnerable and/or marginalised groups of children. This research has included

children with disabilities, children who have experienced abuse or neglect and children who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or Queer. PAR has led to the inclusion of children with complex needs or additional social and communication needs (Bailey et al., 2015). It is claimed (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2018) that for children whose needs are complex or uncommon and who may have had difficult or damaging relationships with adults 'participatory approaches go some way to valuing and making visible their unique experiences and insights' (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2018, p.81). There is an emerging body of knowledge which has provided a greater insight into some of the specific groups, for example vulnerable children in Ireland (Yorke and Swords, 2012); children in hospital settings (Bishop, 2014); mental health settings (Graham et al., 2014) and disabled children and young people (Bailey et al., 2015). Bradbury-Jones et al. (2018) undertook a survey of all of the available literature in this area with the aim of mapping the landscape of this rapidly expanding complicated field and to identify 'central methodological, ethical and practical issues reported by researchers' (p. 82). Their findings unearthed the complexities of undertaking PAR with vulnerable children and centred around the key issues of pupils being included or being over-researched and the power of vulnerable children and young people. They conclude that their review provides a 'unique, contemporary analysis of PAR with vulnerable children, illuminating in particular its conceptual complexities and contradictions, particularly regarding power, empowerment and voice' (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2018, p. 90).

The use of PAR offers a means by which marginalised pupils, teachers and researchers can work collaboratively towards positive outcomes for the research participants and their schools (Ferguson, Hanreddy and Draxton, 2011). However, as pointed out by Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2016), there are issues which need to be addressed 'issues such as power and authority, issues of ownership and issues of process' (p. 163).

## **Summary**

This chapter reviewed the literature surrounding the use of pupil voice in schools. The main argument provided for its use was that only the pupils themselves have the knowledge of what their schooling is like on a personal basis. The obtaining of this rich data can only be achieved if pupils are asked for their views and those views are heard and understood by adults within the school. Pupil voice may be an instrument of change within schools, but it is one which schools find it difficult to engage. It may be an easier exercise if pupils involved are articulate and willing to be involved but there are other groups within schools where pupils' views are more difficult to access. These include pupils with SEN.

Researchers have attempted to access the voices of the difficult to reach pupils by using a variety of different techniques, including the use of PAR.

This research considers the largely unheard voices of the pupils with BESD attending special schools.

## **Chapter 4. Ethics**

Ethics consent was approved by the University Ethics Committee before any approach was made to any schools. The approval highlighted the need to proceed with caution in research involving children especially children who were vulnerable (appendix G).

### **4.1 Introduction**

Conducting research inevitably involves some ethical issues. Often these issues can be anticipated and planned for and may form part of the decision-making process before the research commences. Sometimes, however 'ethical challenges and dilemmas are unexpected and emerge as the research unfolds' (Wiles, 2013, p. 9).

In this chapter I will outline the ethical issues that conducting research in a special school with vulnerable pupils posed. I will outline the anticipated and planned-for issues and their solutions, together with the unexpected ethical issues and solutions that arose during the research.

### **4.2. Ethical Dimensions**

#### **4.2.1. Involving Pupils in School-based Research**

In practice involving pupils in school-based research is not straightforward. Educational literature has identified three problems concerning research with pupils: 'speaking about others', 'speaking for others' and 'getting heard' (Fielding, 2004, p. 296-301). Good practice in all research with children requires high ethical standards (Alderson, 2008; Alderson and Morrow, 2011; Farrell, 2005). These ethically-high standards are often reduced to a statement that research should not be carried out on children but rather with them or by them. The minimum requirement of any research involving children is that the child must actively consent to participate in any research project and that they have the right to decline involvement or to withdraw from the research at any time without giving a reason (Hammersley, 2015). These rights for the child have been highlighted in the field of Childhood Studies: the child has the right to participate in the various decisions that are integral to any research that is concerned with them. The child needs to know of the nature of what is to be investigated, what

data is to be collected, how this will be analysed and how the findings will be disseminated and applied (Pascal and Bertram, 2009). Kellett (2005) observed that children themselves should carry out research on children rather than adults. Children's rights imply that at the very least all research with children should be participatory in nature (Beazley et al., 2009). This, in turn, raises the question of the agency of the child. There is a basic acceptance in research ethics that children in law do not have full autonomy (agency) and consequently cannot give consent to participate in research by themselves (O'Neill, 2014). Children it is asserted may 'assent' but not 'consent', and therefore appropriate adults must decide about consent on their behalf. This is the position in the ethical guidelines set out by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2018).

#### **4.2.2. Gatekeepers**

The first contact with the school which consented to be part of the research was by telephone with the headteacher, where an outline of the research was provided. This led to a meeting attended by the headteacher, the PE teacher and me in which a more detailed discussion took place on the nature of the research. The headteacher gave his verbal consent for the research to take place in his school. There was no mention of seeking approval from any other gatekeepers such as the governing body. At this stage, the only agreed feedback to be provided from the research was a pupil-led contribution to a school assembly. At no subsequent time were the research findings in written form asked for by the school, and they did not request that the final research report be submitted to the school for approval. The school did place some restrictions on the research: no staff were to be involved in the data gathering, a member of school staff should attend all meetings (they were invited but never attended) and the school would select the research participants.

It was felt by the Headteacher that all communications with the parents/carers should be as simple as possible whilst still conveying all relevant information. The research information letter together with the parent/carer consent form was provided to the school in the requested simple language and sent home by the school with the school retaining all the signed consent forms (Appendix A). The school, therefore, became the first point of contact for parents/carers for any problems arising from the research



even though the university and the researcher's details were provided (no issues were reported).

#### **4.2.3. Pupils**

The pupil assent forms (appendix A.) were approved by the school and were distributed, read to the pupils, explained and signed at the first meeting of the group. All pupils present indicated that they wished to be part of the research. This procedure was repeated during the research as more pupils were recruited into the final stages of the research.

#### **4.2.4. Confidentiality/Anonymity**

In this research, focusing on a group of vulnerable pupils (pupils with the label BESD attending a special school), stringent ethical guidelines needed to be applied with all consent and assent paperwork being signed off by the stakeholders. The concept of vulnerability in this research took on a further aspect since the pupils concerned talked freely about a range of issues within their PE lessons. One key issue was that of confidentiality. Pupils sought assurances at all stages throughout the research that what they reported was confidential and that it would not be reported to any adults within the school. At the start of each research session, pupils' rights to withdraw and the confidentiality of their replies was reaffirmed (BERA, 2018).

The pupils felt and clearly stated that, if confidentiality was not observed and adults in the school found out what they were discussing, they feared possible reprisals. This was a significant point since the ethical issues of protecting the participants and doing no harm were paramount.

In parallel with the assurances on confidentiality, there were concerns about the anonymity of the pupils in the final research report. In common with guidelines on research with children, the pupils in this research had their details changed so that they could not be traced in any way. In addition, the school, its location and staff were anonymised to prevent the possibility of harm.

Ethical issues arose after the pilot study when it became obvious that the pupils were giving less than favourable accounts of their sole PE teacher. Indeed, this teacher was identified by the pupils as being the one they feared reprisals from. As described earlier, one of the prime ethical aspects of researching with children is that of doing no harm. This research is primarily concerned with the voices and experiences of the pupil research participants, whether they acted as pupil investigators or pupil participants in peer research. This identification of adults within the school and their being aware of negative comments from pupils and posed ethical issues which will be discussed later.

#### **4.2.5. Use of Photography**

The use of photo-elicitation and video photography presents ethical issues since pupils are clearly identifiable. In a special school with vulnerable children, photography and filming raises two important ethical issues. Firstly, some of the children on roll were not allowed to be photographed. Fortunately, none of the pupils who were selected to take part in the research had this restriction. Secondly, in the photo-elicitation part of the research, the pupils took photographs around the school. Whilst every attempt was made to obtain pupil permission before they were photographed, there was the potential that pupils in the background had not given their permission. These pupils were readily identifiable and may have included some of the pupils who were not allowed to be photographed. In order to overcome this ethical issue, all the photographs taken in this part of the research were reviewed by the pupils and then deleted from the pupil cameras, ensuring the confidentiality of those concerned.

The second ethical issue was that of ownership of the video film. It was intended to edit the videoed interviews and use them to make a video film which the pupils involved would show to the special school during an assembly. The pupils had been involved in all aspects of making the film. They had ownership and therefore their consent would be needed at all stages of production and distribution.

Given the pupils' fears about possible reprisals, all pupils involved agreed that the final film would not contain any images they felt would be potentially harmful. The pupils unanimously agreed that none of the comments about the teacher should be included in the school copy of the video film. In addition, discussions took place both with the

pupil owners of the film and the university concerned about possible film distribution. It was agreed that a copy of the film would be provided for the school, together with a personal copy for each of the three pupil investigators who produced it. A further condition was imposed which said that the film could only be shown within the school (letter to pupil investigators in appendix B).

#### **4.2.6. Ethical issues arising from the research**

The video film was not the only ethical issue since, as detailed above, the final pupil edit of the film would not include all the video footage. This footage in its entirety formed the basis of this research and would be needed for the final thesis. The pupils agreed that, with all the safeguards in place, the entire text of the content filmed could be used as part of the research thesis.

This situation of the final thesis containing pupil comments gave rise to a further complex ethical issue. The thesis would contain a selection of the pupils' comments and would be published at a later date. However, by the publication date all the pupils concerned would have left the school and be therefore away from any fear of staff reprisal. This provided a solution to the issue of doing no harm.

Concern about gatekeepers and the teacher involved becoming aware of negative pupils' comments remained. It might be anticipated that the headteacher and the PE teacher involved, knowing that the research had taken place in the school, would be on the lookout for the publication of the research. In addition, it could be argued that the negative pupil comments might have an adverse effect on the school and the teacher's promotion prospects. Since the identity of the school was anonymised, it could be argued that any harm to the school would be minimal since there was only a very small group of people who knew of the research. It is possible and noted in the field notes that the staff of the school had not been informed that the research was taking place. The research never took place on a settled day of the week, in a specific place or time. This often resulted in staff double booking classrooms or booking outside speakers at short notice, at the time when the research group was due to meet. The ethical issue of the teacher who was the subject of pupil's negative comments being given a right of reply was a cause of serious concern. Such was the

pupils' fear of reprisals, any communication of the research findings with the teacher concerned would/could impinge on the major ethical standard of doing no harm. The ethical dilemma seemed to be that of doing no harm to the pupils or doing no harm to the teacher concerned. Clearly there was the possibility of the teacher being harmed professionally if identified. In this case since all the anonymity/confidentiality issues were in place, the potential harm to the teacher was superseded by the immediate possibility of the pupils' fears being realised if the teacher was informed. The pragmatic solution meant that on this occasion for the sake of doing no harm to the pupils involved, the teacher would not be informed of the negative comments nor given a right to reply.

It could also be argued that any research undertaken by pupils within school has the possibility of producing some negative comments

### **Summary**

The research ethics employed in this research complied with the conditions outlined in the universities 'Research Ethics Policy and Procedures'. This research produced some unexpected and potentially challenging ethical issues. It was anticipated that, in the course of the research, pupils would make some comments on their teachers. What was not expected and could not have been foreseen was the overwhelming negative nature of these comments. This brought into focus the research aim of 'doing no harm' and gave rise to a lengthy review of the issues involved. Eventually, when a definitive solution could not be found and after all the issues raised had been examined, a pragmatic solution was put in place.

## **Chapter 5. Methodology**

### **5.1. Introduction**

Research can be commonly defined as having three purposes: to explore, to describe and/or to explain (Robson and McCartan, 2017). This research will describe and/or explain as appropriate, but since the topic of the research is an underdeveloped area, its main purpose will be to begin to explore relatively-uncharted waters. In order to achieve the three main purposes, the researcher needs to understand the interrelated components of the research design and its underlying theory, as well as developing suitable research questions, methods and sampling strategies (Robson, 2016). This chapter will take a reflective stance on the development of the research design used in this research and will assess the rationales, justifications and obstacles which led to the adoption of the selected methodological approaches.

This chapter outlines the process of obtaining data on the research questions from a group of pupils who all had the label BESD and who attended a special school. This chapter begins with exploring the purpose and aims of the research including personal and reflexive aims, before considering the theoretical underpinning of the research. The possible research methods which might be used in the research are discussed, as is the decision about the methods by which the research will address its aims: photo elicitation, focus groups, interviews and the novel use of the pupils as investigators using video-filmed interviews of their peers.

### **5.2. Purpose of the research**

There is a consensus of agreement that the purpose of research is to find answers to questions (Kumar, 2014), and there are a multitude of research methods/approaches that may be used to achieve this objective. The selected research methods in this research reflect the main research question. The main question of this study is the exploration of the experiences and perceptions of PE, of a group of 15 year old pupils who have been

labelled BESD and who attend a special school. A participatory research approach was decided upon to enable a rich exploration of the experiences of the pupils.

This research aims to examine an area which has so far been under-researched. Pupils labelled BESD attending a special school were encouraged to give their perceptions and experiences of their PE lessons. As previously noted, there is an abundance of research into PE within mainstream education which has highlighted the potential benefits of being involved in PE lessons (Bailey et al., 2009). Their literature review examined PE from the perspective of pupils, was refined to examine pupils with SEN within PE (Coates and Vickerman, 2008, 2010; Coates, 2010) and further refined to include pupils with the label BESD (Medcalf et al., 2011). The research of Medcalf et al. (2011) addressed the perceptions of PE of pupils labelled BESD in a variety of school settings, but not specifically within special schools. There is very limited research specifically exploring the perceptions of pupils labelled BESD.

A review of the literature which explored pupils' perceptions of PE using qualitative research highlighted four key areas for study:

- The child's perception of their participation/inclusion in and accessibility of PE.
- The child's perception of others and teachers about PE.
- The child's perception of being treated differently to other children.
- The child's opportunities to take part in extra-curricular activities.

A review of the literature revealed that previous studies had used a variety of methodologies, all attempting to obtain information from pupils about their experiences and perceptions. Studies had attempted to use aspects of pupil voice to allow pupils to make known their perceptions and experiences. Qualitative research and pupil voice have been used as powerful methods in the examination of pupils' perceptions (Fitzgerald et al., 2003; Fitzgerald, 2005; Coates, 2010, 2011; Coates and Vickerman, 2008, 2010).

This research will build on previous studies, and adds to this knowledge by focusing on the views and perceptions of a very specific group of SEN pupils, namely pupils labelled BESD in a special school environment.

### **5.3. Developing the research**

#### **5.3.1. Personal Statement**

The reasons behind this thesis were long and convoluted, and include an account of what has gone before in terms of my personal experiences. My experiences in education, together with my academic work, have all contributed to the identification of the need for this research.

I was a teacher of PE for the whole of my long teaching career and have held positions at all levels in secondary schools from new entrant right up to senior teacher level. I have worked in secondary schools of all types and sizes ranging from 200 pupils up to schools with 2000+ pupils. In these situations, I endeavoured to use my personal love of sport, activity and the great outdoors as a motivational tool to engage pupils in what I hoped would develop into a life-long interest in sport.

At the age of 50, I decided that the time had come to give up teaching of PE in mainstream schools and move into a new area of education. This corresponded with my appointment to a special school for pupils who had the label of Moderate Learning Difficulty (MLD) with a large proportion also having the label BESD. The culture shock of moving from a school of 2000+ pupils to one of 80 pupils was intense but a greater shock was to occur when I asked what part of the curriculum I was to teach. I was informed that 'it did not matter what I taught if I sent them home happy' (Headteacher).

Notwithstanding this, I set about planning enough work for my first six weeks, only to find that after six weeks' progress had been much slower than I had expected, and I had barely scratched the surface of my planning. This was a marked difference between the progress that could be achieved or was expected in a mainstream school as compared to

my new special school. The special school pupils were not expected by the teachers to make progress as it was felt that pupils did not have the necessary skills.

A real period of personal development occurred when, through a long-term illness of a member of staff, I became a class teacher to a group of 12-year olds, mostly boys, with BESD as a primary or secondary need on their Statements. It soon became apparent that the teaching methods I had relied upon throughout my teaching career did not work with this group of pupils as learning for its own sake was positively rejected, but the pupils had 'energy to burn' which could be utilised. There followed an uneasy period in which classroom work was interspersed with periods of physical activity and I slowly formed relationships with the pupils. I remained the class teacher of this group for the whole of their school career and during this time we built up good relationships in which sport and activity played a daily part.

Building on these small foundations and over a period of political and educational change in special schools, I developed a curriculum for all the curriculum areas (not just PE) that was suitable for this school and the needs of its pupils.

The introduction of the Labour Government's Physical Education and School Sport (PESS) policy together with the Specialist College programme gave me the opportunity to further develop my ideas about special school PE and to have a wider influence over the teaching of PE in the local area. It was with the backing of the headteacher and the approval of the governing body that the school applied for and was successful in becoming a Specialist Special School Sports College and the centre for the local School Sport Partnership (SSP) with all the funding and influence that brought. Becoming the sports college at the heart of the SSP gave us influence over the not-inconsiderable funding and also meant that the school became the administrative centre for the partnership which consisted of 55 primary schools, 3 special schools and 8 secondary schools. This was a powerful position for a small special school.



Sadly, three years into this arrangement, a Conservative Government came to power and the funding ceased almost immediately. This coincided with my retirement from the teaching profession.

Retirement gave me the opportunity to review in more detail the perceived benefits which taking part in physical activity might bring to the education of pupils within special schooling, but I was poorly prepared to undertake this form of study. As a practitioner working full-time in the field, I suffered from what I had noticed in other teachers: being too involved in the day-to-day commitment of doing the job to have the time to think in detail about what was really happening within our classrooms. Enrolment at Sheffield Hallam University provided the catalyst for a greater exploration of the issues involved.

#### **5.4. Research Aims**

The aim of this research was to find out from the pupils themselves what their perceptions and experiences of PE were within their school. If the research was to achieve this aim, the research design would need to consider several factors identified in previous research and from personal experience of working in education. It has been noted that researchers ‘whether we are aware of it or not, always bring certain beliefs and philosophical assumptions to research’ (Cresswell, 2013, p. 15). These beliefs are often deeply-ingrained views which need to be understood in order to provide a personal standpoint for the development of the research aims. When considering the philosophical assumptions which underpin research, it is important to consider the assumptions that shape how we formulate the problem and research questions, and how we seek information in order to answer the research questions (Huff, 2009). These assumptions have been articulated by various authors over the last twenty years (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; 2000; 2005; 2011). These assumptions have been called paradigms (Lincoln, Lynham and Guba, 2011; Mertens, 2010); philosophical assumptions, epistemologies and ontologies (Crotty, 1998); broadly conceived methodologies (Neuman, 2000) and alternative knowledge claims (Cresswell, 2009). They are beliefs about ontology (the

nature of reality), epistemology (what counts as knowledge and how knowledge claims are justified), axiology (the role of values in research) and methodology (the process of research) (Cresswell, 2013).

#### **5.4.1. Ontology – the nature of reality**

Ontology concerns itself with the nature of reality and its characteristics. Research design begins with a consideration of the ontological position of the researcher. Multiple realities make up the nature of existence; there are no right and wrong answers. People see the world differently depending on their roles, value sets or backgrounds (Dilts and DeLozier, 2000). Each researcher embraces different realities, as do the research participants. The position taken by the researcher is important since it affects how they embrace the nature of reality and how the researcher 'can know' (Briggs and Coleman, 2007, p. 18). When individuals are to be studied, the researcher will need to explore the multiple realities experienced by the research participants and this is often, as in the case of phenomenological research, by reporting how the individuals in the study view their experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

In this research, as described in my personal statement, I was in the position of having worked as a teacher in a special school. What for me was the *reality* of the situation: the individual school, the curriculum offer, lessons, role model, experience, personal, social beliefs all had to be appreciated as being influenced by my own personal beliefs system. They were not the beliefs of the children that I taught, indeed I had little knowledge of the realities of the pupils. This research aimed to explore the pupils' realities and, in order to achieve this goal, I needed to temper my own realities and beliefs and find ways of developing an understanding of the pupils' lived experiences and the realities of their lives.

#### **5.4.2. Epistemology - what counts as knowledge**

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy concerned with the theory of knowledge. One method of finding out knowledge is to attempt to get as close as possible to the participants being studied 'therefore subjective evidence is assembled based on the individual views' (Cresswell, 2013, p. 20). Cresswell (2013) contended that this is how knowledge was known – through the subjective experience of people. It therefore is important that studies are conducted in the same location as the participants live and work, thereby providing a context for the understanding of participants' experiences. This is summed up by (Guba and Lincoln, 1988, p. 94) as 'minimizing the distance or objective separateness' between the researcher and those being researched. My research was conducted solely within the pupils' own special school.

#### **5.4.3. Axiology - the role of values in research**

Axiology is the philosophical study of value; it explores the value question of what is intrinsically worthwhile. In simple terms, axiology focuses on what the researcher values in their research. This is important because the researcher's values affect how they conduct their research and how they interpret their research findings.

All researchers bring their own values to their study, this is the axiological assumption (Cresswell, 2013, p. 20). This assumption is addressed by the researcher being aware that their study is value-laden, and attempting to actively note their own values and biases as well as the value-laden nature of the information gathered from the field (Cresswell, 2013, p. 20). In qualitative research, the researchers 'position themselves' in the research. Specifically, axiology is engaged with assessment of the role of researcher's own values and its effects on all stages of the research.

Axiology questions whether the research is attempting to explain or predict the world, or seeking to understand it.

This research aims to understand the perspectives of pupils and every attempt has been made to use the authentic responses of the pupils which are reported verbatim. The position of the researcher in this research will be discussed later (positionality of the researcher).

#### **5.4.4. Methodology**

Methodology is 'the theory (or set of ideas about the relationship between phenomena) of how researchers gain knowledge in research contexts and why' (Briggs and Coleman, 2007, p. 19). Methodology is much more than methods or techniques for conducting research but rather a 'reason' for conducting the research and decisions made by the researcher as to the most appropriate strategies to gather data in order to explore the aims of the research. Methodology provides a rationale for the ways in which researchers conduct research activities. It provides underlying reasons 'why' a certain approach to the research has been undertaken to address one or more of the research questions.

Epistemological and methodological concerns are implicated at every stage of the research (Briggs and Coleman, 2007) since in research the questions being asked develop and change as the study progresses to reflect better ways of accessing data and the understanding of the research problem. The data collection strategy planned at the beginning of the research needs to be flexible in order to reflect the changing nature of the research. Therefore the 'why' (Briggs and Coleman, 2007, p. 19) is important in the development of the research.

#### **5.4.5. Positionality of the Researcher**

The investigation of the lived experiences of pupils within PE posed questions for the research design. These centred around the pupils themselves and their willingness to provide answers to questions provided by an outsider within their school; the reluctance on the part of the pupils to view anything which looked like school work with enthusiasm; the age of the researcher and the possible pupil view that he looked like a teacher; trust

and its development. These issues needed to be addressed before substantive research could begin. The role of the researcher is important in all research and includes the research participants' relationships and the setting. In this research the positionality of the researcher is complex.

The two most noted positions within research are those of 'insider' and 'outsider' but with a continuum of positions between these two extremes. Insider research commonly involves researchers who are already part of the research group as in the researcher who researches their own organization. At the beginning of the research such a researcher is already 'a native', 'indigenous' or 'inside' (Bonner and Tolhurst et al., 2002). Outsiders are non-members of a group as in research being undertaken by universities within schools. The researcher may well be well-qualified in the field of education but in the school situation is not part of the school and is seen as an outsider.

In research which aims to involve pupils in data collection, the pupils are identified as being the insiders and the researcher as being either a member of the school staff (insider) or a visiting researcher (outsider). In research with pupils, if the pupils are to play a full and important part in the research, they should be an active part of the collaboration between the researcher and pupils. My research is a 'reciprocal collaboration of insider/outsider teams who undertake collaborative forms of participatory action research that achieve equitable power relations' (Herr and Anderson, 2005, p. 40). The equitable power relationships are important in this research since it was only by obtaining the pupils' trust through good relationships that access to their lived experiences of PE was possible.

## **5.5. The Research Framework**

Researchers consider philosophical assumptions as key premises that are folded into frameworks used in research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). These assumptions, which researchers draw on either implicitly or explicitly as a set of beliefs, are called paradigms (Briggs and Coleman, 2007, p. 19). In educational research the term paradigm is used to

describe a researchers 'worldview (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) define a 'worldview' as the 'perspective, or thinking, or school of thought, or set of shared beliefs, that informs the meaning or interpretation of the research data' (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017, p. 26).

There is controversy in the literature about what a paradigm is. In a review of the relevant literature Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) conclude that the definitions given by leaders in the field such as Guba and Lincoln (2005), Cresswell (1998) and Cresswell and Miller, (2000) betray a lack of agreement on what constitutes a paradigm. In addition, they found that some of the definitions or explanations overlapped. Creswell's (1998) definition of a paradigm is 'a basic set of assumptions that guide their (researchers') inquiries' (p. 74) and this aligns with the worldview perspective of a paradigm. Lincoln's (1990) definition as 'alternative world views with such pervasive effects that . . . permeates every aspect of a research inquiry, goes beyond this and encapsulates other perspectives of paradigm without being specific' (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017, p. 29).

Morgan (2007) noted that in social science there are several ways of viewing a paradigm:

A paradigm means a world view, a paradigm is an epistemological stance, a paradigm is a set of shared beliefs among members of a specialty area, and a paradigm as a model example of research (p. 50).

In educational research many paradigms have been suggested by researchers but Candy (1989) suggested that a grouping into three main taxonomies: Positivist, Interpretive and Critical. However other researchers have also proposed a fourth that borrows elements from these three and is known as the Pragmatic paradigm (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003).

#### **5.5.1. Positivist Paradigm**

Positivist researchers view enquiry as a series of logically refined steps. They use multiple layers of data analysis often using computer software and write up their findings as a form of scientific report (Cresswell, 2013). This scientific type report uses a form of cause

and effect and relies on deductive logic, formulation of hypotheses, testing the hypotheses, offering operational definitions and mathematical equations, calculations, explorations and expressions to derive conclusions (Cresswell, 2013).

This type of research has a place in educational research for those who desire a scientific approach to their research, but there are researchers who, whilst employing a social science theoretical lens, do not believe in strict cause and effect. These researchers do not use the strict cause and effect type of research but rather 'recognise that cause and effect is a probability which may or may not occur' (Cresswell, 2013, p. 24). Cresswell terms this type of research as being postpositivist.

Research with and by pupils is potentially complex in nature with a fluidity that does not easily conform to a scientific type approach and for this reason the positivist/postpositivist paradigm was rejected for this research.

#### **5.5.2. Interpretive Paradigm**

The Interpretive paradigm aims to understand the subjective world of human experience (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). The aim is to:

get into the head of the subjects being studied so to speak, and to understand and interpret what the subject is thinking or the meaning he/she is making of the context (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017, p. 33).

In educational research the use of the Interpretivist paradigm differs from that of the post/positivist paradigm in that it has the view that reality is not out there waiting to be discovered as facts, but rather is a construct within which people understand reality in different ways. Interpretive researchers recognize that they are part of the research rather than separate from their research topics. This is a two-way understanding since they acknowledge that they have an impact on their participants and that the participants in turn have an impact on them. The researcher attempts to try to explore the meanings of events and phenomena from the research participants' perspectives.

This research aims to listen to pupils' perceptions and experiences of PE, therefore the use of the Interpretive paradigm is a good fit for this research.

#### **5.5.3. Critical Paradigm.**

The Critical paradigm situates its research in social justice issues and seeks to address 'the political, social and economic issues which lead to oppression, conflict, struggle and power structures at whatever levels these might occur' (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017, p. 35). As research in this paradigm seeks to change the politics of the issue, to confront social oppression and improve the social justice of the situation, it is often referred to as the Transformative paradigm.

As previously stated, this research aims to allow the voice of the pupils to be heard but does not aim to address any issues raised in a transformative way. This research does not seek to bring about change so this paradigm was rejected.

#### **5.6.4. Pragmatic Paradigm**

This paradigm arose from philosophers who argued that it was not possible to access the 'truth' about the real world solely using scientific methods, nor was it possible to determine social reality as constructed under the Interpretivist paradigm. The Pragmatic paradigm takes a world-view focusing on the problem being studied and the questions asked about the problem. It is not committed to any one system but rather the selection of the system of 'best fit'. This system could be a combination of methods, techniques and procedures that best meet the researcher's needs. This framework also allows the use of both qualitative and quantitative inquiry.

This is a very flexible paradigm which has many positive attributes allowing freedom of choice for the researcher, but for this research the Interpretive paradigm is preferred as it provides a way that the researcher can work on and with the data. The interpretive researcher recognises that they are part of the research and the research topics about



which they are exploring meaning. Both the researcher and the pupils involved in the research impact each other as they explore meaning. The Interpretive paradigm allows for a more literary style of writing to be adopted. This is essential if the accounts of the pupils' perceptions and experiences are to be an accurate account of their views.

## **5.6. The Theoretical Position of the Research**

This research is set within a social constructivist framework. This framework has often been described as interpretive (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Mertens, 2010). Social constructivism is concerned with how individuals seek to understand the world in which they live. Individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences (Cresswell, 2013). The role of constructivist research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation. These views are 'formed through the interaction with others and through the historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals' lives' (Cresswell, 2013, p. 25). Constructivist researchers often address the processes of interaction amongst individuals and recognize that their own background will shape the interpretations they make, acknowledging how interpretations flow from their own personal background. The researcher's intent is to 'make sense or interpret the meanings others have of the world' (Cresswell, 2013, p. 25). Social Constructivism is often seen in phenomenological studies in which individuals describe their experiences (Moustakas, 1994)

Crotty (2009) described social constructivism as examining how meanings are placed on everyday experience as a social construct determined by human action, interaction and thought. Social constructivism is therefore concerned with how individuals construct and make sense of their world. This approach emphasizes the world of experience as it is lived, felt and undergone by people acting in social situations (Schwandt, 2007). One of the key tenets of social constructivism is the understanding that the world is a construct made in the minds of individuals. These constructions are not based on the actual reality of the world but rather on the meaning the constructions have for the individual (O'Reilly and Kiyimba, 2015). Pupils with the label BESD will have had a variety of lived experiences

which will have influenced the way in which their individual views have been constructed and internalized, and this will of course apply to the context of PE lessons. Galloway, Armstrong and Tomlinson (1994) noted that EBD is itself a social construction in the way that it is identified, perceived and evoked by relationships and situations. They further state that any consideration of the problem behaviours associated with EBD without taking account of the context in which they occur makes them difficult to understand or interpret. It is this need to understand the perspectives of the pupils' lived experiences that led to the selection of one of the qualitative perspectives which share the features of social constructivism. These include phenomenology and hermeneutic approaches. Both approaches have been used extensively in recent years especially by social science researchers (Robson and McCartan, 2016).

#### **5.6.1. Phenomenology**

Phenomenology is a movement created by Edmund Husserl who argued that perceptions are influenced by expectations, assumptions, anticipations and sensory input. He believed that phenomenology would allow researchers to move beyond their natural 'attitude' so that reality could be perceived more objectively (Rennie, 1999). Phenomenology is a way of thinking that emphasizes the need for researchers to achieve an understanding of their research participants' world from the participants' point of view (O'Reilly and Kiyimba, 2015). The aim of phenomenology is to bring about a greater understanding of the lived experiences of individuals (Starks and Brown Trinidad, 2007). Individuals are encouraged to identify the essential qualities of their experience (Giorgi and Giorgi, 2008). In order to achieve this, the researcher attempts to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon into a description of a universal experience. What van Manen (1990) called 'to grasp the very nature of the thing' (p. 177).

This 'thing', the phenomenon, is the object to be identified by the researcher from participants' human experiences. In this research this phenomenon is the pupil's unique experiences and perceptions of PE lessons. Data is collected from the participants who

experience the phenomenon, from which a composite description of the essence of the experience can be described. This description is what Moustakas (1994) called the what and how of the experience.

Several features are typically included in most phenomenological research: the identification of the phenomenon to be explored which can be expressed as a single concept or idea, the exploration of the phenomenon by a group of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon, philosophical discussion about the basis of conducting a phenomenology on the lived experiences of individuals and data collection typically by interviews although there has been a development of 'novel' methods such as drawings and poems (Coates, 2010). Data analysis tends to concentrate on 'what' the individuals have experienced and 'how' they experienced it.

One of the challenges of undertaking phenomenological research is that of 'bracketing' in which the researcher aims to:

suspend or bracket their own assumptions, beliefs and preconceptions whilst analysing participants' narratives in order to enable them to see the world from the participants' perspectives (O'Reilly and Kiyimba, 2015, p. 15).

Bracketing is difficult to achieve since any interpretation of the research data always incorporates the assumptions that the researcher brings to the topic (van Manen, 1990). The effects of my own personal assumptions in this research have been minimised through the practice of personal reflection at every stage throughout the research including my own position as a researcher. They have also been influenced by my reading of background material, discussions with my research supervisor and peers and attendance at research seminars. These have all helped to moderate my own personal assumptions. Every effort was made to ensure that the data provided by the pupils remained as close as possible to the spoken word of the pupils. In order to allow the needs and opinions of the pupils to be 'front and centre', pupils' own language has been used throughout this research.

Hermeneutic phenomenology was developed by Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) from a starting point of theology. He was a pupil of Edward Husserl (1859-1938) and appeared to be the 'heir apparent' to take over the work of Husserl, but he later disassociated himself from the work of Husserl and developed the field of hermeneutic phenomenology. Like phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with the 'life world' or human experience. The focus is toward illuminating details and seemingly trivial aspects within experience that might be taken for granted in our lives, with a goal of creating meaning and achieving a sense of understanding (Wilson and Hutchinson, 1991). It was the method by which the exploration of lived experience is conducted that caused the rift between Husserl and Heidegger (Lavery, 2003). While Husserl focused on understanding beings or phenomena, Heidegger focused on the 'Dasein' or the 'mode of being human' or the 'situated meaning of being human in the world' (Lavery, 2003, p. 24). Husserl was interested in acts of attending, perceiving, recalling and thinking about the world and human beings were understood primarily as knowers. Heidegger, in contrast, viewed humans as being primarily concerned creatures with an emphasis on their fate in an alien world (Annells, 1996 ; Jones, 1975).

Taking a broader view of phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology there are important distinctions to be made which apply when these two linked philosophies are used as methodologies. Phenomenological research is descriptive and focuses on the structure of experience, the organising principles that give form and meaning to the lifeworld. Hermeneutical research is interpretive and concentrates on historical meanings of experience and their developmental and cumulative effects on individual and social levels (Lavery, 2003, p. 27). Hermeneutics therefore is the 'practice or art of interpretation' (Dallmayr, 2009, p. 23) and involves the 'restoration of meaning' (Ricoeur, 1970 p. 8). Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a contemporary qualitative methodology, first developed by Jonathan Smith (1996). In which IPA recognises that analysis always involve interpretation and is strongly connected to hermeneutics in its recognition of the investigator's centrality to analysis and research (Brocki and Wearden,

2006). Research which requires the collection of 'insider' perspectives needs, according to the methodology of IPA:

a double hermeneutic: the participant is trying to make sense of their personal and social world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their personal and social world (Smith, 2004, p. 40).

This double hermeneutic requires that the participant be able to articulate their experiences and the researcher is able to dissect the experiences. It has been noted that this allows the research phenomenon to 'shine forth, but detective work is required by the researcher to facilitate the coming forth, and then to make sense of it once it has happened' (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p. 35). It has been acknowledged by Heidegger (1962) that this process is closely linked to the researchers' own preconceptions, but IPA recognises that there is an impracticality in trying to gain access to the exact personal world of the research participant. The objective must therefore be to get a description that gets as close as possible to the participant's views (Larkin, Watts and Clifton, 2006).

This research aims to understand the experiences of pupils with the label BESD of their PE lessons and is constructed on the notion that their perceptions have been constructed through their lived experiences of the social world they inhabit. In order to access and understand the meaning that the pupil places on these experiences, it is necessary to consult with pupils and to embrace personal narratives regarding their experiences (Coates, 2010). This research aims not only hear the voices of the pupils but also, by using appropriate research methods, to allow pupils to reflect on their experiences and to speak up on issues that affect them.

#### **5.6.2. Research with pupils not on pupils**

Involving pupils in research has changed over time. Where once pupils were objects of research rather than subjects, more participatory approaches involving pupils are now the commonest type of research involving pupils (Bradbury-Jones and Taylor, 2015). The

subsequent enthusiasm for this type of research with pupils seems to suggest that it is an effective mode of research (Tisdall, 2012). The two main forms of this collaboration are where adults act as the primary investigators and involve pupils at selected stages of the research, and where adults and pupils conduct the research together as co-researchers. The two most frequently noted reasons for this shift in position are: the emergence of the new sociology of childhood with its 're-conceptualisation of children who actively participate in their social world' (Chae-Young, 2016, p. 230) and the adoption of the UNCRC (1989). The methodological assumptions which underpin research by pupils is that they are able (or better able than adults) to contribute to knowledge production about their own lives. These methodological assumptions suggest that the pupils have 'the competency to act as primary investigators and have distinct vantage points from which to understand their own and other pupils' lives' (Chae-Young, 2016, p. 233). The assumption that pupils are competent to conduct research is a contested one with authors such as Kellett (2004) suggesting that social experience is a more reasonable measure of competency than age. Dyson and Meagher (2001) suggested that research had certain inherent quality standards which pupils might find difficult to achieve and therefore any resulting research would be inferior. This argument was refuted by Kellett (2004) who argued that pupils had the ability to learn research skills if these were made available to them.

A second assertion was that pupils were better positioned to do research about their peers since they had things in common with them making them better-placed than adults. Tisdall (2012) however pointed out that being an expert on their own lives did not mean that they would be an expert on the lives of their peers. Thomson and Gunter (2007) noted that, although any one pupil would not be able to speak for all pupils, there was nevertheless a shared characteristic: the pupils' standpoint. There is some evidence that pupils feel that they are able to be franker with other pupils than with adults (Bucknall, 2012). Kellett (2011), however, found evidence that suggested the existence of power dynamics between pupil researchers and their respondents which might affect

research data. It is important to consider the context of the research and the possible factors which might influence the decision to use pupil researchers.

In this research it was felt that, in the initial stages, the research would be undertaken with pupils since the pupils' capacity to undertake research was unknown. As the research progressed, it became clear that pupils had much more to give to the research and a fuller involvement would enhance the pupils' experience of research and enrich the research findings.

### **5.6.3. Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Cresswell, 2013, p. 44).

Qualitative research is used when there is a need for individuals to share their stories and have their voices heard, and a desire to minimize the power relationships which often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study (Cresswell, 2013). In addition, qualitative research is useful when statistical measures (as used in quantitative research) are not suitable for the research problem. Interactions with people are difficult to capture using statistical methods as these measures are not sensitive to such individual differences as gender, race, and economic status. In this research, with its focus on the lived experiences of the pupils, the use of qualitative research allowed pupils to talk about their experiences and perceptions, enabling a fuller picture to emerge. Qualitative approaches are a better fit for this research.

One of the disadvantages of qualitative research, as Bryman (2001) noted, was that qualitative research is subjective, and that there are few opportunities to go back and re-examine or replicate findings. In this research pupils had regular PE lessons and the specifics were unlikely to be replicated over time. The experiences of PE were therefore unsuitable for scientific replication and analysis.

In this research the need to use approaches that were different from the pupils' perceptions of 'schoolwork' was more important than the need to replicate findings, therefore qualitative research methods were a better fit. This has been the view of other researchers in this field who described qualitative methods as being superior when examining pupils' perspectives (Goodwin and Watkinson, 2000; Fitzgerald et al., 2003; Coates and Vickerman, 2010).

#### **5.6.4. The Research Questions**

This research examined the experiences and perceptions of PE by pupils who had been labelled BESD and were attending a special school. It did this by focussing on the primary question: 'What are the experiences and perceptions of PE, of a group of 15-year-old pupils who have been labelled BESD and who attend a special school? It is within this primary question that the sub-questions were addressed:

4. How do the pupils experience their PE lessons?
5. How do peer-relationships and pupil-staff relationships affect the pupil's experiences of their PE lessons?
6. Is PE important to the pupils?

Research design has been described by Robson and McCartan (2017) as turning research questions into projects. Essential to this process are: the purpose of the research; the conceptual framework which underpins the research; the research questions; the methods and the sampling procedures. The production of a research design is an organic process in which there are likely to be many changes. It may be best described as a journey in which there will be several changes of direction. In this research there was the need to undertake self-critical reflection about the nature of the research, its direction, its purpose and what the research was attempting to achieve. Such reflection also took place about my own personal and professional experiences and what they might bring to bear on the research.



#### **5.6.5. Self-Criticality/Reflection**

I outlined my previous career as a teacher in my personal statement. I have taught PE in both special schools and in secondary schools, but that is not the whole story behind the pathway taken to this research project. Prior to the development of the NCPE, I had undertaken research for my M.Phil. on the PE curriculum which was being taught in schools in a shire county (at this point teachers within the schools had autonomy within the school context to design their own curriculum). This study showed that pupils in different schools were subject to a wide variety of differing experiences ranging from very limited to extensive. The development of the NCPE provided a degree of structure within PE, with schools being required to teach similar activities selected from a broad range but within the following categories: invasion games; net games; swimming; outdoor education and gymnastics. The NCPE applied to all schools including special schools, but not all special schools. Indeed, not all schools of course had similar facilities or access to similar expertise. The experiences of pupils were very varied. Alongside these developments, there was an ongoing and wide-ranging debate amongst PE professionals about how diverse populations of pupils (with all forms of SEN) could be included in secondary schools.

Inclusion of all pupils with SEN in mainstream PE settings has been the subject of some research which have resulted in a few published studies (Fitzgerald, 2005; Coates and Vickerman, 2008; Coates, 2010). Part of the inclusion debate within PE in schools centred around pupils with physical or severe learning disabilities being included in PE activities. Ways were found to adapt activities and schools were provided with adaptations of some of the major games for use with these pupils. Special schools found themselves inundated with well-meaning advice as to how to adapt NCPE to suit the diverse nature of special schools, and given examples of suitable alternative activities e.g. boccia, seated volleyball etc. Such games suited some pupils but not others, since within special schools it was possible to have pupils with physical disabilities being taught in the same class as able-bodied pupils with SEN in other categories. This diversity of need was one of the topics

covered in inclusion research. Depending on the nature of the special school, there was a high likelihood that a class could consist of a large range of SEN from physical disabilities to pupils with BESD, all being taught together in small classes. This posed an interesting question for the PE teacher: how to effectively teach PE to this diverse class of pupils.

The lack of research in this field together with my own teaching experience provided a starting point for thinking about a possible research topic. I was interested in what the experiences were of pupils, especially pupils labelled BESD, who were experiencing the NCPE in situations potentially very different to their mainstream peers. In addition, the facilities and expertise available to pupils within special schools would differ from those enjoyed by their mainstream peers.

The perspectives of pupils labelled BESD within PE had been little considered in the available literature; their voice was little heard. If this study was to gain a fuller understanding of what they lived experiences of a pupil labelled BESD was like in special school PE, there would be a need to listen to how pupils described their experiences and perceptions of PE. This would allow a deeper insight into their perceptions of the world in which they lived and might provide a fuller understanding of what these pupils needed from future PE lessons.

This research needed to use methods of inquiry that could take into account the unique setting of a special school and the very specific nature of the pupils taking part if it was to be successful.

### **5.7. Timeline of the research**

October 2012	Enrolment at Sheffield Hallam University. Discussions with supervisors around a possible research topic.
June 2013	RF1 Approval.
October 2013	Academic CPD.

	Review of possible literature .
February 2015	RF2 Approval.
April 2015	University Ethics Approval.
	Search for a research school.
June 2015	School agrees to research project.
September 2015	Selection of pupils by school
	Consent/assents obtained.
October 2015	Photo-Elicitation.
November 2015	Focus Groups.
January 2016	Individual interviews.
	Development of pupil investigators.
	Video Equipment sourced.
February 2016	Recruitment of pupil participants
	Consents/assents obtained.
	Pupil investigator video filmed interviews.
May 2016	End of research in school.
June 2016	Video editing
	Video film provided to pupil investigators and school management.
October 2017	Writing

A detailed outline of the phases of the research can be found in Appendix D

### **5.7.1. Selection of the Research School**

This study examined the perceptions and experiences of PE lessons for a group of pupils who all had the label BESD and all attended a special school. This presented the first challenge to the research, since there were not many schools which met the desired

research profile. I decided to use convenience sampling for ease of administration. Convenience sampling involves selecting a sample from a readily available population for research; this was the region in which the university was situated. Inevitably, to find a school which fitted the research profile was difficult due to the specific nature of the research; a special school with Year 11 pupils all having the label BESD. Several schools within the city were identified as having pupils with the label BESD. The headteachers of the identified schools were all written to twice and telephoned a maximum of three times to discuss the research, but all attempts to engage failed (the schools' secretaries always promised to pass a message to the headteachers but there were not any returned calls). I interpreted this as the schools' lack of desire to be involved in the research.

The next stage of the process was to widen the search for a suitable school. One school expressed interest via a personal contact but this offer was declined since it was felt, as it was a private boarding school for pupils with the label BESD, this would inevitably lead to a different set of pupil experiences than those of pupils attending state-funded schools.

The failure to procure a school within the city led to the search being extended to an adjacent shire county. The process of convenience sampling was diminishing, as there were only three possible special schools within a 30-mile radius of the research base within the shire county. Fortunately, one of these schools indicated an interest in becoming the research school. It can be argued that having a choice of only one school in which to conduct the research would affect the research findings, but this was to be a phenomenological research project in which small research groups were acceptable. With only one small school being researched, it would not be possible to generate any general findings from the research. It is always the case in phenomenological research that any findings are unique to the research school, with little possibility to make more general conclusions. The experiences and perceptions expressed by the pupils involved would be their individual experiences of their PE lessons and reported as such. If this was a large-scale research project, then researching one small school could be a problem. Since the aim of this research, however, was to find out the experiences and perceptions of a

number of 15-year-old pupils with the label BESD, having of only one possible school available was acceptable.

The available school fitted the required profile of being a special school, having 15-year-old pupils with the label BESD on roll and a willingness to take part in the research. This school was an area special school situated within a village in a shire county. The school was small and was undergoing a change from its historic role as a school for primarily pupils with the label MLD and BESD. The school was beginning to admit more pupils with the label Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and fewer pupils with BESD. Significantly these changes were only in the process of being phased in, so the target group of 15-year-old pupils with the label BESD were still available to be involved in the research.

### **5.7.2. Participant Sample**

According to the literature there are two important sampling issues in qualitative research (Schwandt, 1997). The first sampling issue is selecting a field size in which to study phenomena, and then sampling within this field. In this kind of research, the researcher is not interested in studying the school as a whole, but rather identified phenomena which take place within the school. The organisation of the school has no bearings on the potential outcome of the research, except in cases where it is commented on by the pupils concerned.

The second set of sampling which becomes important is that of sampling within the place, the school. According to Schwandt (1997) the researcher needs, in order to explore the nature and definitions of social action within a site, to consider sampling across time, processes, occasions or events and people. Sampling in qualitative research is best described as purposive or purposeful (Sparkes and Smith, 2014); an attempt is made to gain as much knowledge as possible about the context, the person or other sampling unit. Researchers choose an individual, several individuals or a group with whom they have an interest and who they feel can contribute rich information based on specific characteristics (Sparkes and Smith, 2014). Holloway (1997) recommended that between

four and forty research participants depending on the specific approach being used. There have been many identified categories within purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990), but for this study the sampling procedure fell within criterion-based sampling. In this category, the researcher predetermines a set of criteria for selecting place, sites, or cases. Research participants are chosen because they have a feature, attribute or characteristic, or have had a specific experience. This fits well with the special school (place) and pupils with the label BESD (case).

This was the intended position for this research, but unfortunately events overrode this. There was very limited access to the research school, and the school insisted that, in order for pupils to take part in the research the school would need to select the pupils. The insistence on this as a prerequisite of the research taking place inevitably changed the method of sampling from the desired criterion-based to convenience sampling.

Convenience sampling occurs when the researcher selects those cases that are easiest to access as being the only way to conduct the study, even though they may not be ideal. All the pupils offered by the school fitted the research profile, but there was no choice. In essence it was these pupils or no pupils. The research school undertook to provide four male pupils for the research, all of whom were 15 years old and all with the label BESD, although not always as their principal need. The school selected these pupils from its role of approximately 80 mixed-sex pupils ranging from 5 – 16 years old. The school decision to provide four males and no females for the research reflected the gender makeup of the school, in which the ratio of male/female was 4:1. In the profile age group, the school only had one female who fitted the criterion of having the label BESD. They chose not to include this female in the initial sample, although she did take part later in the research. The school gave no reasons for their selection of the sample so no inferences may be drawn.

## **5.8. Data Collection Methods**

The focus of the research, the research questions for which answers are sought and the overall research strategy that is appropriate for obtaining answers leads to the selection of appropriate methods by the researcher (Robson and McCartan, 2017). In this research. aimed at listening to and hearing the experiences and perceptions of pupils about their PE lessons, methods which encapsulated the dual notion of consultation and empowerment were chosen. The pupils involved needed to be involved in data collection methods which would inspire them to want to be a participant; these would need to be significantly different from their normal schoolwork to foster engagement. Data collection methods used in other research into PE and pupils with SEN ranged from the traditional interviews to more novel or emerging forms of data collection; poems, dance and drama (Groves and Laws, 2006; Coates and Vickerman, 2008, 2010).

This research is based on a range of data collection methods which are suitable both for the research problem and the needs of the pupils. These research methods that were selected as appropriate for this research were: photo-elicitation, focus groups, one-to-one semi-structured interviews and the use of pupil investigators to conduct video interviews with their peers.

### **5.8.1. Photo Elicitation**

One of the problems which was envisaged before the research began was the potential for the presence of the researcher to influence pupils and possibly inhibit pupils' willingness to engage in conversation. A personal observation, during my career in special education, was the change in pupil behaviour seen when pupils were confronted with unfamiliar situations such as having a supply teacher. In this example there would be mistrust between the teacher and the pupils, which declined as the parties got to know each other. A prime objective of the early days of this research was the provision of activities designed to allow pupils to build up trust, become 'at ease' and to be able to

talk freely within the research situation. In the initial stages, pupils were reluctant to offer any type of answers to questions if they could not be sure of the outcome.

A further factor at the early stage of the research was to make the research process different from the pupils' daily classroom experience, which would make it more interesting for the pupils. Previous research by Coates (2010) had used ping-pong balls to select topics for discussion within focus groups and to get the pupils talking, but that research was with younger pupils. Other research had used techniques such as drawings and personal diaries to get the pupils talking (Gravestock, 2010). This and similar methods were felt to be too childish for use with 15-year-olds. The use of personal diaries was considered as, being suitable for use with this age-group of pupils but was unsuitable as this method seemed very much like schoolwork.

Visual methods would be appropriate for this age group of pupils and would be significantly different to their normal school life. The use of visual research methods is not new, and over the last few years, there has been a renewed interest in their applicability and appropriateness. Visual methods have been used in past research, not totally limited to research with children and young people. Leonard and Mc Knight (2015) felt that there was value in this area which had been clearly demonstrated. It has been argued that the use of visual methods, if used sensitively and reflexively, would encourage more collaborative research by tapping into experiences not easily conveyed or captured verbally, issues that could be particularly relevant in research with young people (Bagnoli, 2009). The use of visual methods in the research process was seen as a tool to reduce power imbalances, which might in turn lead to more co-operation and allow research participants to assume the role of expert (Leonard and Mc Knight, 2015).

There have been many approaches which have used photographs as a research method in recent years and this has raised questions about the use of photographs as a data source. The onset of the digital age has made it easier to change photographs to represent images which may not have been present in the originals. Images pose a problem for the researcher since they are 'never transparent windows into the world'



(Rose, 2016, p. 2). The photographer makes decisions about what is contained within the photograph and this means that the image is always a selection and construction (Thomson, 2008). The meanings of photographs are difficult to analyse. Sparkes and Smith acknowledged that this method might be useful, but it might be difficult to use as the sole method to answer research questions since photographs are difficult to analyse.

This difficulty of analysing photographs in research had led to the use of photography in education being used as a means of stimulating discussion. One such method is photo elicitation. In this method photographs are used to evoke memory and elicit accounts from the participants in the course of interviews (Sparkes and Smith, 2014). This method provides more than the mere taking of and talking about photographs since it can generate new insights into ideas or social worlds that might easily be missed, classed as unimportant or dismissed. As a method for research in schools it has much to commend it since advances in digital technology have provided a cost-effective research tool which is accessible to all. In addition, pupils are accustomed to the taking and sharing of images through the use of mobile phones and social media. The method is subjective as the camera operator points the camera and decides which picture to take and what to delete, thus providing a powerful empowering situation for the research participant. Sparkes and Smith (2014, p. 107) referred to 'participant-created auto-photography' as a means of involving research participants to either use the camera to document the images they had chosen or to document teacher-directed photo assignments.

As a novel means of getting the pupils to talk and to develop relationships, the use of photo elicitation appeared to have potential. Difficulties in the use of this method included access to suitable cameras plus usage difficulties. This is discussed later.

### **5.8.2. Focus Groups**

Guided by the researcher, a focus group involves several people collaboratively sharing ideas, feelings, thoughts and perceptions about a certain topic on specific issues linked to

the area of interest (Sparkes and Smith, 2014). Focus groups have participatory elements which allows the pupils involved the opportunity to give their opinions.

Focus groups require participants to have something in common in order to facilitate discussion within the group. In this research the pupils all attended the same special school, had their PE lessons together and all had the label BESD. One of the key reasons for using a focus group is that within focus groups there is the ability for pupils to steer the conversation in the direction they desire or are comfortable with, again reducing the potential for power dynamics within the group. Focus groups also allow participants to have conversations with their peers, thus allowing a group construction on a certain topic to be achieved. Whilst there are differences in the conducting of focus group research, most focus groups are conducted face-to-face using a semi-structured type of interview as a basis. In this research the use of the focus group provides a context for fostering pupil confidence as they have the opportunity to have their views heard within a safe environment and in a manner they have control over. The use of focus groups led to the development of new topics and directions for the research which had not been envisaged at the planning stage (appendix C for focus group questions).

Whilst focus groups generate a lot of data, it has to be recognised that some of the data might be, as described by Bryman (2001), socially-desirable data (providing answers that were, what the pupils thought the adult wanted), in part due to the presence of the researcher. In this research, the use of photo elicitation as part of a trust-building exercise plus the reassurance at every meeting of the confidentiality of the data and the pupils' right to withdraw from the research at any time without giving reasons, helped to reduce the impact of pupil/researcher power dynamics.

In the context of this research the use of focus groups was directly related to the research sub questions, but the topics were loose therefore allowing pupils to express their views on related matters as they arose.

### **5.8.3. One-to-One Interviews**

According to Holloway (1997) an interview is a conversation with a purpose in which the interviewer aims to obtain the perspectives, feelings and perceptions of the participant. Interviews may be structured or semi-structured, but the most common form in qualitative research is the semi-structured interview. In a structured interview the researcher has an interview schedule in which all participants are asked the same questions in the same order. In a semi-structured interview, the interview schedule is more of a guide and relies predominantly on open-ended questions which do not have to be asked in the same order. The use of semi-structured interviews allows a flexible format in which the interview can be adapted to explore the interests of the pupil or to pursue answers given in more depth.

In this research one-to-one semi-structured interviews were used to further elaborate on the discussions of the focus group and to examine pupils' personal experiences of PE lessons.

### **5.8.4. Pupil Investigators**

One of the aims of this research was to allow the voices of the pupils to be heard on the subject of their PE lessons, but as the research methodology progressed it became obvious that in order to achieve this aim pupils would need greater involvement in the research. This provided a unique challenge for me: to develop a more innovative method in which the pupils themselves became the researchers.

The children's rights paradigm has provided a great push for researchers to recognise children as active participants in the construction of meaning (Cheney, 2011; McTavish, Streelasky and Coles, 2012; Shamova and Cummings, 2017). A further factor is that many of the researchers are adult, with the risk that pre-existing beliefs of the adults might influence the views of the children, relationships and the research perspectives. This could lead to the voices of the children not being fully heard during the research and their

perspectives and experiences undervalued. My research aimed to allow pupils to play a full part in the research.

The use of pupil voice in schools, which was emphasised after the UNCRC (1989), has been a beneficial motivator to engage the views of young people (Fielding, 2001; Rudduck and Flutter, 2000). The use of pupils as researchers have been used in projects to explore various aspects of school life (Ainscow and Kaplan, 2005; Carrington, Bland and Brady, 2009; Tangen, 2009). These researchers have found that it is possible, indeed beneficial, to listen to pupils' voices to provide an insight into what is happening within schools. In addition, it has been argued that pupil involvement is empowering for the pupil and can lead to 'deep participation' (Wilson, 2000). Fielding (2001) suggested a four-fold way of thinking about the involvement of pupils in research which make the distinctions between 'pupils as sources of data, pupils as active respondents, pupils as co-researchers and pupils as researchers' (p. 135). Hart (1992) suggested that any proposed involvement of pupils in research projects should consider eight steps regarding their participation, starting from manipulation and finishing with child-initiated shared decisions with adults. This framework was refined by Shier (2001) who offered his 'Pathways to Participation' which involved five steps: children are listened to; children are supported in expressing their views; children's views are taken into account; children are involved in the decision-making process and children share power and responsibility for decision making. The suggestions of Fielding (2001); Hart (1992) and Shier (2001) all provided useful ways of thinking about the extent to which research that involves pupils was participatory and ways that it might be made more participatory.

In this research I have taken into account previous work on participatory research in schools and concluded that an adaptation was necessary to maximise pupils' full participation. In the early stages of the research four pupils were recruited and these pupils took part in the photo elicitation sessions, focus group sessions and one-to-one interviews before the research became participatory in a fuller sense. At this stage, the four pupils expressed the desire to become more involved in the research and wanted to

attempt to find out what their peers thought about PE lessons. These four pupils had all been interviewed about their perceptions and experiences of PE and had experience of interviews. However, they felt that there were more questions that needed to be asked of their peers. In addition, the pupils felt that they would like to take control of the interviewing of their peers, use video recording and produce a film to be shown in their school. In order to make the film inclusive of all pupils involved in the research, the pupils involved in the initial stages would need to be re-interviewed by their peers. This is a unique situation. Firstly, four pupils took part in the research and data was gathered at all the stages. Secondly the same three pupils (one had withdrawn) video interviewed a selection of their peers using questions based on the first interview schedule (but not entirely identical). Finally, the three pupils video interviewed each other. The pupils could not be regarded as researchers in that they had played a dual role in the research, so it was more appropriate to refer to them as pupil investigators who investigated aspects of the main research which they were interested in. A key feature of this process is that the pupil investigators were given the opportunity to choose what they wanted to find out more about, albeit within the overall aims of the research. This in itself is a dilemma since the research topic had been agreed by the university and, if the pupil investigators were to achieve a supported rather than managed role (Bucknell, 2005, 2009; Kellett, 2010) and have control over their own research, it would have to be within the broad framework of the university-agreed topic. This is not strictly in accordance with the ethos of pupil researchers, but in this research did provide the pupil investigators with an empowering role rather different from their accustomed role in school. In the second part of the research my role became that of facilitator, supporter and at times research assistant to the pupil investigators.

The pupil investigators fulfilled the steps advocated by Shier (2001). Within the participatory research they were involved in, the decision-making process and power and responsibility was shared. An example of this is the final edit of the film in which the pupils discussed what should be included/excluded from the final film and the reasons for these actions. The film was then edited to their wishes and the school and each pupil

investigator given a copy. The pupil investigators decided that the data not included in the final film for the school could be part of the overall research project and as such could be included in the final thesis.

## **5.9. The Methods**

The research took place during the academic year 2015/16 (see appendix D for detail).

### **5.9.1. Pilot study**

The pilot study was designed to assess the feasibility of working with this group of pupils to explore the research questions, and to begin to develop relationships of trust with the pupils. A further pertinent observation was the marked reluctance on the part of the pupils to have to write (the reasons for this were not clear, nor part of the research). What was needed in the pilot stage was a novel approach, removed from the normal school situation, which did not oblige pupils to write and which would foster trust between the group and me. Photo elicitation was thought to be a suitable approach.

Photo elicitation was used to provide a novel introduction to the research, but more importantly to engage the pupils in conversation. It was felt that most contemporary pupils are adept and used to taking photographs using the cameras on their phones, and that the step to using a digital camera would be small and manageable. What was needed were small, simple-to-use digital cameras for the pupils, with the facility to upload images they had taken onto a secure laptop computer to avoid any possibility of the images being uploaded to social media. Simple digital cameras were loaned by the university for the research and these were allocated to the pupils. The pupils were given basic training in the use of the cameras. They all tried to take a 'selfie' and found this was not possible with the cameras provided!

There was the ethical issue which needed to be addressed of the pupils potentially taking photographs of other vulnerable pupils. To alleviate this potential issue, the pupils were told always to ask permission of any other pupil before they took any photographs. The

other related ethical issue was that of certain vulnerable pupils who might well give their permission, but their photographs were not allowed to be taken at school. The pupils in the research were reminded that they were not allowed to upload photographs to social media, although this was a general reminder since the cameras provided did not give access to the internet. The issue of photographs being taken of vulnerable pupils was overcome by uploading the photos taken in the photo elicitation sessions to a secure laptop. The photographs were then deleted from the pupil cameras at the end of each session.

After the initial meeting and the distribution of the cameras, pupils were asked in the following week to take some photographs around the school of things they liked. These pictures were then uploaded to the dedicated research computer in time for them to be discussed at the next meeting. At first, the plan was to discuss each individual pupil's work with that pupil. This meant talking to one pupil whilst the other three pupils were in the room. This proved very difficult since the three pupils not discussing photographs struggled with not being purposefully occupied; and the free time provided opportunities for small-scale disruption. To resolve this the individual pupil's photographs were discussed in the group as a whole. This was not an ideal situation since it raised the possibility that the voices of some pupils would be overshadowed by their more vocal peers. There was also the possibility that pupils were not making comments for personal reasons, fearing rebuke from the other pupils. These group meetings were carefully managed to minimise such negative effects.

Over the next few weeks the research followed the same format with the pupils being given a week to take photographs of a topic from a list I provided: my favourite lesson; something I was proud of this week; what we did in PE this week; a good performance in PE; an interview of a friend on video (possible on the pupils' cameras); what I like/dislike in PE and a sport I took part in over half-term.

When the pupils had taken the photographs, a discussion followed by the group about what they noticed from the photographs, together with a discussion about what the

photographer had been attempting to achieve. In the early stages these sessions were lively with some of the photographs being of dubious quality and the subjects very diverse e.g. my favourite teacher as a blurred photograph 'because he would not stand still long enough for the photo to be taken' (Pupil Y). Pupil I took a photo of his best friend – his iPhone! The approach mirrored the essence of photo elicitation since the pupils chose which photographs to take. As they were not initially required to take photographs related to specific research topics, the pupils gained some control over the power dynamics of the researcher/pupil relationship. At this stage in the research the questions asked about the photographs were flexible and suited to the needs of the individual pupil. Pupils were not required to provide what they might perceive as the correct answer to the adult. It was out of these early sessions of photo elicitation and the development of trusting relationships that it was possible to move the research onto the focus group.

#### **5.9.2. Problems with Photo Elicitation**

The use of photo-elicitation seemed a good fit for building up trust, but the problems it produced could not have been envisaged at the outset. The cameras had to be simple to use, with only a basic amount of skill needed to achieve results. They needed to be digital to enable the rapid and safe turnaround of the images. The problems started from the very first day. For the pupils to be able to access the cameras to take photographs at different times in the week, the cameras needed to be stored on the school site in a place that was accessible to the pupils but secure. Initially this was solved by having the cameras, plus the means of charging, stored in the assistant head's office. This rendered them unavailable for pupil use when the office was in use, a frequent occurrence. The cameras were then assigned to a TA to keep in her locker. This meant that pupils had to find her in order to retrieve the cameras when they were needed. As these were digital cameras, they needed to be charged after use and this raised the issue of who would do this task. This was never completely satisfactorily achieved, with problems of flat batteries. The situation as a whole provided a ready-made excuse/explanation for non-completion of tasks. A further problem arose when the pupils needed to take the



cameras home during half-term holidays. The school was reluctant to allow this, and it was not until reassurances were provided by the university about its attitude to possible losses, that the school agreed. The university's position was that since these simple cameras had been superseded by more complex digital equipment for use by the university students, then the cameras I had borrowed were essentially redundant. The university would not be pursuing any cameras that went missing (and none did).

Another issue was that the simple nature of the cameras plus the physical nature of PE lessons meant that to take photographs of their peers during PE lessons the pupil photographer had to anticipate the delay in functioning of the camera shutter. Failing to do this led to some amusing results. Even with all of the problems experienced, the use of the cameras did achieve the allotted aim and by the end of this period trust had grown and relationships were being established. The process provided starting points for the next part of the research on the main research question: 'What are the perceptions and experiences of PE for pupils with the label BESD who attend a special school?'

### **5.9.3. Questions arising from Photo Elicitation**

As trust developed, conversations about the group's photographs became more open-ended and began to include pupils' experiences within their PE lessons. The group sessions of photo elicitation had provided some insight into the pupils' experiences within the school in addition to their PE experience and pointed the way to addressing the research questions. Future research would initially focus on the research sub questions 'How do pupils experience their PE lessons?'; 'How do peer relationships and pupil-staff relationships affect PE lessons?' and 'Is PE important for the pupils?'. Several topics were developed to be discussed in a focus group of the pupils.

## **5.10. Main Research**

### **5.10.1. Focus Group**

The pupils in this study were used to the teacher of the group being in control and telling them what was required. One of the main points of concern for all the pupils in the focus group, and possibly an indicator of familiar power dynamics, were the assurances which the pupils required about confidentiality. This proved to be a regular feature of not only the focus group meetings but throughout the research, with pupils requiring frequent reassurances that their teachers would not have access to any conversations which took place and that their responses were private and confidential. The photo elicitation sessions had given the pupils access to a degree of choice which seemed not to be part of their normal classroom situation. Providing pupil ownership of part of the research process was further developed by all conversations being recorded, transcribed and presented to the pupils for their approval and signature at the subsequent meetings of the focus group.

All the focus group meetings took the same format in the early stages with the use of broad discussions. Pupils were encouraged to share their experiences and perceptions of the issues. In this way pupils were empowered to explore their feelings in the group. At the same time the discussions provided an insight into which topics were relevant to this group of pupils (Fitzgerald et al., 2003). There was always a structure within the group meeting with the initial questions being related to PE. The pupils were then free to discuss, question and respond to prompts when necessary. This gave the pupils the freedom to consider and respond in their own ways. The only rule in the group was that there should be no interruptions. This was easier said than done! What was apparent was that certain of the group members were keen to have their views heard, whilst others demonstrated that, in the initial stages at least, they were not used to or willing to say what they felt. This situation took time to resolve but for one pupil at least a certain negativity towards school and all things connected was a permanent feature of his contributions. The focus group met on four occasions for approximately one hour. From

these meetings a series of questions was formulated which would form the basis for one-to-one interviews in the next stage of the study.

Once the round of focus group meetings came to an end, the next stage in the research was to take the concerns generated and develop a set of questions which could be asked of all the pupils involved in the focus group. An interview schedule was developed out of the focus group discussions and covered not only the questions posed by the research questions, but also topics which the pupils had demonstrated to be of interest. The questions were selected from six main topic areas:

1. PE likes/dislikes
2. Working with friends/peers/in groups/in teams
3. Relationships with school
4. Choice within the PE curriculum/school
5. Behaviour, boredom
6. Out of school activities

The questions were kept to a simple format and were sufficiently open-ended to allow for the individual interests of the pupils to be explored.

A full list of the questions used is in appendix C

#### **5.10.2. One-to-one interviews.**

The focus group had sought to form a group perspective (Cohen et al., 2007). The one-to-one interviews were used to gain a more detailed insight into what the experiences and perceptions of PE were for each individual pupil. Often described as a conversation with a purpose (Holloway, 1997), the interviewer is able to explore the feelings and perceptions of the pupil on a range of topics. Other authors have suggested that the interviewer is like a traveller on a journey to a distant country that leads to a story being told on returning home (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). This is certainly how it felt to me, as my previous experience in school made me aware that working with children often throws up

unexpected issues. Interviews can be of various kinds, but the qualitative researcher often uses semi-structured interviews, unstructured interviews and group interviews. Which type of interview is used or the combination of types is largely determined by the epistemological and ontological assumptions of the researcher (Sparkes and Smith, 2014). This research used semi-structured questions with the freedom to allow the interview to explore unscheduled topics which were of interest to the pupil concerned.

There is some evidence that, whilst informal interviews allow the researcher to facilitate an exploration of pupils' views and to draw on the rich data that this method provides (Robson et al., 2016), there is also the need when working with children for the researcher to be able to offer guidance when answering the question (Scott, 2000). The interviews carried out for this research were conducted in a sympathetic manner appropriate to the individual pupil concerned. All four pupils were interviewed at what proved to be an unscheduled but fortunate time during the research. Due to curriculum issues it proved possible to see each pupil on their own, eliminating the possibility of the other pupils being present in the room as had happened in the photo elicitation sessions.

The interview schedule contained thirty-three questions taken from the six main groups provided by the focus group data. These questions covered the main research question and all the sub-questions. All the interviews were open-ended and followed a conversation style as advocated by Holloway (1997).

All the one-to-one interviews were recorded, transcribed and returned to the pupils for them to sign as a true record of what had been discussed. The interviews lasted on average twenty minutes, with the longest being thirty-five minutes and the shortest eleven minutes. The open-ended nature of the interviews allowed the pupils to say as much or as little as they wanted or felt comfortable with. The questions on the interview list were kept as simple as possible, but on occasions there was the need for the question to be paraphrased. An example of this was when a question was asked and the pupil replied with a monosyllabic answer. In this case the question was re-phrased to encourage the pupil to draw on their experience. At this time, a research finding not

present in any of the literature I had read, began to appear. It became apparent that the pupils had little experience of taking part in PE-type activities outside school e.g. swimming. This lack of out-of-school sporting activities provided an insight into each of the pupil's social conditions and the importance of having friends within the school. Once again, these reported findings are at odds with mainstream school research findings of pupils' involvement in out-of-school sporting activities (Fitzgerald, 2003; Coates and Vickerman, 2010).

Due to the school's differing curriculum demands, the interviews were not all conducted on the same day nor in the same room and this may have affected the results. However, there were no other pupils present during the interviews nor were there any adults from the school present, so the possible bias which Scott (2000) reported was absent. Given the difficulties experienced during the one-to-one interviews such as changes of room, noise from adjacent classrooms and interruptions, the data produced was nevertheless detailed and rich.

Each pupil prior to the interview taking place was reassured that the conversation was confidential, would not be heard by any other adult and was only designed to ascertain their personal perceptions and experiences of their PE lessons. Pupils were told that this was their chance to tell someone what they really felt about PE in their school. This approach, suggested by Scott (2000), was designed to give pupils involved the chance to be open and honest about their personal feelings in a non-threatening environment. There were still instances where the pupil response was 'I don't know' or 'I don't remember'. When these responses occurred, they were accepted as being the pupils' true position. Pupils' responses were all taken at 'face value' since it was felt that this acceptance reflected the ethos of listening to and believing the voices of pupils. In this way pupils' responses were a reliable and valid source of data. There were occasions when, despite the interview schedule, pupils wanted to talk about topics only loosely linked to the questions. In this situation the pupils were reminded of the question, then

allowed to talk about the topic they wanted to discuss. This data was all recorded and transcribed and was valuable in that it provided an insight into the pupils' lives.

The completion of the one-to-one interviews was to have been the end of the research with the research question and sub questions having been addressed. However, at the group meeting which took place after the interviews had been completed, supposedly the final meeting, the pupils felt that they would like to involve more of their peers. One of the reasons given was the feeling among the pupils that, even though all precautions had been taken to reduce the effects of researcher/pupil power relations, they knew that some of the answers provided had not been entirely truthful. They felt that they had a privileged insight into the experiences of their peers since they knew each other well, having been in the same small class for the past four years. I decided to make the most of this possibility of gaining a deeper insight into the lived experiences of the pupils. The interviews had clearly had an impact on the pupils since they voiced the desire to use the same technique on their peers. The decision to gather more data from other pupils posed problems. Since this research concerned pupils who had been labelled BESD, all additional pupils also needed to fit this profile. The school and concerned parents/carers and pupils needed to give consent for this extension to happen. The approach to be used needed to be thought through. The pupils had stated that they wanted to take a more involved role in the next part of the research: writing their own questions, conducting the interviews and making decisions as to the final outcomes. This enthusiasm on the part of three of the pupils (one wanted to withdraw at this stage) was intense. It felt like pupil voice research in action.

The key focus of using pupils as researchers is that they are no longer the passive focus of adult-led research but became active researchers (Kellett, 2003). The role did not involve pupils taking on roles as co-researchers in an adult-led project, but involved pupils carrying out self-directed empirical research from inception to dissemination – researched *by* pupils not research with or on pupils and relating to issues that they, not adults, had identified as significant in their lives (Bucknall, 2012). This is the

recommended position of the Children's Research Centre (CRC) at the Open University, UK, which have been instrumental in the development of Children as Researchers (CaR).

In this research, the implementation and development of the concept of using pupils as researchers arose from a series of unforeseen developments. This research was from the outset being conducted within the participatory/interpretive paradigm but the possibility of using pupils as researchers had not been envisaged.

### **5.10.3. The Rise of Pupil Investigators**

The three remaining pupils had already been part of the research so the pupils' role in this future research could not be construed as the pupils researching a new topic, but rather that they were investigating aspects of the previous research which interested them.

The pupils had experienced photo-elicitation in the pilot study part of the research and this topic was revisited in further meetings of the group. The lack of video facility on the cameras was discussed with the pupils suggesting that, instead of the interviews with their peers being audio-recorded, they could be videoed. It was only a small step from videoed interviews to the suggestion that they made a film of their investigations and presented it to the school.

The school was approached, and the film proved to be a selling point. Further consent was given with more BESD pupils being made available from the other class within the year group. The school once again undertook to recruit the pupils and to provide information to and obtain consent from the parent/carers. In line with the previous practice, the school showed me the signatures and then kept all the documentation. The pupils concerned came to a meeting where the research and the process for which their help was needed was described. Questions were answered and assent documents signed. In this part of the research three new pupils were provided, and one was the only female in the year group who fitted the profile.

The three initial pupils involved in the research decided that they would each have a specific role: interviewer, cameraman and director. As the project developed, these roles changed and each pupil investigator experienced the three different roles.

The three pupil investigators had stated that they wanted to design a new schedule of research questions, but this did not happen. They elected instead to ask the new pupils similar questions to those they had been asked but with some modifications. A further development was that, after the additional pupil interviews had taken place, the three pupil investigators thought that it would be a good idea to interview each other on video. This meant that there were now two interviews for the initial three pupils using largely the same question schedule. At face value this seemed a pointless activity. However, the pupil interviewers were able to bring to the interviews more rigor as they knew the pupils being interviewed. They were able to identify and challenge interviewees when they felt they were not giving completely truthful answers.

The video interviews took place with the three new pupils following receipt of necessary assents. Before each interview, the pupils were informed about confidentiality, anonymity and asked if they wished to continue to be part of the research. Suitable video equipment had been resourced and training given to the investigators in its use. Training had also taken place in interview technique, with an emphasis placed on the need to be able to ask 'follow up' questions. This was not an easy skill to acquire with only two of the pupil investigators being able to think spontaneously and ask further questions. These two pupil investigators carried out most but not all the interviews. Conducting the video interviews was not without problems if the autonomy of the role of the pupil investigators was to be maintained. In order to fulfil their role, the pupil investigators needed to be able to conduct their interviews in private, and this raised child protection and duty of care issues. This was solved by the pupil investigators and the researcher setting up the interviews, dealing with all administrative tasks and then the researcher withdrawing behind a glass screen (in some rooms a window) whilst the pupil investigators conducted the video interviews. The interview was positioned in the room



to place the researcher behind the screen but out of the interviewees' eyeline. This, it was felt, was the compromise position of not having an adult in the room with the possibility of the interviewees' answers being socially provided, yet still allowing child protection issues to be monitored satisfactorily.

## **5.11. Data Analysis**

### **5.11.1. Interpretation and Analysis of Data**

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used in this research. IPA is a philosophical approach to the study of experience (Smith et al., 2009) and there are different ways of using IPA. IPA, pioneered by Smith, stems from the work of Husserl and Heidegger (Smith et al., 2009) and aims to explore in depth the personal lived experiences of participants and how they make sense of those experiences. It is thus idiographic, inductive and interrogative (Smith, 2004). The two main components of IPA are the phenomenological requirement to understand and 'give voice' to the concerns of participants and the interpretative requirement to contextualise and 'make sense' of these claims and concerns (Sparkes and Smith, 2014, p. 126). Smith et al. (2009) stated that IPA does not pertain to a specific analysis strategy, rather it is flexible, focusing attention on and giving primacy to participants' own understanding and experiences. It is also a valuable approach since it allows meaningful and important conclusions to be drawn from research with small numbers of participants.

In this study great attention was given to understanding the meaning which the pupils placed on their own experiences as a means of exploring their perceptions of PE. This was achieved through focusing on their accounts and descriptions of PE which had been elicited through the use of flexible approaches. The pupils' own interpretations were accepted in all cases with no researcher interpretations being placed on them. In the analysis of the data every effort was made to record the actual words of the pupil from the transcription of the texts through to the development of the grouping of the research data into broad categories or themes. All transcriptions were subjected to two basic

processes: that of manual primary analysis and then computer analysis using Nvivo12 (computer software for gaining richer insights from qualitative data).

The data analysis followed in a loose way the IPA analysis procedures outlined by Smith et al. (2009) and Smith (2011). These were:

1. Searching for themes
2. Identifying and labelling themes
3. Connecting themes

#### **5.11.2. Searching for Themes**

In this stage each individual pupil transcripts were read and re-read in order to become immersed and familiar with the pupils' accounts. In line with the IPA recommendations, at this stage the impressions of the text were recorded but there was no attempt to code the data, merely to compile impressions gained. These impressions were recorded alongside the data in the form of noting things of interest or significance in the pupil's interview data. This was as previously described part of the manual processing of the data and not a form of 'open coding' such as used in Grounded Theory. Rather it was 'loose annotations', 'unfocused notes' and what some call 'exploratory coding' (Sparkes and Smith, 2014, p. 127).

#### **5.11.3. Identifying and Labelling Themes**

When the initial stage of immersion and note taking examining pupils' transcribed texts had been thoroughly completed. I sought to find deeper connections within the texts. This research stage of reading all texts in conjunction with each other is what Smith et al. (2009) called 'a phase of active engagement with the data' (p. 82).

An important factor in this stage was a constant referral to the actual voices of the pupils concerned. The development of the themes is the work of the researcher; themes do not emerge from the data (Braun and Clarke, 2013) but are developed by the researcher from the data. Therefore, there is a danger of the theme being more a reflection of the

researcher than that of the pupil investigators. As this research process was reflective, an important aspect was the part played by field notes taken (appendix F). These notes, taken after each meeting with pupils, were essential since they provided a context for each meeting. They included such things as pupil attention, behaviour, changes in the way the interviews were conducted, environment for the interviews, pupils present and ambient noise heard from adjoining rooms. This process resulted in an ongoing evaluation of the methods used and was especially useful as the research methods changed with the development of the research. Some of these field notes enabled the pupil texts to be given a more nuanced meaning by accounting for variables such as the pupils' particular 'mood' resulting from their experiences earlier in the day, or even the time of the day when the research was conducted. Morning sessions seemed to provide richer data.

This use of the field notes in conjunction with the pupils' texts meant the contextual meaning of the data was not lost. This contextual meaning was especially important during the video interviews when the interview process was undertaken 'at arms-length' from the researcher.

#### **5.11.4. Connecting Themes**

The transcribed texts of the pupil interviews were studied to make connections between the pupils' experiences and perceptions and the common themes that emerged. Some of the emerging themes were easy to group together e.g. the pupils' perceptions of school. Further development of these initial themes linked some of them together to form more complex themes. For example, pupils' perceptions of school were linked with pupils' perceptions and experiences of school and relationships with peers and teachers. This developed into the broader theme of social interaction. Other emerging themes were ranked in a hierarchical manner to facilitate similar connections being made. At this stage all the texts from all the pupils were analysed using Nvivo12, with the results being compared to the manual analysis. This aided the development of more grouped themes.

Further analysis of the emerging themes revealed two broad themes: social interactions and pupils' views on choice, boredom and ability.

The two themes each contained sub-themes which will be discussed under the thematic titles in chapters 6 and 7.

#### **5.12. Evaluation of research – Trustworthiness**

After undertaking a review of some of the available texts concerning the trustworthiness of qualitative research, Cresswell (2013, p. 249) summarised it thus: 'I consider validation in qualitative research to be an attempt to assess the "accuracy" of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants'. Cresswell preferred to use the term validation instead of trustworthiness and concluded that any report on research is a representation by the author. There have been attempts to provide strategies for use in qualitative research and Cresswell and Miller (2000) suggested eight different strategies. Given the differing nature of qualitative research, these eight strategies are not applicable to all forms of qualitative research, Cresswell (2013) suggested that at least two strategies should be used. In this research the most appropriate strategies were: writing with detailed and 'thick' description and taking the entire written narrative back to the participants for checking.

Throughout this research, I have attempted to use the authentic voices of pupils concerned to provide a picture of their experiences and perceptions of PE in their school. In order to achieve this authenticity, all meetings with the pupils, formal or informal, were recorded, transcribed verbatim and then passed back to the individual pupils for their signed approval. This process was enhanced using video recordings of the pupil investigator interviews since it allowed for a possible review of the text noting the body language of the pupil and other factors. This aid was not available with audio recordings. Although there were some problems with the pupils not wishing to read the transcripts and preferring to move on to the next part of the research, I feel that the transcripts are an authentic account of the research proceedings. It is from these transcripts that I have

been able to describe in some detail the experiences and perceptions of the pupils concerned and to provide a commentary on these experiences.

Reliability was addressed by the keeping of detailed field notes in all phases of the research. It was my practice to conclude the meetings with the pupils and then spend time writing up the experiences. These field notes were also transcribed and added to the text of this research as appropriate to provide detail and context.

### **Summary**

In this chapter I have described my personal pathway which led to this research with pupils with the label BESD within a special school.

In the discussion of the research aims, I outlined the four philosophical assumptions that underlie the research before proceeding to identify my personal role within the research. This was followed by a discussion of the various paradigms which could be applicable to this research. I briefly explored each of the paradigms before outlining the reason for the selection of the Interpretive Paradigm.

The decision to take a qualitative approach to the research led to the development of the research questions and the need on my part to critically examine and reflect on my beliefs.

The search for a suitable school in which to complete the research initially was, the cause of some concern since the research school would need to be a special school which had Year 11 pupils with the label BESD. There was a limited sample of such schools but eventually one was found which was willing to take part in the research. The school insisted that they should be able to select the pupils for the research and, this resulted in four boys being asked to become involved in the research. This was a far from ideal situation but essentially it was 'these pupils or no pupils'.

The next section briefly examined the various data collection methods which were thought to be applicable to research of this type. The selected methods involved, photo elicitation, focus groups and one-to-one interviews.

The main research consisted of a pilot study in which photo elicitation methods were used to both give the pupils confidence in talking but also to build a relationship with me. Feedback from this pilot study part of the research confirmed the appropriateness of the questions and provided topics to be addressed in the focus groups. Focus groups followed where the discussions moved on to the research questions and this led to the development of the interview schedule for use in the one-to-one interviews. The conclusion of these interviews provided unexpected development since the pupils involved stated that they had enjoyed the research and would like to interview their peers in a similar manner. This, in turn, led to the novel development of pupil investigators. The pupil investigators took on the role of video interviewing some of their peers on their perceptions of PE. The pupils at this stage had autonomy over this part of the research and produced some rich data.

IPA was described and used to analyse the pupil transcripts and to provide a method of identifying connected themes. The process of making notes from the texts and grouping these notes together eventually identified two connected themes.

Finally, the reliability and trustworthiness of the research was discussed.

## **Chapter 6. Social Interaction**

### **6.1. Introduction**

A German study by Mand (2007) asserted that children with behavioural difficulties were less popular with and/or often rejected by their typically-achieving peers and had lower sociometric status. Pupils with the label BESD need positive relationships in school. These may be provided by their peers, and perhaps more importantly by their teachers.

This chapter examines the data relating to pupils' social interaction with their PE teacher the school and their friends/peers. It forms part of one of the research sub-questions: 'How do peer relationships and pupil-staff relationships affect PE Lessons'. This topic was explored in both in the focus group and by the pupil investigators in the process of interviewing their peers. Relationships within the school was an important focus of pupils' reported perceptions and experiences of PE and became a major theme of this research.

This chapter analyses the wider effects of being taught solely by one PE teacher who not only oversaw PE but was also in charge of overall school discipline as an additional responsibility. It also explores the issue of whether the PE teacher's additional role of overseeing school discipline was important to the pupils. In addition, pupils' perceptions and experiences of their peers and the ethos of the school will be considered.

### **6.2 Pupils' perceptions and experiences of their PE Teacher**

In the research special school, the Year 11 pupils all experienced the same PE lessons. They were taught as a year group comprised of two classes each of eleven mixed gender pupils. This was the usual organisational situation of the research school: pupils were taught in mixed age ability groups in Mathematics and reading, but as tutor groups in most subject areas, and year groups in specialised subjects such as PE.

Throughout their time in the secondary part of the school, the pupils had been taught PE in the same group and with the same teacher: *'There were two PE teachers in the school, with one taking all the secondary classes and the other taking the primary PE classes'* (Field Notes).

One of the topics of an early focus group was a discussion about the PE teacher who taught PE to the pupils involved in the research. Initially the focus group members were guarded in their replies when asked questions about their PE teacher. This was typified by several replies such as:

'alright I guess' (Pupil A).

This topic was returned to in the focus groups, and in the pupil investigator filmed interviews. In the early stages the pupils often demurred, giving the following reason why they thought that other pupils had not given fuller answers:

'Well they didn't dare say anything because they thought that it was a school project like it might be presented in assembly; that's what they thought' (Pupil D).

This quote by Pupil D raises an important point of view on the part of the pupils: not wanting to voice an opinion about a member of staff if that opinion could be traced back to them. It took a large amount of reassurance on the part of the researcher to explain to the pupils that what they said would be kept in the strictest confidence and that their teacher would not get to know what had been said. Even with these assurances, trust between the pupils and the researcher took time to develop. This was important since trust is at the heart of the research ethics for researching with children. It was also fundamental for the research design which actively sought the perceptions and experiences of the pupils; this needed a relationship of trust.

The pupils' perceived views of their PE teacher in this research do require some unpicking since, they appear to be in contrast with the views expressed by similar types of pupils regarding PE in research in different situations (Coates and Vickerman, 2008, 2010). In my research, pupils



expressed a concern over reprisals if their comments about their teacher became known. In addition, they expressed the feelings that the PE teacher and the ethos of the school was one of adult authority. The research school at the time of the research did have a high proportion of pupils with the label BESD (half of the Year 11 group) and since there was the probability of inappropriate pupil behaviour, the school had decided on a strict pupil discipline policy. It was perhaps unfortunate that the person overseeing the discipline policy was the pupils' PE teacher. The pupils spoke of his teaching style as authoritarian, but this could have been the case even if he were not in charge of discipline across the school.

The pupils' perceptions of their PE teacher are interesting since they give an insight into the overall social dynamics of the PE classroom (Coates, 2010). There are indications that the pupils and the PE teacher are involved in power relationship as evidenced by one pupil:

'If they think that Mr. B is going to see then they're not going to say anything that gets them into trouble; he is a sad angry person' (Pupil Y).

Coates (2010) found that perceptions surrounding children's teachers influenced the ways in which they viewed their lessons. Whilst positive relationships with teachers might result in positive perceptions of PE lessons, negative perceptions of PE teachers might similarly result in negative perceptions of PE lessons (Groves and Laws, 2000). Coates and Vickerman (2010), noted the importance of this relationship and its impact on pupil enjoyment, whilst positive social interaction was one of the factors identified by Beni (2017) as important to the achievement of meaningful outcomes in PE lessons.

One of the perceived roles of the teacher was to manage disruption when it occurred. The pupils reported that if they were enjoying the lesson when disruption occurred, there was a need for the teacher to effectively manage behaviour within the lesson:

'I don't like it when somebody messes around in the lesson and I have to stop doing it so they can be taken out' (Pupil K).

In this situation the teacher's role as the manager of the classroom was accepted since the pupils understood the need for behaviour control. For many of the pupils involved in this research, it was the nature of the teacher's control of behaviour which was the cause of some friction. Whilst acknowledging the need for the teacher to exert authority over pupils who were disrupting the lesson, shouting at individuals as a means of control led some pupils to believe that shouting was an essential part of the role of the PE teacher:

'Mr B shouts at people but he is a PE teacher, you know what I mean. He's just doing his job. He is very strict and gets angry very quickly. Quick to anger yeah! It's just his job. If he is strict the students will do the lesson more, you know what I mean' (Pupil D).

This pupil thought that it was necessary to shout to keep order if you are a PE teacher. This pupil had transferred to the special school at the end of primary education so had only ever known this PE teacher. He thought that because this PE teacher acted in this way, then all PE teachers must behave in this manner.

The views of Pupil D in defending the role of the PE teacher as he perceived it 'only doing his job' led to a dialogue with another pupil about the PE teacher. This pupil responded:

'No, cos it doesn't work' (Pupil Y).

And continued:

'I don't get school; you are there to learn. You are not there to get mouthed at' (Pupil Y).

This led to the reply:

'You only get mouthed at when you are not learning, you're doing something else' (Pupil D).

Which led to Pupil Y making a personal statement about how being shouted at made him feel:

‘Mr B takes it too far, shouts and needs to start calming down, before I end up flipping’ (Pupil Y).

There is evidence from this research that the teaching strategy for managing disruptive behaviour in PE lessons that the pupils referred to the most was that their PE teacher would either shout at the individual disruptive pupil or at the whole class. This agrees with the findings of Coates (2010) in which it was noted that the most commonly-used strategy for managing disruptive behaviour in PE lessons was for the teacher to either shout at the offending pupil, or to exclude them from the lesson for a short period of time. There is a need, which has been recognised by other researchers in PE, to continue to develop methods of dealing with disruptive behaviour (Hutzler et al., 2002; Coates, 2010).

In this study shouting on the part of the teacher often produced a negative response from the pupils:

‘Well he is a bit aggressive. If one thing happens then he goes straight away shouting, and shouts in front of all the class, when he’s only talking to one person’ (Pupil Y).

Not all the pupils experienced Mr. B’s teaching style as being ‘shouty’, coercive and negative since Pupil D thought it to be beneficial and a style of teaching which he understood:

‘You get teachers, let’s say Mr.... who is really placid, and the pupils don’t listen as well... but with Mr. B he’s really strict and the students listen a lot’ (Pupil D).

This comment was an exception since most of the other pupils felt that Mr. B was aggressive and angry:

‘I’m not going to say much about that sad, angry person’ (Pupil Y).

These pupil perceptions of their PE teacher were influenced by factors such as the background of the pupils, their potential time out of education due to a fractured

education and possible pupil disaffection. The remit of this research meant that such factors could not be explored further.

The individual and varied pupil experiences of being in mainstream education and then moving into special education meant that pupils had both positive and negative perceptions of their overall education. Once they arrived at the special school (most of the research participants had transferred at the start of secondary education), they were only being taught by one PE teacher which had consequences for the pupils' perceptions and experiences of PE. The influence of the PE teacher was further enhanced by the fact that, although the pupils did access off-site PE facilities (local sports hall/pool), they were still only taught by the same teacher. In addition, the school did not invite any visiting teachers/coaches to work with the pupils.

The characteristics of the PE teacher is important as noted by Fox (1993): teachers who are perceived as competent and enjoy teaching can positively stimulate even the least-motivated pupils. The ability of the teacher to be able to motivate and stimulate pupils is a basic requirement of good teaching as described by Szklarski (2011). In a phenomenological study into pupils' experiences, Szklarski showed that interest was a necessary assumption in motivational experiences in school. Szklarski reported that pupils used expressions such as 'exciting, fun, or something that gives you an energy boost' when they described how it felt to be interested in PE (Szklarski, 2011, p. 45).

The perceptions pupils have of their teachers influence their attitudes and feelings towards school subjects, including PE (Groves and Laws, 2000; Flintoft and Scraton, 2001; Brittain, 2004). Coates and Vickerman (2010) also found that perceptions surrounding teachers influenced how children viewed their lessons. Groves and Laws (2000) stated that positive relationships with teachers resulted in positive perceptions of PE lessons; negative perceptions resulted in negative perceptions of PE lessons. These findings indicate the strength of the influence the teacher had on the experience of PE for pupils. This influence might be lasting for good or bad depending on the pupils' perception. Whilst individual teachers and their

relationships with pupils might vary within an individual school, in a large school where pupils meet several PE teachers and coaches their experiences have the potential for breadth and variety. In a small school, such as the one in this study with just the single PE teacher for the secondary age group, then the personality, teaching style and pupils' relationships with the teacher takes on a more important role.

### **6.2.1. Motivation, Personal Meaning**

Beni et al. (2017), in a far-reaching review of literature, concluded that the teacher of PE was critical in facilitating meaningful participation. He was responsible for:

determining needs and interests to make PE experiences personally relevant and fun to the participants as well as facilitating choice and challenge to allow for 'just right' learning experience (Beni et al., 2017, p. 307).

Personal meaning arising from positive interactions with others, both peers and teachers, has been found to be an important factor in pupil motivation. As previously noted, pupils' perception of their PE teacher is a complex mix of experiences and emotions with some pupils expressing strongly-held negative views (e.g. Pupil Y). Pupil Y clearly stated that he did not like his PE lessons nor indeed the teacher; he regarded himself as not being interested and only getting involved in lesson activities at a minimum level. This contrasts with Pupil A, agreed by all the pupils to be the best performer in the class who held very positive views of the subject and the teacher. He reported that their PE lessons consisted of the teacher, or a more able pupil (often himself), demonstrating a skill and then the class practising the skills:

'Mr. B shows us how to do it and then we try to do it' (Pupil A).

Pupil A had very favourable experiences since he enjoyed a positive relationship with the teacher, was involved in all the lesson activities and took on the role of helping his peers during their PE lessons:

'I always try to do my best and to help others by explaining what they are doing wrong. I always want to be captain of the team' (Pupil A).

In a similar positive situation one of the pupils reported that in the gymnastics lesson (a Year 10 activity), he trusted the PE teacher not to allow him to try to do movements of which he felt he was not capable. This feeling of trust was only reported by Pupil K within gymnastics lessons. Such a finding was noted by Coates and Vickerman (2010) who found that most of the pupils felt their teachers helped them enough in their PE lessons. Blinde and McCallister (1998), however, noted more negative opinions of their PE teachers. More recently, Fitzgerald (2005) found that some pupils felt excluded from PE lessons by the attitude of their teachers. In my research there were few reports of the PE teacher being helpful.

Alderman and Green (2011), in a paper on enhancing teacher-pupil relationships, contended that the quality of teacher-pupil relationships often had enormous impact on pupils' success at any level. When teacher-pupil relationships were positive, there was often an improvement in classroom behaviour and a reduction of aggression (Murray and Pianta, 2007). Pupils also showed improvements in their social interactions, a higher degree of social competence, an enhanced sense of wellbeing and improved achievement (Baker, Grant and Morlock, 2008; Murray and Pianta, 2007).

In research it has been noted that positive pupil-teacher relationships were a strong mechanism for guiding and supporting pupils' social, emotional, behavioural and academic growth (Cooper, 2008; Mihalas, Morse, Allsop and McHatton, 2009). Positive pupil-teacher relationships referred to the interaction which took place between teachers and pupils characterized by mutual respect, caring and closeness, whereby the teacher did what was in the best interest of the pupil, while taking into account the pupils' developmental level and associated needs (Hughes, Gleason and Zhang, 2005; Pianta, 1999; Pianta and Stuhlman, 2004). In a New Zealand study, it was found that positive relationships enhanced pupils' good feelings about themselves which contributed positively to their learning (Cushman and Cowan, 2010).

Fitzgerald (2005) noted that where PE teachers had failed to develop meaningful relations with the pupils, it might be that aspects of the subject or some of the teachers' practices excluded pupils from participation to the full. The teacher who was authoritative and did not foster positive teacher/pupil relationships tended to have pupils who felt negatively about PE. It was noted that pupils with SEN and/or pupils with the label BESD benefitted from having the traditional focus of instruction, transferring knowledge and developing skill, but this must be coupled with positive interpersonal relationships and access to the social side of schooling (Crosnoe, Johnson and Elder, 2004). Classroom behaviour was found to be enhanced by good relationships with teachers, with reductions in aggression being noted (Murray and Pianta, 2007).

### **6.3. The School**

'In school you're treated like a kid' (Pupil Y).

'You do get treated like a kid. You are there to learn and the teachers are there to teach you' (Pupil D).

These two comments, taken from pupils with differing perceptions of PE and the role of the PE teacher, agreed that in their special school they did get treated like a 'kid' and demonstrate the different mindsets of the pupils concerned. One quote indicates a feeling of being treated in a manner they did not appreciate, and the other accepted the role of the school as educator including being shouted at. This conversation came out of a discussion exploring the experiences the pupils have of their PE teacher. There has been some research on the effects that authority had on pupils within schools. Wadham, Owens and Skryzpiec (2014) conducted a study in mainstream schools in Australia and reported that 'young people experience themselves as subordinate to adult authority figures, while they are attempting to negotiate an emerging adult identity' (Wadham et al., 2014, p. 138). It is this lack of confidence in the pupils' emerging adulthood that Wadham et al. (2014.) reported as being responsible for the disruptive pupil being constructed as 'other', and being thought of as trouble and in need of authority.

The pupils reported that they felt there was a disciplinary power at play within the school and in the PE lessons. When asked about his PE teacher Pupil K simply replied:

‘I hate him’.

There were examples within the research of pupils pushing at boundaries to find out the limits of the authority, but what was more interesting was a certain pupil’s response to the disruption. On one occasion, during a focus group conducted in a workshop (which was the only space available):

*‘Pupil Y ran into the room to claim a revolving chair and proceeded to spin round on it but only when he was not being observed’ (Field Notes).*

This was reported by the other pupils present as Pupil Y’s normal behaviour in the classroom and was seen by his peers as low-level but acceptable behaviour. On another occasion, when the pupil investigators were conducting a videoed interview, the only pupil not involved in the procedure:

*‘slowly rolled an empty drink can across in front of the camera – whilst looking at me for comment. This stopped the proceeding with his peers awaiting my response, which seemed to suggest that the pupil involved was pushing the behaviour boundary to see what was acceptable. Fortunately, the situation was resolved by the disruptive pupil receiving the ire of his peers who were involved in the task and resented this interruption’ (Field Notes).*

There were other instances of poor behaviour reported by the pupils. One such incident was observed when early in the research, due to a mix-up in the time I was to be in school, I took the opportunity to attend a basketball lesson at the local sports centre:

*The pupils were being taught by the school’s other PE teacher who had taken over the class at short notice. A game of basketball was in progress when I arrived, and the lesson demonstrated some of the lesson attributes later described by the pupils as the norm for their lessons. The game was being played on the full-size court which meant that some of the pupils who were not involved were either standing around or leaning against the wall talking to others. Suddenly one of the players ‘elbowed’ another player in the face and the lesson descended into chaos, with much shouting and the teacher working hard to keep control. The result was a*



*bleeding mouth and lots of swearing on the part of the injured pupil. The pupil who had 'elbowed' then took on the role of the victim himself telling anyone who would listen that the cut on his elbow was probably infected as it had been in contact with the other pupils' teeth and that he had probably 'caught something' (Field Notes).*

Feeling as though they were victims found resonance with other pupils when describing their relationship with the school especially Pupil Y who likened school to prison and other pupils reporting a teacher-controlled school. Given the above incident in the basketball lesson which appeared to come out of nowhere with and other such examples reported by the pupils, it is perhaps not surprising that the school had chosen a strict discipline policy.

Some schools have chosen to ignore minor breaches of discipline in favour of the smooth running of the school. In this school especially, within the PE lessons, the power relationships with the teacher was important and had both positive and negative effects.

There is evidence that pupil involvement in decision making within the school and within their lessons can contribute to positive outcomes (see Coates and Vickerman, 2010; Medcalf, 2011). Even though the pupils in my research were in their final year in their school, they did not have any say regarding the curriculum choice in PE. Choice within the curriculum could be a factor which promoted the desirable outcome of having an active lifestyle. The overall feeling of most of the pupils was that the school and the teachers made all the decisions about the pupils' education:

'Teachers decide what we do in the lessons and we just do it' (Pupil I).

There was a common negative attitude amongst pupils about such aspects of their lives as having to attend school, the teachers deciding the lesson content and teachers telling them what to do. Being told what to do was very disliked by the majority of the pupils:

'Schools and prisons are the same – they've all got the same things, they've got the dress code, food and times when you've got to go to lessons. Prisons same time you've got to be in jail, they have certain foods [sic]' (Pupil Y).

'Key feature at school is you get to go home, and you have 6 weeks' holiday. You don't get 6 weeks' holiday in prison' (Pupil D).

'To be honest I don't really want to go to school – cos it's boring and tiring. I could be asleep right now' (Pupil Y).

These comments suggest that it was not only the PE teacher who was perceived by the pupils to have a coercive style, but also that the school itself was seen as controlling in ways some pupils perceived as unacceptable. This was demonstrated by two isolated occurrences:

*A focus group conducted near to the end of the school day was interrupted by the school Tannoy system requesting that one of the boys needed to go to see Mr B (the PE teacher) before he went home. The focus group member immediately decided that he would be on a day's exclusion for something that had happened earlier (Field Notes).*

In another focus group on a different day:

*'all the members were very subdued having just come from a 'telling off' from Mr. B.' (Field Notes).*

An example of pupils' expectations of their school situation arose during a pupil investigator videoed interview:

*I became aware that every time pupil I was asked a question, he looked at me before he attempted an answer. It was this reluctance to answer questions without first gaining clues as to what might be expected which demonstrated the normal classroom situation for this boy - not wanting to be seen to 'get it wrong' (Field Notes).*

These research findings agree with Gallagher (2010) who argued that modern schools exercise power through constant surveillance and monitoring of their pupils. He further argued that 'the practice of looking to see who's watching' is a common result of pupils' experience of surveillance' (Gallagher, 2010, p. 267). The observations of the pupils in this research indicate that approval-seeking behaviour and checking to see if anyone was observing potential misdemeanours was routine to the research pupils. It could be argued that, in a school with a high proportion of pupils in Year 11 with the label BESD, the potential for acts of disruptive behaviour was ever present, The volatility of some pupils meant that seemingly-calm lessons might suddenly erupt into violence towards themselves, peers, adults and equipment. In

addition, pupils could make unfounded accusations against their peers or staff. Schools are expected to have forms of discipline in place to provide an orderly environment in which education can take place and the use of surveillance is 'widespread, common and carried out by both teachers and pupils' (Gallagher, 2010, p. 271).

In the research school, it was not possible to draw even tentative conclusions about the degree of surveillance or control present within this special school since the research was solely on and with the pupils, but it was clear from pupils' actions and comments that they felt there was a lot of exercised control. Pupils' reactions to this perceived control could be an indication that they were developing and internalising self-surveillance. It could also be that they were not, rather at times acting out frustration knowing that staff would endeavour to put a stop to it as quickly as possible.

#### **6.4. Friends and peers**

In this special school the pupils were transported to the school from their neighbourhoods, many having journeys of up to 20 miles. This made it difficult to maintain friendships within their home neighbourhoods. Having friends is important to most people, so being able to form friendships within the school is of vital importance to pupils attending special schools:

'If you're paired up with like your friend who is good as you, you would be happy to work with them' (Pupil I).

The pupils who took part in this research came from a very small class (11 pupils) within a year group of 22 pupils. All but one pupil had been in the same class since they came to the school at the start of their secondary education, four years previously. All the research pupils said that they were friends with all of the other class members to a greater or lesser degree; there were also 'best friends' groupings. A factor in these friendships was that the class always worked together with the exception of Mathematics and reading which were streamed according to ability. The only time pupils had the opportunity to mix as a year group was at break/lunchtime and in their PE lessons with the other Year 11 group. There were few opportunities to become

friends with pupils from other years. None of the pupils spoke of having friends in other years in the school.

In this research with pupils labelled BESD, the pupils realised that they probably worked better if they worked with a friend; all reported that they would choose to work with 'their' friend. In PE lessons there were many examples when pupils were not allowed to work with their choice of friend, and it is in these situations that many pupils reported negative feelings:

'if you get put with a partner and they don't really want to do it, then they can let you down a bit' (Pupil I).

PE lessons share many of the characteristics of lessons in other subjects where teachers require the pupils to answer questions in front of classmates or make contributions in class or in small group work. In the PE situation such common characteristics are often of a physical nature since the pupils observe each other performing skills, giving demonstrations or participating in competitive activities. It is in the public nature of performance that striving for competence or the avoidance of incompetence took on an importance since it was relatively easy to evaluate one's own physical competence or to compare oneself to others.

It is the interaction between friends and peers which Wentzel et al. (2009) reported allowed the pupils to establish their own culture, emotional support, problem solving and personal meaning. Friend and peer support, good peer relationships and positive peer role models have all been found to have a positive effect on a range of achievement (Patrick, Kaplan and Ryan, 2011). In PE pupils who have a strong relationship with peers had the most positive PE experiences (Cox, Ullrich-French, 2010). Ntoumanis (2005) noted that peers could offer help and encouragement to improve which aids peer acceptance.

In PE lessons the usual classroom practice was for the individual pupil to be either working alone as in learning and practising a new skill; working with a friend; working as a member of a small group not necessarily a friendship group or working as part of a larger team as in the playing of team games. The selection of the various groups needs to be explored further since it has the potential to bring aspects both positive and negative to the PE lesson. The findings of

this research was that pupils enjoyed the lesson when they had some input into the selection of the pupils they were to work with:

‘I try to pick a person I know I can get along with and they will try their hardest – well if they don’t like you, they might not want to get involved and might not try’ (Pupil I).

Indicating the importance of selecting a person who will try and will not let the pupil down is an important aspect of working together. This feeling was expressed more bluntly by another pupil:

‘I pick my friends, so I know that they won’t be idiots. They’re doing it the proper way’ (Pupil Y).

This is a clear rejection of having to work with someone who might ‘show up’ the pupil in front of their friends and whose behaviour might not fit thus leading to negative social experiences (Hill and Brackenridge, 1989).

Positive outcomes when working with friends/peers in PE is beneficial in providing an enjoyable lesson. This view was also found in this research when the pupils were discussing what made a good PE lesson. All the group agreed with Pupil I:

‘a good PE lesson is when everybody gets stuck in and we all work together’ (Pupil I).

The implication from this response was that if the whole group was ‘getting on’ and concentrating on an activity which had meaning for them and was enjoyable, this implied positive peer support and relationships. This confirms the views of Cox, Ullrich-French, (2010).

Pupil D had personal reasons for not wanting to work in a group:

‘I don’t like working as a team in PE. I haven’t got a pride when it comes to sports, cos I don’t like it and I’m not good at games’ (Pupil D).

Beni et al. (2017) reported that a recurring aspect of social interaction was pupils’ perspectives on group composition with both support for self-selected groups and groups selected by the teacher. Koekoek and Knoppers (2015) found that at times pupils preferred to select their own

groups in PE, yet at other times preferred groups which did not contain their friends as they were aware that in some situations friends could be a distraction to learning. The results of the research are not conclusive with Dyson (1985) reporting that pupils achieved more when they were not with their friends. Gray, Sproule and Wang (2008) asserted that secondary pupils liked playing games activities with friends or peers of the same ability.

Despite the research findings of Koekoek and Knoppers (2015), some of the pupils in this research noted feelings of not having the competence to perform well with their friends. The perception of their peers that they were not able to contribute to the group led to some negative responses from pupils about their experiences of PE:

‘depends on which group I’m in. Sometimes when we play crosswise and I’m in a good group then I get the ball a lot. If I get in a really good group, I don’t get the ball much cos nobody passes to me. I just run around a lot but there aren’t many passes’ (Pupil D).

This pupil goes on to explain what it feels like to be part of a group in which his peers have little confidence in his ability to contribute:

‘I’m waiting for the ball and waiting for the ball. I get the ball and drop it and now I just run around, run after the ball and ... still running around’ (Pupil D).

This pupil is trying to become involved but his peers have no faith in his ability to contribute. He got the ball once, dropped it and was not given it again. It is to this pupil’s credit that he continued to try to take part even after his self-esteem was injured. This contrasts with Pupil Y who in a similar scenario reported:

‘well I just don’t get the ball passed to me so I’m just leaning on the wall chatting ‘ (Pupil Y, basketball lesson).

This pupil gave up trying to contribute to his team or indeed the lesson preferring to socialise with like-minded pupils on the fringes of the activity. Baumeister and Leary (1995) also noted feelings of anxiety, jealousy and loneliness in their research on team games. These are serious social consequences for something as seemingly easy as selecting pupils in groups.

My research suggests that the pupils liked to work with their friends, pupils of similar ability or pupils whose behaviour is known. These preferences could be fulfilled if the pupils were allowed to make the selection for team groups, but there were occasions, where the teacher initiated the selection. If the teacher started the process of team selection by selecting captains, then there was a strong likelihood that the captains would select high ability pupils or their friendship groups. In a games situation priorities change as competition is now an important factor. The importance of picking a team on ability-to-win comes into force:

‘I liked it today. We won every game – well if you are playing a game like basketball and you don’t win how are you going to feel. You’ve got to try and pick the best players’ (Pupil I).

The comments of Pupil I sums up the pupils’ attitude to team games in that enjoyment comes from winning ,and to win you must select the best players for your team.

#### **6.4.1. Playing as a member of a Team**

The issue of dividing the class into teams for team games is a necessary element in PE. It is important to reflect on the social processes that are enacted by different selection methods. Team selection proceedings in which pupils function as captains and select the teams may bring about humiliation as the rejection is publicly demonstrated and visible for the whole class (Breidenstein and Kelle, 1998). This dilemma of the selection of teams has long been discussed within PE circles. Numerous different methods have been tried (see Evans,1998; Barney, Prusak, Beddoes, and Eggett, 2016) but there is always the possibility that friends not together or that of having to work with pupils who are either perceived to be skilled, not-skilled or liked or not liked. In addition, as in many selection processes, there will be rejection, since there is always the pupil who is the last to be selected and who potentially suffers the loss of self-esteem accompanying this rejection

Pupil L summed up this feeling of rejection perfectly:

‘I never get to be a team captain and I am always nearly the last to get picked – cos I’m a girl’ (Pupil L).

Pupil L was the only girl in the class and reported that she liked some of the PE activities but also disliked activities that involved running:

‘I’m not keen on warm-ups and I don’t like running when it hurts’ (Pupil L).

The PE curriculum on offer at the time of these comments was basketball, twice a week, and as this activity involved running and being skilful enough to be able to join in with the more able boys, Pupil L felt that she had little to offer. However, she did see the injustice of it all and wanted to be given the chance to select her own team for a change:

‘Pupil A always gets picked to be captain and I would like to pick my own team’ (Pupil L).

Pupil L wanted to feel part of the team, preferably her team. The feelings of rejection when not selected early in the selection process or not being team captain placed was stressful. Pupil L clearly felt that she was being discriminated against due to her gender but there were other forces at play in this situation. The sexist view was that she was a girl and not able to be a good performer in what the pupils perceived as a male game (basketball). Also pupils’ perceptions of her ability in other aspects of their PE lessons was a factor. An indication of what her peers thought of her ability in PE emerged during a photo elicitation session when photographs had been taken of Pupil L performing on the trampoline:

‘she’s jumping and she’d kneed herself in the face. Yeah then she tried to do a backdrop and it ended up as a roly-poly after kneeing herself in the face in mid-air’ (Pupil D).

Teachers making practical decisions about how the class should be divided is a management issue, but there is strong empirical support for allowing pupils to make choices about how PE classes are organised (Beni et al., 2017). Moreno-Murcia and Sanchez-Larorre (2016) demonstrated that this can lead to significant increases in intrinsic motivation whilst How, Whipp, Dimmock and Jackson (2013) reported greater physical activity levels for pupils in groups of their own choices as compared to control groups not allowed to make choices.

The pupils in this research reported that they wanted to win so they selected the most able players and were reluctant to have pupils on their team who they felt could not make a valid



contribution. They had to include those who they perceived as not skilled, so in order to win kept the ball between the more able players with the resulting rejection of those they perceived to be less able players. These feeling of rejection are summed up by this comment:

‘I like passing but sometimes I sort of get excluded. Sometimes nobody passes to me. I get sort of pushed out of the game and I’m not really involved. Sometimes I get, sort of, ignored by the other players and I don’t like it’ (Pupil D).

O’Donovan (2003) in a case study involving Year 7 pupils found that those pupils with the highest status had the greatest influence on their peers because they determined the value system. In addition, pupils were concerned about what effect the association with unpopular or perceived unskilled pupils would have on their own status. Breidenstein and Kelle (1998) described this phenomenon as ‘rubbing off’: the mechanism by which pupils often stay as outsiders because their peers fear that their sociometric positions will be endangered by the outsider status ‘rubbing off’ on them if they interact with an outsider and in so doing might become an outsider also (Breidenstein and Kelle,1998).

It is therefore not surprising that any team selection method potentially produces a team captain who is likely to have a friendship group of similar ability pupils. This friendship group is likely to contain pupils with good skills and known ability and are selected first:

‘I try to get in the team of (Pupil A). It’s always a good team and we can win (Pupil M)

The intention of Pupil M (a perceived skilled player) to always get into the best team tells much about team selection and the positive benefits for some pupils. The opposite is when the pupil is at the end of selection with all the negative feelings that brings. If these experiences are reinforced on a regular basis by the dynamics of team selection, then experiences such as those reported regarding football lessons are the possible long-term outcome:

‘I don’t like football; I’ve never really liked it cos I don’t get the ball. When it’s football I walk around the side of the pitch avoiding the ball and not really taking part in the lesson. My worst lesson is football, we go outside and it’s raining’ (Pupil D).

This pupil went on to report that, although he disliked football, it was the activity he disliked not playing nor being selected for teams, for he found a personal satisfaction from being involved in a winning basketball team:

‘I was excited and happy; I scored a lot and I helped with the defence’ (Pupil I).

These perceptions of PE, if reinforced on a regular basis both positively and negatively, are likely to affect pupils’ perceptions of what PE lessons have to offer them on a personal level. Fitzgerald, Fitzgerald and Aherne (2012) found friendship quality and peer acceptance in adolescence was crucial for PE contribution, perceived self-competence, and enjoyment of PE. This indicated that pupils’ positive relationships with their peers contributed significantly to PE, an aspect also found in my research. Fitzgerald et al. (2012) also supported the view that ‘good quality friendships and a feeling of social connectedness with peers strengthen self-determined motivation .... enjoyment of PE was increased through having more in common with one’s peers’ (Fitzgerald, Fitzgerald and Aherne, 2012, p. 994).

Cox, Duncheon, and McDavid (2009) suggested that pupils with strong close friendships in class, and who felt more accepted by their peers, experienced greater feelings of belonging, and expressed more self-determination in their motivation. Cox et al. (2009) noted that peer acceptance was more important than the quality of close friendships in terms of motivation.

Fitzgerald, Fitzgerald, and Aherne (2012) found that some pupils felt that they were being victimised by the actions of other pupils. They further reported that this might create an environment where pupils felt more insecure about being active, worried about not being selected to participate on sports teams, and had limited opportunities and support in PE. All of these factors caused them to avoid situations taking an active part in PE lessons.

#### **6.4.2. Enjoyment in PE Lessons**

Despite the perceived negative and controlling nature of the reported PE lessons, pupils still saw PE as the opportunity to have fun. Over the period of the research all the pupils spoke of

PE lessons in which they described enjoyment as the primary outcome of the lesson. The conditions for this enjoyment, although different for each individual pupil, did have common features: the class was all working together, there was no disruption, it was an activity in which they identified meaning and the pupils felt that they were involved. These findings are in line with other studies (Rikard and Banville, 2006; Medcalf, 2010; Dismore and Bailey, 2011). Enjoyment has been shown in other studies to be a consistent aspect of pupils' views of PE (Coates and Vickerman, 2008). Although not found in this research, PE was frequently linked to feelings of escapism from the rigours of other subjects; it was noted that some pupils felt relief from other aspects of the school curriculum. These feelings were noted in pupils who had been identified as having SEN and attended mainstream schools (Coates and Vickerman, 2008). It is significant to note that in my research the pupils did not consider their PE lessons to be a relief from other aspects of school, rather a subject that was different from others within the curriculum.

The notion of having fun when all the class are on task and personal meaning is being achieved points to PE being a subject in which the individual pupil must work with others, and this involves an ability to socialize with peers and friends. The pupils in my research demonstrated that their experiences and enjoyment of PE were dependent on good relationships with their peers.

There were occasions when pupils spoke of their experiences with peers as defining their enjoyment of the lesson regardless of the curriculum activity, learning environment or the teacher's input. The interaction of the individual, the learning environment and the activity of the lesson affected the social experience of the pupil with all pupils speaking of these effects as positive and negative at times. There existed a fragile relationship within the PE lessons in which small changes significantly influenced pupils' possible enjoyment of the lesson. The pupils reported that working with a friend who was of similar ability in an activity they enjoyed was a good source of enjoyment, but working with the same friend in a different activity where their physical skills did not match was to be avoided. In this research pupils' accomplishments often seemed to be dependent on others and, as such, appeared to be linked to the social

ability of the individual pupil. A positive example of this was Pupil A using his own high-level of physical ability to facilitate a small group of pupils' positive attitudes and engendering towards PE. This group regularly enjoyed success in PE activities. It was perhaps not surprising that this group was looked up to by their peers. It was thought that to play in this particular group ensured success and enjoyment. To be selected as a member of this group, especially in playing games, could also be an opportunity to adjust one's position within the class. In the games lessons the ability to work in conjunction with peers was central to the pupils' active participation and enjoyment of the lesson. Ohman and Quennerstedt (2008) reported that one of the governing processes of PE was the willingness of individuals to do their best and their willingness to make an effort - factors which were not always evident on the part of the pupils in this research. Pupils' perception of their PE lessons as a place where they could socialize with their friends was prominent in this research. These perceptions were enhanced by the opportunities the curriculum offered for periods of perceived social time, for example travel to off-site venues and standing around the trampoline waiting for their turn to perform.

#### **6.5. Feeling anxious in PE lessons**

In my research the pupils were very aware of their status within the class and in PE lessons and openly discussed how they behaved in different lesson situations, although it was difficult to assess if some actions were to avoid losing face. One pupil who admitted to not liking PE had used the technique of fooling around so many times that his fellow pupils expected this behaviour in PE:

'In trampolining he just gets on. He doesn't concentrate, fools around and doesn't do it properly and he puts no effort into it and he just dance all around' (Pupil K).

This trampoline lesson is a good illustration of the pupil's techniques and strategies since in this situation there is 'no hiding place'; as the nature of the lesson mean that one pupil performed whilst the remainder of the class stood around the trampoline and watched. This situation was fine if you were a competent performer:

‘Like Pupil A is the best ‘trampoliner’ in the school and he can do a lot of skills and he tells the other pupils to concentrate and stay on the same spot, but they’re not bothered’ (Pupil K).

Pupil K understood that Pupil A was trying to help the other pupils, but the rest of the class were not concentrating and were clearly not interested in the lesson:

‘they are looking around, thinking to themselves and they just don’t listen. When they fail somebody laughs at them, they can’t really say anything because they’re not concentrating. So, they are putting no effort into it’ (Pupil K).

Lyngstad, Hagen and Aune (2016) noted that some pupils use strategies to avoid participation in PE when it is demanding or difficult. My research also adds the reason of boredom. One pupil described his feeling of being in the trampoline lesson:

‘If it’s trampolining I probably won’t concentrate cos it’s boring’ (Pupil D).

Alongside the action of not concentrating, it was a problem for some pupils to have to wait for their turn to perform. The fact that all the class stood around the side of the trampoline made it easy for the individual pupil to calculate how long it would be before they were asked to perform. This clearly raised anxiety in some pupils:

‘When it’s coming up to my turn, I’d rather be somewhere else. I’d rather not perform in front of other people because if you get it wrong, they see you get it wrong and there’s an audience to see you get it wrong. I can’t deny all knowledge. I’d rather not perform in front of other people cos you are going to be made fun of and they are not going to let you forget it’ (Pupil I).

As noted earlier the issue of pupil competence plays an important part in the development of meaningful social interactions within PE lessons. The act of having to demonstrate their lack of physical skills in public view is for some pupils a cause for some concern. This public view has been studied by researchers and noted as one reason for some pupils experiencing PE as being difficult and problematic (Cardinal, Yan and Cardinal, 2013; Enright and O’Sullivan, 2010).

Pupil I experienced a very real feeling of not wanting to lose face in front of the class and not wanting to become the butt of his friends’ derision. Interestingly, his coping tactics in this

situation in which he saw no means of avoiding having to exhibit his performance in public was to use delaying tactics to make the lesson as short as possible:

'I take as much time as I can. I walk slowly to the lesson, take my time getting changed and take my time putting the trampoline up so the lesson will be shorter' (Pupil I).

Motivation, social status and peer support also influenced pupils' views (Morrison and Nash, 2012). Pupils not wishing to perform in the public gaze adopted methods to prevent their social standing being compromised. Pupils did not want to lose face in their PE lessons, whether in terms of the subject or socially, neither to teachers nor to peers, because losing face undermined their self-perception (Ntoumanis, Taylor and Standage, 2010).

A similar situation occurred when the school was preparing for its annual Gymnastics and Dance Demonstration evening for parents/carers. As the date of the performance got nearer, the PE lessons were given over to practice. In a chance opportunity to observe the pupils during their PE lesson (there had been a miscommunication as to the time I was expected in the school) I was able to observe a lesson in which pupils were preparing for a trampette demonstration. The able performers had been selected to take part and were practising their routine. The rest of the class including Pupils D, I and Y had made sure that they had not been selected through their performance on the trampoline. As they were not involved in the observed practice:

*'Pupil D, I and Y not in PE kit for the lesson but being used to hold the mats in place whilst the selected pupils practiced their routines' (Field Notes).*

When I asked the pupils about this particular PE lesson, they expressed feelings of relief since:

'you don't have to get changed and you can just sit around and talk to your mates' (Pupil G).

For these pupils, this was preferable to being asked to perform skills in a public arena of performing in front of the whole school and parents/carers

Lyngstad, Hagen and Aune (2016) quoted the doctoral research of Von Seelem (2012) in which the claim was voiced that situations in PE lessons could put a strain on the self-perception of some pupils. This strain might occur in activities in which the pupil perceived themselves to have poor skills or where the teachers' teaching style was perceived as challenging. This was the feeling expressed by the pupils not involved in the Gym/Dance display: a relief at not being expected to perform in the display.

Pupils respond to the social interaction and communication which takes place in PE and it is this social interaction which can maintain or undermine the pupils' self-concept (Morrison and Nash, 2012). This process which takes place during PE lessons in which the pupil is 'on-view' to their peers has been termed as self-presentation. This is the process by which pupils monitor and control how others view them within PE lessons. Self-presentation varies in different situations with pupils responding differently according to the situation. Research found that pupils faced with problems which affected their self-concept developed a set of techniques for hiding within the PE lesson. Lyngstad, Hagen and Aune (2016) identified these techniques as: clowning, fooling around and kidding, pretending, avoiding involvement and other individualised techniques to avoid participation in disliked activities. These hiding techniques were clearly demonstrated by the pupils in the research who reported that, when they perceived themselves or were perceived by others to be not skilful, they employed avoidance techniques rather than take the chance of being undermined by the negative comments of their peers.

## **6.6 Social Interaction and Medical Model of Disability**

This chapter has detailed the social interactions which took place during PE lessons in this special school for a group of pupils with the label BESD. The provision of the label BESD indicates that the pupils' behaviour was different to that observed in 'normal' pupils and in need of fixing (Rouse and Sharby, 2011). This need, within the medical model of disability, becomes the defining characteristic of the pupil with disabilities, and shapes the beliefs that individuals who are typically functioning have toward them (Fitzgerald, 2006). Friends and

peers played an important role, but the PE teacher was central to social interactions within the PE lessons. Research has extensively explored the attitudes of PE teachers towards teaching pupils with disabilities (Combs, Elliott and Whipple, 2010; Qi and Ha, 2012), with teachers demonstrating both positive and negative attitudes towards teaching such children within their PE lessons.

A further aspect of the medical model is that of labelling, where diagnostic terminology is used to label individual pupils with disabilities, as in the label BESD. This label then becomes the 'language of choice' (Grenier, 2007) for the understanding of behavioural difference and often leads to teachers building performance expectations based on this label.

In the research school the attitude of the PE teacher towards the group of pupils labelled BESD was one of control, perhaps reflecting that the pupils had the label BESD and, according to the medical model of disability, were therefore in need of fixing (Bingham, Clarke, Michielsens and Van De Meer, 2013). In this case the 'fixing' technique was to keep a tight disciplinary control of the group and to provide limited opportunities for the pupils to demonstrate the teacher-anticipated poor behaviour. Grenier (2007) wrote that, within the special education system, it had been appropriate to 'authorise the management and control of those who in one way or another, trouble the social order' (p. 301). Grenier further stated that some would argue that the purpose of special education was the management and control of difference as a mechanism for fixing the pupil (Grenier, 2007, p.301). This fixing is thought by some to be the best path towards independence and those that do not want to be fixed are 'considered non-compliant or unmotivated' (Rouse and Sharby, 2011). Palmer and Harley (2012) noted that fixing is more likely to occur within special education classrooms.

A failure of the PE teacher's teaching method of keeping tight control was that the needs of the individual pupils were subservient to the need to keep control. In this situation individual pupil needs not being met often produced feelings within some pupils that PE was not for them; they became bored, disillusioned and often exhibited poor behaviour. It was not only within PE lessons that pupils perceived there to be strong discipline since they reported that



they felt the ethos within the school was one of control. As previously noted the PE teacher was also responsible for whole-school discipline hence providing a similar attitude towards the control and fixing of these pupils labelled BESD. This indicated that in relation to pupils with the label BESD the school subscribed to the medical model of disability.

## **Summary**

This chapter has examined the findings from the research relating to the pupils and their experiences and perceptions of their social interactions with their PE teacher, their school and their peers. It forms part of one of the research sub-questions: 'How do peer relationships and pupil-staff relationships affect PE lessons?'

The chapter began by exploring pupils' experiences of their PE teacher and took account of the possible influence that the PE teacher having the dual role being their PE teacher and also being in charge of overseeing discipline throughout the school might have on the pupils' perceptions of PE. The pupils largely found the teacher to be aggressive and disciplinarian; this had the effect that one at least of the pupils thought that all PE teachers were this way. Pupils reported that they found the teaching style to be authoritarian and unhelpful.

Pupils reported social interactions with their PE teacher as mostly negative with few positive relationships being noted of the kind which have been reported in other research findings. The teacher's perceived authoritarian teaching style coupled with his responsibility for school discipline led to reports by the pupils of the fear of possible reprisals if he were to find out what they had discussed as part of the research process. Only Pupil A described having friendly relationships with the PE teacher.

The pervading authoritarian discipline ethos within the school was reflected in PE lessons, with all pupils initially being very careful about what they said about their teachers especially their PE teacher for fear of reprisal. The feeling that adults within the school were in charge with little opportunity given for the pupils to express themselves was

evident from the pupils' views. Pupils broadly said that the teachers told them what to do and the pupils did it, often with some feelings of negativity as evidenced in the pupils' reports of their PE lessons.

The pupils generally had good relationships with their peers. They had mostly all been together in the same small class for the whole of their secondary education. There were examples of the pupils gaining enjoyment from working in groups or teams with their friends. There were also reported examples of pupils not wanting to work or be in the same group as pupils who they felt were not their friends or pupils who did not share the same levels of physical skill. There were fears from pupils with weaker physical skills that they would be negatively targeted by their more skilled peers, thus damaging their already-fragile confidence levels. Whilst working with like-minded friends/peers was acceptable in small groups, the introduction of competition and the process of selection of teams changed this dynamic which was a cause for concern for some pupils. The selection of teams to play games was synonymous in the eyes of the pupils with having to select or be selected in a team that would be successful and win. For some of the research participants, this often led to a situation in which they found it difficult not to be in the winning team. The importance of the perceptions of their peers was evident with the least able pupils or those who were felt by their peers as not usually making a positive contribution to lessons feeling left out and rejected.

In some of the reported lesson activities social interaction took on a different role in that it became a method to maintain a social position through acting in a manner which brought peer approval.

The overall feeling was that for most of the research participants PE was not an enjoyable, meaningful experience and, for these pupils, it was just another subject in a school curriculum in which they were able to make little, if any, contribution.

## **Chapter 7. Listening to the voices of pupils: choice, boredom and ability**

### **7.1. Introduction**

This chapter examines the findings from this research especially the research sub-question: 'Is PE important for pupils?' In this research the concept of the voice of the pupil was explored from differing perspectives including: listening to pupils' views on the curriculum in PE, providing a forum for pupils to express their views about how they perceive PE lessons and pupils' perspectives on other matters which arose during the research.

#### **7.1.1. Context**

The UNCRC (1989) enshrined several important rights for children (Alderson 2008; Taylor 2000). Of specific relevance to this research is the right for children to express their views on all matters affecting them (article 12), to have maximum participation regardless of disability (article 23) and to have an education that prepares them for a responsible life in a free society (article 29).

In 2014 the revised Code of Practice for SEN (Department of Education [DfE]) and the Department of Health [DoH] stated:

'Schools should ensure that decisions are informed by the insights of parents and those children and young people themselves' (DfE, DoH, p. 25)

In relation to children with SEN in schools within England, the SEN Code of Practice (2014) required teachers to empower and consult with pupils in order to determine the most effective interventions and provision. Pupils labelled BESD have the same rights as other pupils under the UNCRC (1989) which, in addition to the more recent 'Every Child Matters' (2003) legislation, asserted the importance for all children to have a voice in matters which concern them. It was the empowerment of children and the opportunity to express their views, opinions and experience which was reflected in the NCPE premise of personalized learning and the value of designing learning contexts that met individual pupil's needs (QCA, 2007).

This chapter will analyse pupils' views on aspects of the PE curriculum and their PE lessons.

## **7.2. Pupil Choice (If I could choose, I'd like to)**

This research enabled pupils to express their views and later to act as pupil investigators to explore the views of their peers. The first part of this research was an analysis of pupils' views on the lessons they attended in PE; later the agenda broadened to include pupils' views on the wider aspects of PE.

When the question of the possibility of having some choice in the PE curriculum was raised in a focus group, it was met with mixed reactions. Some pupils seemed to indicate by their body language (*Field Notes*) that they were surprised that the issue of choice might be a valid one.

The reluctance for pupils to express their views has been previously discussed (chapter 6) and reflects pupils' experiences of school and the unequal balance of power they have experienced there. The pupils expressed the view that adults in the school made all the decisions and pupils were told what they had to do. Choice was not something which the pupils were used to having, so when initially asked a question about choice pupils had little to say:

‘Don’t know’ (Pupil L).

The pupils stated that they had never been asked their views on their PE lessons. Finding out the extent to which pupils were consulted on any matters within the school is beyond the remit of this research. However, the school had a School Council to which each class sent a representative and the minutes of the Council’s deliberations were available on the school website. This provided a way to access a snapshot of the extent of pupil consultation in the school:

*The School Council meets every half term and the pupil representative are previously given an agenda drawn up by the staff listing the topics to be discussed at the next meeting of the Council. The topics are discussed together with issues brought up in any other business, and later the member of staff involved in the Council replies to the discussion points. In the small snapshot taken (4 meetings), the staff response only covered some of the points made and never addressed the points brought up in any other business (Field Notes).*

Whilst this is a snapshot it does suggest that pupils in general had only a token say in matters which concerned them. This lack of experience in talking about their perceptions of their school initially provided a slight difficulty in the first part of this research, as these involved pupils expressing their opinions about PE. It took time for the pupils to develop trust and be able to articulate their thoughts. In the initial part of the research they spoke of their experiences as passive participants:

‘Teachers decide what we do in the lessons and we just do it’ (Pupil I).

This statement perhaps indicates a lack of previous thought on the part of the pupil, with school being something that you had to take part in but towards which you had little input. This statement about the teachers making the decisions reflects the findings of Magri (2009) and highlights a sense of helplessness that pupils feel as they see the teachers making all the decisions without any consultation with the pupils (Cafai and Cooper, 2010). This led researchers to conclude that the pupils felt that they formed part of ‘an undemocratic system built on adult power and coercion; this led to them feeling alienated and led them to discharge from the system’ (Cafai and Cooper, 2010, p. 189).

A form of this disengagement was the way in which some pupils saw the imposition of:

the alien school culture on their own [culture]. They sought to resist the attempts on enculturation by refusing the values projected by the school, such as dressing in ways that conflicted (Cafai and Cooper, 2010, p. 190).

In this research there are examples (see later) of pupils rejecting the school's policy as seen in their views on the PE clothing policy.

Most of the pupils at some stage spoke of their dissatisfaction with some part of their PE lessons, although there were a range of views. One pupil had a value system which was at odds with many of his peers. This boy was in the eyes of all his peers a skilled performer. He said:

'I don't really mind what I do; I just like sport' (Pupil A).

When the pupils in the focus group were asked what activities in PE they liked, the pupils came up with a range. For example:

'Badminton, rugby, cricket, dodgeball, bench ball, baseball, basketball' (Pupil D).

Interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, the list this pupil provided contained activities that drew on the previous year's curriculum content or contained 'wish list' activities such as rugby which had never been part of the curriculum offer as far as I could ascertain. When asked what activities they disliked, the selected activities consisted of just football and trampolining. The response of Pupil I to the trampolining lesson was mixed, for he stated:

'I like trampolining; it gives you strength and it gives you energy and it helps you learn new tricks' (Pupil I).

In a later question, as part of the pupil investigator research on what activities he disliked, he stated:

'I hate trampolining; you all have to wait for your turn, and it gets really boring' (Pupil I when being interviewed by a pupil investigator).

This contradiction might be explained by noting his first reply was from the early part of the research, when the pupils probably sometimes gave answers which they thought I wanted, whilst the second reply came during the pupil investigator questioning. When pupils were more confident.

The reasons for the liked activities ranged from the ease of learning the basic skills to being able to participate:

‘I like badminton ‘cos it’s a good game and it’s easy to pick up and you can get a good rally going’ (Pupil D).

These comments are in marked contrast to the same pupil talking about football in which he had no interest and admitted to having limited skills:

‘I don’t like it. I’ve never really liked it. I’m no good at it. I don’t get the ball. Just don’t like it in general’ (Pupil D).

Pupil D clearly equated likeable activities to ones in which he felt he could perform well and contribute; activities that were disliked were concerned with his perceived lack of ability and the negative reactions of his peers. It was noted in the previous chapter that some pupils experienced anxiety about taking part in team activities. The one activity which was liked by all the pupils was badminton. This might be explained by looking at the nature of badminton as a game. Badminton, for these pupils, meant being able to work with a partner that they had selected. This allowed pupil choice in the selection of their friend or a pupil of similar ability thus increasing enjoyment and reducing feelings of poor self-worth. It was also an activity which offered the opportunity to work away from the direct scrutiny of their peers and thus free from the possibility of peer comment. This was an important factor in the building/maintaining of the pupils’ self-esteem.

Enjoyment was brought up in many of the pupils’ comments:

‘Basketball is just a one which gets everybody involved – I like basketball. In basketball you must play as a team and you can win the game. You learn how to get along with other people and you might make some new friends’ (Pupil Y)

These comments by Pupil Y were in contrast to those of Pupil D who, whilst expressing he liked basketball, had some reservations about how it was played and how he could take part in it and get personal enjoyment. These reservations all arose from how the game was organised and how the teams were selected, with greater enjoyment being linked to small-sided games played across the basketball court. Small games equalled lots of passes which gave the Pupil D enjoyment and involvement.

Other pupils expressed their preferences for different activities that they found enjoyable and in which they were achieving some success:

‘I enjoy cricket even though we have not done it for some time (comment made in January). I like it in the warm weather. I like to bat best. Mr. B tries to teach us how to do it properly, but I just like to hit it’ (Pupil I).

These three comments about basketball, badminton (Year 10) and cricket (Year10) align with the findings of many researchers that pupils find meaning in activities they enjoy or in which they see value (Coates and Vickerman, 2010; Sellman 2009).

Whilst there were many examples given by the pupils of activities which they enjoyed, there were also several activities which they did not enjoy or find meaningful.

Trampolining accounted for the most negative comments from the pupils and was an example of an activity bereft of meaning for them and perhaps one which they would not have chosen if they had been able to exercise choice.

### **7.3. Curriculum Offer**

PE lessons at the time of the research consisted of 2 x 90 minutes of basketball each week for one half term (Autumn Term 2), 2 x 90 minutes of trampolining for one half term (Spring Term 1) and 2 x 90 minutes of ‘display practice’ for one half term (Spring Term 2).



When the pupils were asked what the PE curriculum consisted of in Key Stage 4 of there were several varied answers, some of which were clearly drawn from the activities of previous years:

‘tag-rugby, ultimate frisbee, badminton, tennis, cricket, rounders and trampolining’ (Pupil D).

This was an interesting selection and bore no resemblance to the activities set out on the school’s web site for pupils in Year 10:

*‘Year 10 PE activities – football/dance/cheerleading (for three half terms), display, striking games and outdoor education’ (Field Notes).*

In this special school the decisions made by the staff regarding the curriculum content and the timing and location of the lessons all had a part to play in the development of pupils’ self-esteem. The design of the curriculum offer meant that pupils were involved in the same physical activity for the whole of their PE lessons during one half-term. This offer meant that pupils spent 180 minutes each week divided into two separate lessons for a period of 6/7 weeks in which they only take part in a single activity.

This research did not have the remit to ascertain why this format had been chosen, only to report on the consequences of the decision on the pupils.

When asked how they knew what the activities were for the coming year, the pupils reported that they waited to be told by the teacher, a reinforcing of the pervading attitude of ‘them and us’:

‘the teacher tells us what we are going to do next term’ (Pupil L).

There was a notice board in the school’s main hall which clearly showed the activities for the year (*Field Notes*), but when pupils were asked if they had seen the plan outlining activities for the year, they all replied that they had not and insisted that they had not been told about the PE curriculum for the year.

The physical siting of these activities was also important since school-based lessons were able to make use of the full 90 minutes allocated, whilst lessons which took place off-site lost lesson time for travel. The three activities that pupils participated in during the research period were basketball, trampolining and display.

Basketball lessons took place at the local sports centre which meant the time spent on this activity was limited to 30 minutes with the remaining time taken up by travel. Basketball lessons consisted largely of the playing of games which the pupils found to be supportive of their development if they were small-sided and played on a small court. Small-sided games provided the opportunity to play in a restricted space on the basketball court, usually across the width which in itself limited the physical activity. This was a plus for some pupils as the size of the court meant that games had only a few pupils on each side which in turn provided many opportunities to be involved in the game with lots of passes for each individual pupil. Games played on a full-size basketball court were negatively received by some pupils. Pupils not being included in what they perceived to be the 'best' team (discussed later) was also a cause of disquiet. Games of basketball played across the full-size court were much appreciated by many pupils as was the fact that with more teams being selected, it limited the opportunities of the 'better' players to select themselves into the same team. Conversely, pupils reported that when the games were played on the full-sized court, they experienced frustration at not being regarded skilled enough to participate in the team therefore receiving few passes with resultant loss of self-esteem.

A different pupil talked about football which had been part of the previous year's curriculum. Football had been a recurring activity throughout the pupil's time in the school and Pupil D had decided that for him this activity held no meaning.

#### **7.4. Pupil Choice in the Curriculum**

One of the main opportunities that PE offers is a degree of choice for pupils. PE, unlike other subjects, consists of a combination of different types of physical activities plus a

selection from a multitude of games activities. The range is broad enough to engage the interest of most pupils if taught well. In addition to the multitude of possible activities, there is also the choice of how pupils engage, with whom and in what role. It is this perception of choice relative to other subjects that has been noted by Travell and Visser (2006) to provide a feeling of comparative autonomy within lessons, but this autonomy is only achieved if choice exists within the PE lessons.

Some pupils looked on the idea of choice as a possible chance to do their favourite activity, perhaps an opportunity to revisit an enjoyable lesson. However, at this school there was no personal choice in the PE curriculum. Whilst pupil choice is not written into the NCPE, many schools have recognised that some pupil choice is important. This is especially true in Key Stage 4 since it allowed pupils to participate more fully in activities that they enjoyed or that had meaning for them, with possible positive effects on their later ability to lead active lifestyles.

The NCPE Key Stage 4 provides opportunities for pupils to get involved in a range of activities that develop personal fitness and promote an active healthy lifestyle. In many mainstream schools this has been interpreted as allowing pupils to exercise a degree of choice over which activities they wish to pursue to a higher level in their later school years. This experience is often mediated by the facilities available to the school, the choice of curriculum content and the time available.

In the research school's situation with a Year 11-year group of only 22 pupils and one member of staff, facilitating full pupil choice of activity could potentially result in the impractical situation of pupils pursuing individual activity timetables in a variety of on and off-site locations. This would cause both facilities and staffing problems in addition to safeguarding issues for pupils pursuing individual activities off-site. An alternative, which is used in some schools, would be to allow limited or guided choice. In a survey conducted with 153 15-16-year-olds in north-west England, Smith, Green and Thurston (2009) concluded that PE teachers usually provided young people with a degree of activity choice in the later school years but this was limited by the individual school's

resources. The research of Smith, Green and Thurston (2009) established that some degree of choice of activity amongst 15-16-year-olds attending mainstream schools was well-established as an aspect of the PE curriculum.

The provision of a teacher-directed PE curriculum in the research school, even though it did not provide a choice of activity in the later years, may have been a pragmatic solution to the difficulties of a small school (as outlined above). However, such was the strength of negative feeling by some of the pupils that a different selection of activities which perhaps held more meaning for pupils might have been more appropriate.

The experience of Pupil D provides an illustration of the effects of lack of choice. Pupil D was a slightly-build articulate boy who professed that he had never been interested in playing football throughout his school career. By the time he had reached Year 10, the accumulated years of low-skilled performance, rejection by his peers, having minimal involvement during the games and the physical fear of being hit by the 'hard ball' meant that he rejected the activity completely. Pupil D spent the whole of his three-hour PE time for a period of 6/7 weeks wandering around the pitch usually as far away from the ball as possible, making sure his involvement in an activity which for him had no meaning was minimal. These behaviours were reported not just by Pupil D but also by his peers, who acknowledged that this was his normal behaviour during football lessons. Pupil D's self-esteem must have been battered with a series of comments from his peers referring to him being 'scared' and 'running away' from the ball.

The pupils had experience of choice within the lessons but not in the curriculum. Their choice was restricted to such issues as whom they wanted to work with or for which team they wanted to play. The pupils all expressed the desire to have more participation in making personal choices in their final school year and spending more time in activities which they had previously found to be personally meaningful. In the early part of this research the pupils had no experience of being asked for their opinions on curriculum matters, but as the research progressed and confidence grew, became excited by the thought that PE might offer some choice of activity. It was generally felt that the current

curriculum offer selected by the staff was largely uninspiring. Smith, Green and Thurston (2009) highlighted that 'activity choice' was important. Although they did not specifically research choice for pupils with the label BESD, they did describe the structure of PE lessons as being characterized by varying degrees of formality and informality that went further than mere choice of activity.

In the special school, even if the pupils *had* expressed preferences about activities which had personal meaning, the lack of choice meant that they had to take part in activities that for them were meaningless. Pupils such as Pupil D who disliked football and Pupil Y who disliked trampolining still had to take part in these activities. Pupil Y stated that he hated trampolining, but he still had to take part in two weekly lessons of 90 minutes duration. Pupil D said he had had the same feelings during his Year 10 football lessons.

Previous research with pupils labelled BESD highlighted that pupils have expectations of their PE lessons as a subject which would allow them to have relative autonomy in a way unavailable elsewhere in the curriculum (Medcalf, 2010). This relative autonomy meant for some pupils PE was a time when they could forget the constraints placed upon them in the other school subjects. The relative independence was the cornerstone of their high regard for PE within their timetables. PE was a subject in which there was a 'freedom' not found in other subjects; it was a means of 'escape' from classroom-based subjects. In my research there were no reports of PE being a subject which allowed for autonomy. It was rather seen as a subject that typified the perceptions of the pupils that the school decided and then told the pupils what to do. This situation led Pupil D and Pupil Y to report that such was their dislike of some of the activities and the controlling nature of the lessons that, for them, there was no feeling of autonomy and that other classroom-based lessons were preferable to PE. Pupil D said:

'I like Maths, quite like Design and Technology and Cooking. Duke of Edinburgh's Award is not bad'.

### **7.5. Competitive Team Games**

Competitive team games form a significant part of the NCPE and have often been used as a barometer of the sporting prowess of nations (Mackintosh and Liddle, 2015). The need to develop sporting activities and physical activity for young people is a key international public sector policy concern according to Devine (2013); Green (2007), (2011); Nicholson, Hoye and Houlihan (2011) and Van Bottenburg (2011). There are concerns raised about the privileging of competitive team games within PE, and it is recognised that such privileging is often at the expense of providing a more inclusive and balanced education for all children (Penney and Evans, 1997; Tinning, 1997; Penney and Chandler, 2000; Fairclough et al., 2002; Penney and Jess, 2004; Penney and Lisahunter, 2006). The concern is mainly about the place of competitive team games within the curriculum. There is, however, a recommendation within the NCPE that pupils should continue to take part in competitive sports and activities outside school through community links and sports clubs. The expectation is that by the end of Year 11 pupils will have experienced a variety of competitive team games and have identified ones which held personal meaning. In a small special school this poses several concerns: the complexities of pupils working in teams (see above), the difficulties of providing an experience of playing the full game with only a small number of pupils and the provision of opportunities to compete in team games outside of school. If competitive games are part of the curriculum, then it is not unreasonable to expect that the school would provide competitive games experiences both within school and against other schools.

The experience of competition within basketball lessons suggested that if pupils were perceived by their peers to have the skills required, then they enjoyed the lesson and it was not important how the game was played. If pupils were not perceived by their peers to have the required skills, then they experienced a very different situation. It was for these latter pupils that the game played assumed greater importance. Notwithstanding all the self-concept and self-image problems encountered in the selection of the teams

(discussed previously), if the games were played on the full-sized basketball court the pupils reported problems:

‘if it’s a full-court match then I don’t get involved cos nobody passes to me. I like passing but sometimes I get sort of excluded, sometimes nobody passes to me. I sort of get pushed out of the game. I’m not really involved. Sometimes I get well sort of ignored by the other players’ (Pupil D).

When it came to describe their experience in small games of basketball played across the full court, the same pupil reported a very different experience:

‘Sometimes when we play crosswise and I’m in a good group, I get a lot of the ball and I feel involved - yeah gives me a lot of confidence’ (Pupil D).

The experience of this pupil is reflected in the pupil’s self-concept where he felt that in the large game situation, he had nothing to contribute and was ignored. When placed in a small team game with pupils of similar ability he had much to offer and gained a feeling of wellbeing. The playing of the game was more important for Pupil D than the competitive element, since in his comments about basketball lessons he hardly talked about winning but rather of being involved and enjoying the game. This was not found with more able pupils who frequently referred to selecting the best team possible from the best players with the ultimate intention of winning the game:

‘well if you are playing a game like basketball and you don’t win, how are you going to feel. You’ve got to try and pick the best players’ (Pupil I).

Pupil I described the scenario where he needs to select the best players to win the games in order for him to feel the activity holds meaning. Being part of winning teams also helped him maintain his status in the class of being recognized as an able performer.

There had historically been the provision to play basketball within the school, thus eliminating the need to drive to the local sports centre with the subsequent loss of lesson time. This lack of a school basketball facility was a cause of some concern for the pupils:

‘we used to be able to play basketball in the hall but Mrs. A took them down (the basketball nets) so she could have mirrors for dance. When do we ever do dance? She promised that we could have a net outside, but it never happened’ (Pupil D).

This issue had been raised at the School Council and new basketball nets had been promised for sitting on the playground (*Field Notes, School Council minutes*):

‘we were promised that we could have some outdoor basketball nets, but they never arrived’ (Pupil K).

The research showed that the local sports centre was 30 minutes’ drive from the school which meant that a 90-minute lesson was reduced to 30 minutes playing time, a fact which not all pupils felt was a bad thing. One pupil commented that it gave him:

‘the chance to talk to my mates’ (Pupil K).

For Pupil K talking to his ‘mates’ seemed preferable to playing basketball which raised the question about the meaningfulness of this activity to this pupil. Pupil K continued his conversations once the lesson was underway as he was not very interested in taking part in the lesson. Other pupils reported that they enjoyed some of the basketball lessons and did not feel the need to continue their conversations.

Inter-school games, especially after school was a difficult provision for a small rural special school to provide since most of the pupils travelled long distances from their homes to attend school. At the end of the school day, buses arrived at the school to take the pupils home and there was no provision for later buses to enable the school day to be extended. On the whole pupils had no memory of ever taking part in inter-school games. Pupil M, however, insisted that there:

‘used to be football and rugby teams’.



This view was rejected by all the other pupils with Pupil A noting in addition that they had never played rugby. After some discussion amongst the pupil investigators, it became clear that these pupils' only experience of competition in team games was at an intra-school level. There was, however, still difficulty in remembering exactly what had taken place, probably indicating that this was not a recent occurrence:

'there used to be teams. I was in one of them, like Eagle team, Clover team, can't remember what we did' (Pupil I).

The reported lack of opportunities to take part in competitive team games either within the school or playing against other schools raised the possibility that the pupils had misunderstood the issue, since they reported that the school occasionally took part in sports days when the local special schools played different sports together:

'we sometimes go to a sports day with other schools, but we have not been this year' (Pupil A).

The lack of inter-school and intra-school sporting activities, in addition to, the busing issue meant that the pupils reported no involvement in local sports clubs and community links. The school was not fulfilling its NCPE role of providing links to sport and community groups, which meant that the responsibility of organizing personal sporting links devolved upon the pupils themselves or on their parents. Indeed, none of the pupils involved in this research had any experience of sport outside of PE lessons. When the pupils talked about taking part in sport outside of school, it was largely centred around their 'mates' and playing 'knockabout' games on the local playing fields. Despite the near-universal negative comments on the trampolining lessons, there were reports about pupils having garden trampolines and the hair-raising exploits they witnessed or performed. One resulted in a broken arm and a broken trampoline. The pupils involved in these exploits commented on their personal skill levels, and it is of interest that these skills were not on show during school trampoline lessons. When this was probed, the pupil stated that it was alright to make mistakes in front of your 'mates' but performing in the PE lesson provided an opportunity for peer rebuke and loss of possible self-esteem and was best avoided. Only Pupil D expressed any desire to take part in sport out of school, but lacked the support needed to proceed.

## **7.6. Boredom in lessons**

### **7.6.1 Boredom in Lessons (Trampolining)**

Trampolining lessons had a possible working time of 60 minutes after allowing time for pupils to change clothes and erect and dismantle the trampoline. During a typical lesson, each pupil would perform for approximately three minutes.

This lesson structure provided an abundance of time for pupils to engage in other activities. Activities ranged from 'day-dreaming', talking to their friends (there was evidence that the pupils arranged to stand next to their friends in order to be able to chat) or more overtly inappropriate behavioural activities brought on by boredom. In

addition, when this lesson was observed (*through miscommunication I arrived as the lesson was in progress [Field Notes]*), there was lots of chatter around the trampoline with many negative comments directed at individuals who exhibited poor performance, made mistakes or had accidents. The atmosphere was one in which rebuke and ridicule followed most performances. In this situation pupils felt that it was acceptable to exhibit poor behaviour since the lesson was only meaningful to very few of their peers. This was in contrast with lessons found to be meaningful, as in a reported badminton lesson (Year 10 activity). Most of the class found badminton meaningful and deviant behaviour on the part of some pupils was rejected. In this case pupils deemed it acceptable for the teacher to provide a managerial role in preventing deviant behaviour on the part of the few spoiling the enjoyment of most of the class. This was a clear contrast with the trampoline lesson where teacher involvement was resented as the majority of pupils felt the activity lacked personal meaning. It has been previously noted that for pupils with the label BESD fast-moving active lessons are more likely to prove to be engaging and motivating. In this case the pupils were engaged in an activity they found neither engaging nor motivating:

‘we all have to wait around for your turn and it’s really boring’ (Pupil I).

It was this boredom which, in the eyes of the pupils, was the main cause for the inappropriate behaviours displayed within the lesson, which in turn added to the lack of personal meaning. Having to wait for a turn caused some pupils to seek other cases of amusement:

‘you just stand around the trampoline, just waiting for your go and not surprisingly it’s not the most amusing thing. So, you sort of drift off, so you just sort of daydream, sort of you’re there but not there really. Well your attention span it’s not broad enough. If you’re bored, you’re not going to really concentrate, so you try to find some other type of entertainment like daydreaming’ (Pupil D).

This was one pupil’s account; others took the situation further:

‘probably quite a bit more than chatting, pushing and stuff. It depends who you are standing next to. Well if you don’t like the lesson you just mess around and stuff’ (Pupil I).

The lack of interest in the lesson, and the time that the pupils were inactive, led to some pupils making the connection between boredom and poor behaviour:

‘You just get pulled into that stuff, don’t you? If you are bored you don’t behave as well; you want to be entertained you don’t want to be bored. There’s more chance of you not obeying if you’re bored and finding something {else} more entertaining, usually misbehaving’ (Pupil D).

In addition to the lesson being boring, pupils had views on being used as safety aids during the lesson:

*‘The pupils had been taught that when they were waiting around the side of the trampoline for their turn, they were to watch the action with their hands up ready to push a stray performer back onto the trampoline’ (Field Notes).*

When safety was discussed, pupils reported that they did not concentrate when they were waiting for their turn. One pupil said if someone was at risk of falling from the trampoline, he would not want to be involved:

‘If I see that somebody is doing something stupid and are falling off the trampoline near me, I just take a step back cos I don’t want them to fall on me, they’re much bigger than me!’ (Pupil D).

When the issue of concentration was explored, the pupils felt that it was unreasonable for them to have to stand around and focus on the safety of others. Their view was that they should be allowed to talk and, if this was not allowed, they would do it anyway to alleviate boredom. They also felt that if the school had invested in a net surround like the ones used on garden trampolines, that would have alleviated the need for them to have the responsibility for the safety of their peers:

‘I probably won’t concentrate cos it’s boring just standing around. I really think the school should get a net, but you’re standing around then you can’t really talk. It just gets boring, so a net is probably more reliable than kids standing around not concentrating’ (Pupil L).

The pupils admitted to being bored with the lesson and to finding other ways to entertain themselves:

‘You’re not really allowed to talk, only a little bit. You’re not really allowed to talk but instead of standing in silence, you could like have a conversation’ (Pupil K).

In this situation the pupils acknowledged that little learning was taking place. Chen (1998) stated that it appeared that ‘boredom is personally and socially constructed, primarily in the learning process’ (Chen, 1998, p. 17).

Farrell, Peguero, Lindsey and White (1998), in research in American high schools, reported that pupils’ experiences in classrooms, school playgrounds and sport-related programmes were all likely to contribute to the perception of boredom. They stated that that boredom seemed to result when pupils failed to develop the skills needed for an activity and attributed this failure to their own lack of certain ability. This was endorsed by Chen (1998) who reported that for these pupils ‘the activities in which they failed in learning became the symbols of boredom’ (Chen 1998, p.17).

Many pupils indicated that they usually experienced boredom when they perceived a lack of competence in themselves and did not believe that they would become more competent at a specific activity:

‘Some people are natural performers; some people pick it up a lot quicker than others ‘cos they are more athletic. It depends if you’ve got the gift’ (Pupil D).

Pupil D believed that in order to be a ‘good performer’ you needed to have some innate ability in order to progress, but some pupils attributed their lack of progress to other factors:

‘when I was little, I actually did a lot of ‘roly-polys’ and when I was little at my old house they used to be on the grass in the carpark. Then I got a trampoline and I broke it and my mum wouldn’t let me have another one, so I had to go back to the grass, and I tried to go a flick-flack and I broke my arm. I don’t do it anymore’ (Pupil K).

A bad experience of an activity can indeed have a lasting effect on the pupil's self-concept. It is likely that the pupils in my research with the label BESD have in their past experienced activities in which they did not feel competent i.e. they perceived themselves as having low ability. In research on the significance of ability Evans and Penney (2008) noted an:

‘inextricable link with a child's willingness and opportunity to display and achieve recognition for ability as well as their desire to learn in a subject such as PE’ (Evans and Penney, (2008, p. 2).

An important debate, outside the remit of this research, is the question of whether the pupil ability is innate, the product of their environment, an interrelationship between genetics and environment, or a construct reflecting the way in which individual and collective attributes are valued in a specific site of practice (Evans, 2004; Wright and Burrows, 2006).

#### **7.6.2. Meaningfulness in PE**

Regarding PE, Beni, Fletcher and Ni Chroinin (2017) commented that for activities to be meaningful to pupils they should include social interaction, challenge, fun and personally-relevant meaning. They suggested that provision of such meaningful activities might help to attenuate some behavioural challenges. My research found that both the lack of choice for pupils and the nature of the teacher-led curriculum contributed to pupils perceived some of their PE experiences as lacking meaning.

A lack of meaning, according to Chen (1998), occurred when pupils wanted certain things from a PE lesson and did not get them. Chen (1998, p. 13) described the possible outcomes of such conflict: ‘when participation in an activity failed to provide the meaningfulness that was sought, boredom was very likely to be the outcome’.

An example of this conflict of meaning resulting in boredom is provided by Pupil D in his comments about football lessons:

‘I hate football. I’ve never really liked it. When it’s football I usually walk round the edge of the pitch avoiding the ball, not getting really involved. If you get hit with the ball in the face it really hurts, so I keep out of the way’ (Pupil D).

Pupil D had decided due to his past experiences that football lessons were to be avoided and that they held no meaning for him. He reported that he would much rather be doing lessons he liked such as Maths as opposed to having to go outside in the cold to play football. Football lessons were, for this pupil, one of his worst lessons. Other pupils had different ideas on what they wanted from PE lessons. When Pupil A was asked what it was that he wanted from the PE lesson, he replied:

‘I like it because we always do it, we always do something and there’s nothing that I don’t really like. I just like taking part. A good lesson is where I could achieve everything I could and try to achieve. Most sports I’m good at’ (Pupil A).

When asked in the focus group about what had happened in their worst-ever PE lesson, Pupil K summed it up succinctly:

‘well the lesson does not go well, and I don’t get what I want’ (Pupil A).

This pupil reaction demonstrated the fulfilment of one of the stated aims of PE: PE is about the expression of movement and the enjoyment that can be achieved from being satisfied in the performance. The five challenges outlined by Beni et al. (2017) of social interaction, fun, challenge, competence and relevant meaning are all achieved by this skilled pupil whose abilities are recognised by his peers.

### **7.7. Pupils’ views on behaviour in PE**

Poor behaviour was considered to be the consequence of the disparity between what pupils wanted from their PE lessons and what they got. These behaviour problems mostly related to the behaviour of their peers:

‘the lesson did not go well and there were problems with people that are upset or unhappy’ (Pupil I).

Placing the blame on their peers was one side of the situation, with pupils reporting that their own behaviour was also at times a source of concern:

‘My behaviour is quite bad when I’m bored but it’s just messing around and not getting involved in the lesson’ (Pupil I).

When Pupil I was asked for more information he declined:

*‘Pupil I was asked to explain his poor behaviour in lessons, he declined to do so, and it was evident from the look on his face that this line of questioning could go no further’ (Field Notes).*

As previously reported, all the pupils had friends within the class, and they had all been together so long that they knew each other well. Certain pupils used the PE lessons to reinforce their position as someone with challenging behaviour; this was largely expected and favourably regarded by the class. Pupil Y was accepted as the class ‘clown’ who was expected to keep the other pupils amused by his behaviour, especially if they were not interested in the lesson. Notably Pupil Y had played this role so often that he knew how much he could ‘get away with’ before earning the rebuke of the teacher. There is agreement here with the work of Cothran, Kulinna and Garrahy (2009) who found that increased social status could accrue from the results of misbehaviour. Pupil Y was regarded by all as someone who kept the class amused, but often these behaviours had the opposite effect: of excluding him within the group when his behaviour detracted from an otherwise enjoyable lesson.

Conflict can also arise when pupils want to develop skills but are offered lessons which do not provide this. ‘Beyond 2012 – outstanding physical education for all’ noted ‘In a minority of schools visited, these pupils were not challenged sufficiently in PE lessons because teachers’ expectations were low’ (Beyond 2012 – Outstanding Physical Education for All, February 2013). In my research pupil reports also indicate that during PE lessons they were not challenged physically. An indication of this was provided by Pupil K who thought:

‘In the PE lessons we do the same thing every year and it’s boring] (Pupil K).



### **7.8. Pupil Perceptions of their Ability**

In this research pupils regarded their own ability as a binary choice: they thought that in PE they had ability or not:

‘I have not got a reputation for being good. I’m alright I guess so when I mess up it does not bother me. If some people who are really good mess up, they’ve got a reputation for being good, so’ (Pupil Y).

This idea needs to be explored to enhance our understanding of the perceptions of pupils of their ability in PE. The work of Evans (2004) is useful in that it attempts to explain how ability might be conceptualized. Evans drew on the work of Bourdieu (1986) in that he suggested that the ‘embodied dispositions of a person’, which Bourdieu described as their habitus, could also be perceived as their ability when ‘defined relationally with reference to values, attitudes and mores prevailing within a discursive field’ (Evans, 2004, p. 100).

Bourdieu described a field as a site of social interaction, but it is more specifically a group of social relationships and practices through which certain values and beliefs (which may include ability) are situated, consolidated and imposed on people (Wacquant, 1989). The fields within schools are defined as the school rules, uniform, lessons taught etc. There are other influences on the educational field such as teacher influence and values and beliefs about PE by pupils.

Bourdieu conceptualized the field as horizontal differentiated social spaces, intersected by vertical differentiation. The horizontal axis was made up of media, family, schools and workplace with the vertical axis being class, race, gender and dis/ability. Evans (2004) further argued that:

‘We cannot “read” or “interpret” ability, valued aspects of behaviour . . . without reference to a person’s gender, age, ethnicity, “disability” and the values prevailing within and across particular fields’ (Evans, 2004, p. 101).

Evans noted that middle-class parents no longer claim privilege on the grounds of traditional differences, but because of what they have achieved through their 'ability'. They invested heavily and strategically to ensure that the 'ability' of their children is fostered (Ball, 2003). Crossley (2001) asserted that a child brought up in a football-loving household is far more likely to develop a love of their own for football and acquire the 'know how' and the ability to both appreciate, criticize and indeed to play football.

Children from such households had had their physical skills invested heavily in from an early age and they may have acquired not only the 'right' attitudes, values, motivations but also the right physical skills, techniques and understandings. Crossley (2001) described these as the 'deep-seated dispositions of the body, deep seated structures of the body which become unquestioned beliefs embodied in actions and feeling but seldom in word' (Crossley, 2001, p. 99).

In terms of this research, there is no evidence that the pupils have had their physical skills invested in from an early age. Pupils did not report any instances of being involved in organised sports activities outside school. Pupils reported that they took part in football and trampolining activities outside of school, but when this was probed it was revealed that this amounted to a 'kickabout' sessions with their friends in the local park and playing on a trampoline in their own or a friend's garden. There is evidence that far from being encouraged by their parents/carers, pupils basically 'did their own thing'.

On being asked to take photographs of the sport he took part in over the half term break, Pupil Y said:

'I don't really do sport. I don't want a sporting half-term. I'm not interested' (Pupil Y).

He went on to comment that for him half-term was:

'never coming out of my room. I'll be playing on my Play Station 3 or my X-Box. I play 'Call of Duty' against other players but I'm up against players who hack' (Pupil Y).

Pupil D said that he had tried to join a fencing club. He had never seen fencing except on TV, thought it looked easy and decided he would like to try it. He found a club on the internet and:

‘I got mum to send them an email and then we found out that it was too far for mum to take me, so we just forgot all about it’ (Pupil D).

None of the pupils reported that they had any sporting influences outside school except their ‘mates’. Given that all the pupils in the research had been transferred from mainstream education to attend a special school, there is a strong likelihood that most of their experiences of judging their ability in PE came from within the special school PE programme.

An example of a lack of confidence in their ability leading to a self-fulfilling prophecy was reported by Pupil D. He disliked football as an activity. He was physically afraid of it and actively ran away from the ball but the reasons he gave for not liking the lesson were that it was played outside, it was usually cold and wet, and he had to wear shorts. By avoiding participation in the football lessons, he was unable to develop his skills.

The belief amongst the pupils of some lessons being socializing lessons demonstrates the restricted view of the pupils which was that any lesson that held no personal meaning for them became an opportunity to socialize. Basketball lessons were not seen as socialising lessons by most of the pupils, but ones of enjoyment and meaning. As a result, Pupil Y found himself not wanted in any of the teams since they perceived his contribution would not help bring about a successful outcome for the team.

There were other pupils within the class who because of their actions or characteristics were not part of socializing activities. One such pupil was perceived to be a ‘loner’ who was ‘always staring’ and was not deemed to have much physical ability. A consequence of these negative perceptions was this pupil was rejected as a working partner. This rejection was marked during a photo elicitation review when the first response by all the

pupils to a photo in which he was present was to make comments about the way he looked in the photo, even though he was only in the background.

There is evidence in this research that experiences before they came to the special school played their part in the individual pupil's perception of themselves. Pupil D recalls how in his primary school he was:

'dyslexic and had ADHD and the work there was far too hard for me. I was falling behind, you know like tremendously, so I got transferred to this school where it's much better – I'm happy at this school cos it's a massive improvement on my old school' (Pupil D).

Pupil Y describes how his mum moved him from his previous special school:

'I go to this school because I have anger issues – from another special school. My mum moved me when a kid went off on one and the teacher threw him into a wall' (Pupil Y).

None of the pupils could remember what their PE lessons had been like at their previous schools, but could remember the reasons for them being transferred to the special school. These experiences seemed to illustrate that the pupils, and by implication the parents/carers, were happy with what the school provided:

'My mum transferred me to this school where it's much better' (Pupil Y)

However, parents/carers did not seem to involve themselves in the development of their children's physical capital about which the parents/carers appeared, from pupil comments, to be ambivalent. It seems that the pupils' skills are not nurtured within the family and there is a need to consider what their families recognise, value and nurture. Broomhead (2013) noted that educational practitioners often believed that parents with children with the label BESD did not take responsibility for the pupils' development, learning and wellbeing and that they failed to adopt adequate and appropriate practices for supporting their children. Klett-Davies (2010), Perrier (2010) and Broomhead (2013) noted that these inappropriate parenting strategies, as judged by predominately middle-class educational practitioners, with their middle-class values saw other parenting styles

as inappropriate. An additional factor was the often-chaotic home lives of the pupils impacting negatively on the attainment of the pupils. In the Broomhead research, the educational professionals employed in BESD schools commented on the dysfunctional behaviour of parents and lack of parental involvement in providing clothing.

#### **7.8.1. Finding out about ability**

It has been previously noted that the pupils had very clear perceptions of their place in the ability hierarchy and the extent to which their individual contributions were able to be beneficial to themselves and others. When asked about their how they found out about their level of ability in PE, most of the pupils demurred. In the school hall, there was a public display of the pupils' ability levels:

*'On a large noticeboard located in the school hall there was a series of charts on which all of the pupils in the school were named and their levels of achievement in the various activities within their PE lessons were displayed' (Field Notes).*

These charts were discussed in a focus group and the findings were illuminating. The pupils knew they were there and what they were about, but none of the pupils admitted interest:

*'you look at the board in the hall, but they are the old levels cos I've looked' (Pupil I).*

In this pupil's view there was no point in looking at their levels since they were not updated, but when asked if they knew their levels in PE all the pupils reported that the teacher told them their levels at the end of each half term but:

*'the teacher never tells you what you have to do to get to the next level' (Pupil Y).*

Research has suggested that teachers' understanding of ability in PE is dependent on three key indicators: assessment via the NCPE indicators, representation in extra-curricular sport and their own interpretations of talent (Croston and Hills, 2017). These findings contrast with those of Bailey et al. (2009) who reported minimal use of NCPE levels. Croston and Hills (2017) found that comparing pupils against each other and

identifying individuals above the levels of their peers was an important variable in assessing pupils. They found that physical capital was a key indicator of ability and was associated with prowess in a range of activities (as reported in Bailey et al. 2009).

Physical capital is:

‘the forms of symbolic and material resources related to the body that individuals have at their disposal to enact relations of power’ (Wiltshire et al., 2017, p. 551).

The concept of physical capital needs to be conveyed to the pupils, since it has been noted that pupils involved in the research were only able to judge their ability by comparing themselves to their peers.

PE is a school subject which by its very nature is physical and pupils taking part are in the public view, so achievement goals are emphasised at all levels of the subject. Some researchers have recommended that pupils are helped to ‘develop learning goals which have internal meaning rather than achievement goals which are dependent on the judgement of others’ (Belton and Priyaharshini, 2007, p. 590).

One effective teaching technique for obtaining positive results from pupils labelled BESD is to provide interesting, fast-moving lessons. Young (2013) recommended maximizing active learning time for pupils with EBD, since potentially the most disruptive times amongst EBD pupils occur when pupils ‘are not directly involved in activity such as skill practice, fitness activities or games play’ (Young, 2013, p. 10). Swinson, Woof and Melling’s (2003) similarly suggested that EBD pupil behaviour reflected the organisation of the lessons, with more on-task behaviour in well-organised lessons than in poorly-organised lessons. Other researchers have reported that if pupils (not only those pupils with the label BESD) were to gain full and effective engagement in learning tasks, which is the antithesis of boredom, there needed to be ‘the provision of choice, lack of coercion, respect for children’s own agenda, and learning activities relevant to the pupil’s own goals’ (Patrick, Skinner and Connell, 1993, p. 789).

In this research the pupils reported that none of the above conditions were present in their PE lessons. The lack of the pupils knowing what they needed to do in order to improve made the setting of any learning goals difficult. This, once again, reinforced the feeling of helplessness already in place as pupils had had no input into their education within PE. It reinforced the 'us and them' situation reported in many research projects (Bartola and Tabone, 2002; Magri, 2009. Szklarski (2011) noted that progress was an essential constituent if pupils were to be motivated in school and if the pupil did not perceive 'forward movement even though effort was made then the motivational experience disappears gradually' (Szklarski, 2011, p. 45).

It is not surprising that the pupils in the research expressed little motivation to learn or improve, when their perceptions of the subject and their PE teacher were generally negative.

In school there was a reliance on the role of the teacher to tell them their level of ability and what they had to do to improve. At no point did any of the pupils make any attempt to try to find what they had to do to reach the next level.

#### **7.8.2. Talking about my future**

One of the consequences of the researcher getting to know the pupils were insights into the pupils' lives outside of school. Whilst these insights did not form part of the research, they did provide a context for some of the pupils' comments. Throughout the research one of the main findings had been that of the pupils accepting that the nature of their school was adult-dominated. I noticed instances of the pupils not wanting nor being able to play a part in the school situation, and being content to wait to be told what to do. Conversations about the pupils' lives outside of the school shed a different light on the pupils concerned. They *had* thought about their futures and indeed had put in place potential plans. Some of the pupils had a clear vision of their future as became clear in an informal conversation whilst waiting for all the pupil investigators to convene. A conversation arose about what the pupils wanted to do when they left school; this gave

an insight into two pupils' thoughts. The two pupils present had clear ideas on their future. Pupil D said that:

*'I see myself with a good job, married, nice house and kids. I want to own my own independent indie game company' (Field Notes).*

Pupil Y had decided that he was going to:

*'go to college and do a foundation course to help him with his reading and then do another course to become a joiner' (Field Notes).*

When asked how they were going to achieve this and what qualifications they were taking, Pupil D replied:

*'only one person in our class is taking GCSE's. Other people in the HUB (for pupils with Autism) get to take GCSEs. I want to but unfortunately, I put it down to my learning difficulty, you know like it's harder for me to learn. I read for enjoyment because I want to get better at reading. I've got my entry level in computing and electronics and my entry level in construction and I'm doing my entry level in paving' (Field Notes).*

These views show some maturity of thought which is far removed from the pupils' expressed views in other areas of the research. They demonstrate the pupils' capabilities to reflect on their lives and to plan for the future, something denied to them in their PE lessons.

## **7.9. School Uniform**

The school had instigated an overall uniform policy and, as stated in the school prospectus, this was provided free on entry to the school to help pupils:

*'instantly feel part of the school' (Field Notes from school website).*

Enhancing the feeling of belonging to a school is an often-raised argument for having a school uniform (Caruso, 1996). Other discussion points regarding the wearing of compulsory school uniform include a reduction in the differences in clothes worn by rich and less well-off pupils, minimisation of unsuitable clothes being worn for school, saving parents/carers money, reducing parent/carers and offspring arguments about what is



suitable to wear for school and pupils not being distracted by the wearing of non-uniform clothes:

*'Some pupils in the research did indeed not always wear school uniform, preferring to come to school in more 'teenage clothing' and risk the consequences' (Field Notes).*

Pupils were ready to express their feelings about having to wear school uniform. It was felt by some pupils that the school uniform with its prominent badge identified them as attending a special school. This was something that some of them would rather keep from their peers in their home environments. This stigma of attending a special school was especially marked with Pupil I who talked about the effect that knowing he went to a special school would have on his 'mates' and the fear of the comments which might follow:

*'Well you don't want your mates to know that you go to this school, do you?'  
(Pupil K)*

The pupils talked about not being consulted in the design of the uniform, although this would have been difficult since the clothing was provided as the pupils entered the school:

*'The school had a compulsory school uniform dress code and provided every pupil free of charge a school uniform (bright pink or royal-blue polo shirt and a royal-blue hooded sweatshirt) and a PE kit (dark-blue shorts and short-sleeved top)'  
(Field Notes).*

One of the main topics that occurred throughout the research was that of the school-selected clothing that had to be worn during PE lessons.

The school policy was strictly adhered to in that the same PE clothing was to be used by all pupils regardless of age or activity. The pupils in the research felt that they should have been allowed more appropriate clothing for some of their activities, for example track suit bottoms for use outdoors on cold days and long-sleeved tops for use on the trampoline to prevent abrasions. The school might have benefited by having a more

relaxed policy in this area, since its policies of strict adherence gave opportunities for already disaffected pupils to feel victimized.

After this first free set of clothing, the pupils were expected to provide their own uniform. Having to do this was a contentious issue with some of the pupils in this research:

‘I don’t think that we should have to wear uniform. I want to come to school in my clothes’ (Pupil M).

A question asked in the pupil investigator interviews: ‘What do you think of the school PE kit?’ elicited such typical comments:

‘It’s shocking, absolutely horrible because it’s shorts and t-shirt. Like if you are doing trampolining and you are doing like a front drop and you’ve only got a sleeveless [sic] t-shirt on and like shorts and it really gives you grazes on arms and knees and it’s not nice’ (Pupil D).

It was felt by many pupils that PE clothing was a contentious issue and that they should have been consulted about it.

A further pupil investigator question asked was: ‘What PE kit would you like?’ There was a clear consensus that the kit should suit the activity taking place:

‘tracksuit bottoms and long sleeve shirts for trampolining (Pupil D) and ‘tracky’ bottoms for going outside when it’s cold’ (Pupil L).

The comments in this research suggested little rejection of having to wear a PE kit; it was more that pupils clearly disliked the PE clothing that they had to wear and thought it inappropriate for some of the tasks in hand.

The advantages and disadvantages of uniform PE kit has been widely discussed (JOPERD, 2011) and the arguments reflect general discussion about the use of school uniform in general.

The feelings expressed by the pupils about their PE kit were in line with the findings of Caruso (1996): if pupils felt uncomfortable, especially when having to wear what they considered to be inappropriate kit and perhaps faced with adverse weather conditions, they would be less receptive in the lessons. Feelings of resentment might bubble over into inappropriate behaviour. Pupils' negative feelings about their school uniform are clearly demonstrated in the above comments.

If pupils did not have their PE kit with them, they were obliged to wear a PE kit provided by the school for errant pupils. This was extremely unpopular:

'If you forget your PE kit, you still have to do the lesson in the school's kit,' (Pupil L).

One argument for the wearing of PE kit was that of hygiene: pupils needed a change of clothing so that, after taking part in PE, they did not have to wear the same clothes for the rest of the day. This argument relied on the pupils having clean PE kit at the start of each lesson, but failed if the PE kit was seldom laundered or the pupil had forgotten/lost their PE kit and had to borrow some from the school:

'I can't find my PE kit! I left it on my peg and it's not on my peg. This is bad! Now I don't have a PE kit and now I have to wear their PE kit and the top I got the other day was really itchy' (Pupil D).

It might be that the PE kit borrowed from the school is freshly laundered. Another possible scenario was that it was previously worn that same day by other pupils. The worst-case scenario was that the PE kit had not been washed for days/weeks and had been worn by many pupils (and hence, possibly, the itchiness reported by Pupil D above). There is anecdotal evidence (TES, July 8<sup>th</sup> 2011) that forgetting PE kit is a problem faced in many schools with a variety of different responses employed by schools: pupils keeping the kit in school for the whole of the half term; borrowing kit from school; missing the lesson and being punished; doing the lesson and being punished; letters home. The issue of PE kit is seen by many teachers as a discipline issue. Some teachers regard not having

PE kit as being on par with a pupil forgetting an essential piece of equipment for other lessons (TES, July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011).

#### **7.10. Having a shower after PE lessons**

The notion of pupils wearing PE kit during PE but not showering at the end of lessons, merely changing out of their PE kit and putting their school uniform on what might be a perspiring and possibly dirty body, sits uncomfortably with the teaching of effective personal hygiene.

A survey of nearly 4,000 pupils was undertaken by the University of Essex. Half the surveyed pupils said they never showered in school, with one third stating that they did but only occasionally (Sandercock, Ogunleye and Voss, 2016). Although there were showers available at the research school, these were communal showers as opposed to individual cubicles and were not popular:

‘I like showers, but I don’t have them at school, ‘cos you don’t want your friends looking at your naked body’ (Pupil Y).

Pupil I responded to this comment by pointing out that:

‘you could wait until everybody had left the changing room and then take a shower’ (Pupil I).

This comment was instantly dismissed by:

‘what and have all those little kids coming in for the next lesson see me naked. I don’t think so’ (Pupil Y).

The reluctance to allow others to see their naked bodies was the subject of research by Frydenal and Thing (2019) who found feelings of shame and embarrassment expressed by pupils in changing rooms and during showering. This is entirely in line with other research: O’Donovan, Sandford and Kirk (2015) explored the changing room from a ‘Bourdieuian perspective displaying the changing room as a conflicting arena, where the

exposure of the body increases young people's seeming need to control their bodily appearance' (Frydenal and Thing, 2019, p. 3).

Body image was not spoken of by the pupils in this research which contrasted with other research which found that body image was of increasing importance to adolescent males with the rising use of social media influencing pupils' views (Wiltshire et al. (2017). Davison (2000) reported on boys' fear of humiliation and bullying in the communal shower space along with the need to conform to the athletic male body type. Sandercock et al. (2016) also found that body image was an important factor when it came to undressing and showering after PE. In my research there was not, as found in many other pieces of research (Gorely, Holroyd and Kirk, 2003), any reference to different boys having different body characteristics. Neither was there any reference to boys' developing masculinity.

Pupil L spoke about constraining herself during lessons in order not to sweat. She said she did not want to have a shower, but also did not want to have to go to her next lesson feeling hot and sweaty. These feelings were in marked contrast to some of the boys who, as described above, did not feel the need to wash after getting sweaty or muddy. Cordoro and Ganz (2005) noted the need to shower after exercise due to perspiration from intense exercise and the contact from mud in field sports.

Pupils at the research school took the option of not taking a shower after PE, so this was not a cause of friction in PE but was a potential issue for the rest of the school with pupils returning to lessons, after outdoor PE, with mud on their bodies especially their hands

'Mrs. X always goes and makes us wash our hands after PE' (Pupil L).

### **7.11. Healthy Lifestyles**

One of the aims of the NCPE is that schools should help all pupils lead healthy, active lives. As previously reported in the research, the pupils made few references to a healthy lifestyle. The opportunities for the pupils to engage in inter/intra competitive activities as part of the preparation for adult sporting lifestyle was minimal in this small rural school. Any future involvement in pursuing activities that interested pupils or team games would need to be provided by the pupils themselves or their parents/carers.

This research did not have access to the views of the parents/carers, but the views expressed by the pupils shed some light on their home environment.

Computers played an important part in the lives of all the pupils who took part in this research and were the most reported leisure time activity. Pupils' involvement in both computers and television watching was expressed as being preferable to physical activity. The use of such devices did vary considerably and included computer sports and 'gaming'. Pupil Y stated that during the half-term holidays he spent the whole time in his room gaming against other on-line opponents. In another example, Pupil D talked about his mother sending him out of his room when she thought he had been on his computer for too long, with the result that Pupil D went to his friend's and continued playing. This amount of time reportedly time spent in bedrooms gave some insight into the pupils' home life, as well as the school's inability to inspire the pupils to be physically active.

In Year 10 the school had provided a half-term block of work in the fitness suite of the local sports centre which, according to the pupils, was boring. Pupil Y reported that it only served as an opportunity for his fellow pupils to 'look at women' in the public session in which the visit took place. The only experience the pupils reported of health-related issues and the development of a healthy lifestyle was that they were taught how to 'warm up' before activities, but this was seen by the only girl in the research as being overly strenuous with too much running involved. This could indicate a lack of

understanding by the pupils, be a reflection of their personal preferences or point to a lack of any explanation by the teacher. Bearing that in mind it is accepted that taking part in physical activity can affect health in a positive manner, that schools can only play a small part in the development of healthy lifestyles, the perceived lack of interest on the part of the parent/carers in physical activities and the school's limited involvement in this aspect of PE meant that pupils' long term prospects of involvement in physical activities post-school were not being fostered.

There has been research which draws connections between masculinity and physical and social status (Hill, 2015). Hill (2015) researched a group of pupils, albeit a small one, who reported that they worked their bodies to become or remain competent, strong or fit, performing or practising what would bring them 'capital' with their peers. Hill (2015, p. 774) noted 'performance and appearance were crucial; if peers were not convinced, a boy could not achieve higher status'. Swain (2003) reported that boys told powerful stories of how boys had to develop a strong and skilled body to have status not only as a sportsman but also as a boy. The size and shape of bodies have become public matters to be discussed and measured against a normative vision of masculine sporting bodies (Evans, Rich, Davies and Allwood, 2008). These issues, however, were not seen as important by the pupils in this research. They did not want their bodies on view, but showed no interest in developing their bodies through PE. Even though they were in their final year in their school and had the appearance of adolescents, most of the pupils showed little regard for their appearance or how they appeared to others. A possible explanation for this could be found in a comment by Pupil D, in which he described himself as a 'kid' even though he was 15 years old at the time.

#### **7.12 Listening to the voices of the pupils – Medical model of disability**

This chapter has explored the voiced perceptions and experiences of pupils not merely within their PE lessons, but also across their special school experience. In the previous chapter it was suggested that the school and the PE lessons were conducted from the

standpoint of the medical model of disability. This chapter deals with the choices that the pupils experienced within the school and its curriculum and provides an insight into the use of the medical model of disability within the school. As noted in the previous chapter the medical model views pupils with disabilities in a 'deficit model orientation' (Mitra, 2006) with subsequent language use influencing the social interactions with, and talk about, disabled pupils.

The very narrow and concentrated PE curriculum selected by the school gave the pupils little or no choice within the curriculum as the whole class undertake the same activities. The school noticeboard indicated a range of different routes through the Year 11 PE curriculum, with the possibility of choice being indicated. The pupils reported that in their experience there was only one PE curriculum in which they all took part. The reported lack of choice within the curriculum suggests that the opinions of the pupils were not trusted to make decisions about their PE activities. The largely negative views expressed about the trampolining lessons and, for some pupils, competitive team games highlight this perceived view. This limited curriculum undoubtedly led to instances of boredom, lack of personal meaning and in some cases poor behaviour. When asked for their views on which activities they would have liked to have taken part in in their final year, pupils provided a rich list with reasoned arguments. This contradicts the apparent school view that the pupils were not capable of making informed choices.

The pupils reported that throughout their school life they had become accustomed to being told what to do, both in the school as a whole and in all aspects of the PE curriculum. The teacher chose the activities for the PE curriculum, the timings, venues aspects of team selection of teams. Pupils were told their grades, but were not told what they had to do to improve and get to the next grade. This may point to the medical model assumption that pupils with disabilities (BESD) need their behaviour fixing before they are allowed greater autonomy.



The lack of choice within the PE curriculum plus the failure to provide information on healthy lifestyles suggests a perceived view of pupils with BESD that their special school education was primarily concerned with containment. It may be that the PE teacher's expectation was that his pupils were unlikely to play a full part in society. The label BESD may have been interpreted as a medical phenomenon that results in limited functioning, that is seen as deficient (Fitzgerald, 2006; Mitra 2006; Palmer and Harley, 2013). It is considered that there is little point in BESD pupils taking part in sporting experiences and activities which might provide active lifestyles since they would not be capable of making use of such activities post school.

The issue of choice is an essential part of the social model of disability which sees the constraints imposed by society as being instrumental in providing barriers for disabled people. Choice is fundamental in this model of disability and the lack of pupil choice within the PE curriculum points towards the medical model being in evidence. In this school the application of the medical model of disability within the school, and especially within the PE lessons, undoubtedly has a detrimental effect on the future of the pupils with the label BESD.

### **Summary**

The research school, like many other schools, extolled the virtue of taking part in PE by asserting that PE was a means by which the school would attempt to change lives by the development of self-esteem, confidence, teamwork and pupil independence (school brochure). This chapter explored the question of the importance of PE to the pupils by listening to pupils' views and examining their different perceptions of their PE experiences. In this chapter the voices of the pupils have been listened to and heard and this has highlighted several issues. Despite all the legislation regarding the rights of the pupil to be heard and consulted in all matters concerning their education and wellbeing, pupils were able to provide little evidence that they had had more than a cursory input into their PE education. This was highlighted when the pupils were asked their views on

choice within the PE curriculum. Despite the school statement of the various pathways available within PE for KS4 pupils (school noticeboard), pupils stated that these differing pathways did not exist and all pupils in the class had to do the same activities. Regarding the issue of choice within this prescribed curriculum, pupils expressed surprise that they might be allowed to select activities which interested them and which they might want to take further. There were feelings expressed of boredom with the PE curriculum; this had the potential to be minimised if pupils had been allowed some choice of activities.

Boredom was the norm with some pupils, especially when they either did not like the activity or could see no relevance for themselves in the activity due to their perceived low-ability levels. In short, some PE activities had become meaningless for the majority of pupils.

There were significant negative feelings about the school PE uniform, another area in which they had not been consulted, with pupils feeling that it was inappropriate and restricting. This became an issue when they were not allowed to wear appropriate clothing for the various activities (not being allowed to wear tracksuit bottoms for outdoor PE on cold days and not being allowed to have the protection of long-sleeved tops during trampoline lessons). What is clear is that the pupils had little input into the subject; these feelings of resentment were demonstrated by the pupils' unanimous rejection of the school PE kit.

A further area of disquiet was to be found in pupils' lack of knowledge about how they could improve their ability within PE. Although the ability levels of all the pupils within the school were on public display on the school notice board in the main hall, pupils felt that they did not understand them, had never been told about what they meant, the levels were out-of-date and they were never told what they had to do to make progress. Pupils reported that their experiences of PE lessons often contributed to them feeling bored and tense, and that some lessons prompted them to behave inappropriately.

## **Chapter 8. Conclusions; Limitations of the Research; Future Research**

### **8.1. Introduction**

The aim of this research was to bring together and explore the under-researched fields of PE and pupils with the label BESD who attend a special school. This research has given a voice to these pupils and by using the pupils as investigators has been able effectively to explore pupils' experiences and perceptions of what it is like to be a 15-year-old pupil with the label BESD attending special school PE lessons. It is this understanding of pupils' lives within PE which has highlighted several core issues

### **8.2. Conclusions**

Previous research was reported to be too generalised in the field of SEN (Coates and Vickerman, 2010; Medcalf, Marshall, Hardman and Visser, 2011) with scant regard being given to pupils with the label BESD who form a significant part of pupils with SEN. This lack was partially addressed by Medcalf, Marshall and Rhoden (2006). Medcalf (2010) used a case study methodology with 6 adolescent boys, each described by their schools as having SEBD in order to elicit their perceptions of PE.

My research has generally not aligned with much of the previous research in this field. This reflects the unique nature of the research and the richness and diversity of pupils labelled BESD. It perhaps also reflects the individualised nature of the sample (all Year 11 pupils, mostly boys, attending a rural special school) and the innovative research methodology used where the pupils became investigators who interviewed their peers.

In this research it seems that negative perceptions of PE stemmed from the pupils themselves, with their desire not to be seen by their peers as 'other'. The performance aspect of the PE lessons was the cause of some concern for the pupils where, far from being an opportunity to achieve success as found in other research, it was a time when pupils needed to protect their self-image and self-esteem. The class of pupils within this special school had a pupil-conceived social hierarchy and pupils were protective of their

position. At times this meant using strategies aimed at diminishing the effects of being seen negatively by their peers. In this close-knit class of pupils, pupils' position within the class hierarchy was of great importance to most of the pupils. This was a recurring theme in all the pupil interviews: the dangers of being seen to 'lose face' in front of the class.

Previous research conducted with pupils who had a SEN plus additional physical difficulties found that pupils' experiences and self-image were negatively influenced by the behaviour of their non-SEN peers (Fitzgerald et al., 2003; Fitzgerald, 2005). Research with pupils labelled BESD in mainstream schools did not agree with the findings of Fitzgerald in that the actions of others did not have a negative effect on the pupils with the label BESD (Medcalf, 2010).

The pupils in this research perceived PE lessons as not being significantly different from any other lesson. They saw PE as a subject requiring little cognitive effort where they just had to turn up and do what they were told by the teacher. Lessons did not take place in a classroom and at times they got to go off-site. This contrasted with one of the main findings of previous research where pupils perceived PE to be a unique school subject in which there was a possible release from the constraints of the curriculum.

The PE curriculum offer of the school focused largely on activities which were either competitive in nature or had an emphasis on public performance. The competitive element of the activities provided the positive opportunities sought by some pupils of being successful, being a 'winner', being part of a winning team. Not being allowed involvement in games by other pupils impacted negatively on pupils' self-esteem. One of the attributes of PE, as found in previous research (Coates and Vickerman, 2008), is that it provides opportunities for pupils with SEN to use their skills and to demonstrate their competences to their peers. SEN pupils in mainstream education enjoyed the opportunities PE provided to be seen as successful. Such opportunities might not have been available in other parts of the curriculum. It has been noted that previous research found that pupils sought out opportunities to be successful through activities which reflected their own desires and needs (Medcalf, 2010). Medcalf (2010) along with several

other influential pieces of research (Bailey et al. 2007: Bailey, Armour, Kirk, Jess, Pickup and Sandford, 2007) highlighted the benefits of taking part in PE, but the pupils in my research held the perception that PE was a school subject in which they might, if the situation was right, enjoy themselves but it was not seen as a context for learning. PE was reported as a lesson in which they 'did things' and the opportunity to learn was seldom reported. These findings are at odds with previous research (Dismore and Bailey (2010) who endorsed the findings of Subramaniam and Silverman (2007) that, as pupils grow older, positive attitudes to PE could be fostered by repetition of activities, varying the level of challenge and the introduction of novelty to sustain enjoyment.

In this research the pupils did not seek out challenge in their physical activities and they rejected the limited repetitious range of activities they were offered. They said that they did the same thing every year even though this did not appear to be the case (*Field notes*). When faced with activities in which they were not interested, the pupils found ways of coping with the situation. These coping strategies included socialising with their friends whilst at the same time doing enough in the lesson not to face sanctions and to being entertained by the class 'clown'. In these situations, the informal hierarchy of the class was maintained with pupils being careful to safeguard their own self-esteem.

One of the complexities of this research was considering pupils' perceptions of PE. Pupils were only able to base these perceptions on the narrow PE curriculum they had experienced. The constrained PE curriculum could be a result of the limitations of attending a small special school with limited resources. Pupils' limited understanding of the wider subject of PE was a finding of this research and highlighted the need for the pupils to be exposed to a broader curriculum to affect positively their perceptions of the potential benefits of taking part in PE.

It could be argued that the PE curriculum of the school appeared to restrict the positive opportunities which PE might offer the pupils with the label BESD. The special school class studied did have a complex mixture of SEN and the provision of a PE curriculum which would address the diverse needs of all the pupils would not be simple. Whilst it is not

within the remit of this research to analyse the school's curriculum offer, pupils' reports do illuminate the effects of the offer on the perceptions of the pupil. The pupils perceived some of the activities to be meaningless to them personally having had a diet of similar activities in previous years and rejected them, or found activities to have a slow pace and be boring and meaningless. It is acknowledged that within a small school the opportunities within the curriculum may be limited by resources and the expertise of the teaching staff. An additional but linked factor is the small size of the year group, meaning that the pupils did not have the flexibility of their mainstream peers with their greater numbers of pupils in year groups and larger PE departments. The special school pupils, having been in this small group within a restricted curriculum since their inception into the school had not only formed their often-negative perceptions of the various curriculum activities, but also had an understanding of their position within the class. These positions were then actively reinforced during every lesson with the more able 'performers' reinforcing their self-esteem by positive performances, the 'maintainers' doing just enough to maintain their position and others playing to their position as 'class clowns' or 'don't carers'.

In this research pupils who found the activities meaningless spoke of other ways they had developed to amuse themselves. Their experiences were socially constructed since rejection of the meaningless activities had led to pupils seeing PE lessons as a time when they could socialise with their friends. It has been previously noted that in order to access the proposed benefits of taking part in PE, the pupil has to find meaning in the activity with positive benefits being achieved by those pupils who found the activities meaningful and negative benefits for those pupils who found the activities to be meaningless (Beni et al., 2017). There were times, especially during the games activities, that it was clear that the pupils perceived the activities to be not a time for the development of their education through the physical (Harris, 2018), but rather a time to endure what was happening. They had adopted other strategies during the lessons to alleviate their feelings of boredom or rejection. Pupils were aware that the teacher of the year 11 class had also

accepted the pupils' individual perceptions and allowed individual pupils not to be involved in the games.

These were individual socially-constructed perceptions since a number of pupils totally rejected some of the activities and used strategies to avoid taking part in certain activities such as those containing a competitive element .

Pupils reported that they could enjoy the same curriculum subject but in a different context e.g. the use of small-sided games in which much of the element of competition had been removed. In these games, the accent was not on winning but rather on participation and being physically active. On such occasions the findings of this research aligned with previous research in that pupils obtained enjoyment from the physicality of the activity.

It had been noted previously that an effective teaching strategy for pupils with the label BESD was for lessons to be brisk with activities broken down into small manageable pieces. The school PE timetable allocated 2 x 90-minute lessons, one on a Monday and one on a Friday. Both lessons were the same activity. These activities were maintained for a half-term and then changed, meaning that the pupils experienced only six activities per school year. According to the pupils these activities were, with few exceptions, repeated each year. This system did little to develop or hold the interest of the pupils. The activities were either perceived by the pupils as being about playing games (football, basketball, badminton etc.) or activities such as trampolining or display practice which most found lacked personal meaning. There was evidence that these pupil perceptions led to boredom, socialising or instances of poor behaviour. These three characteristics of the lessons were most pronounced during trampolining lessons. The pupils' experiences of these lessons have been previously discussed, but there seemed to be an agreement that trampolining for the majority of the pupils was a meaningless activity. During these lessons there were expectations from the teacher about the role to be played by the pupils not directly using the trampoline: they would safeguard the performing pupil's safety. This function was rejected by the pupils not performing in favour of socialising

with friends, but the long periods of inactivity also led to disruptive behaviour. Pupils deemed this to be acceptable since they were bored. This poor behaviour was so entrenched in some pupils that it came to be expected by their peers; when lessons were boring they could be entertained by the class 'clown'. The class 'clowns' had played this part so often that they knew just how far they could exhibit these behaviours and not be subjected to any disciplinary actions. As noted previously, pupils with the label BESD found enjoyment in activities which held meaning for them. These pupils' needs were best met by lessons which were fast-moving with activities presented in small manageable portions. Trampolining lessons fulfilled none of these criteria with resultant negativity on the part of the pupils.

The school PE curriculum offer appeared to be 'one size fits all' even though the research pupils were all Year 11 pupils they were given no choice over the activities they took part in. The provision of choice in a small school with limited resources would be difficult to achieve, but the lack of choice had a negative effect on the pupils. In many schools pupils in Year 11 would be allowed some form of choice. It is envisaged that by Year 11 pupils would have identified activities that were of personal interest and that they might wish to pursue further into adulthood. In this school there was not any choice nor links to out-of-school clubs, which made it very difficult for pupils to identify an activity which they wished to pursue post-school. It has been suggested that one of the benefits of taking part in PE is the possibility that it could lead to the development of a healthy lifestyle (Harris, 2018). The development of this lifestyle could be influenced and developed by the school, but only if the pupils were exposed to a variety of physical activities in which they could find meaning and might wish to continue post-school. It is not only the school which is able to provide this, but also parent/carers and the society in which the pupils live. In a small rural school, the exposure of the pupils to activities which they found meaningful took on a new importance since pupils possibly had limited friends within their own community through their attendance at a special school removed from their home communities. In addition, the pupils' home background might have had a limiting effect on their sporting experiences (Evans, 2004). Some schools within the mainstream



sector organise community-links programmes with pupils being introduced to community sports clubs. In this special school, there were not any community links as reported by pupils, who said anyway they were not interested in taking part in organised sport post-school.

The pupils reported that competing with and taking part in sports and activities with similar pupils from other special schools was limited, reducing the opportunities for the pupils to experience and possibly find meaning in sports activities. To summarise, the pupils in the research took part in a limited curriculum where pupils had no choice of activity. Many pupils experienced the activities of PE as lacking in personal meaning.

It is beyond the remit of this research to ascertain the rationale behind the organisation of the PE curriculum. Clearly being a small school with limited resources had implications on what could be contained in the curriculum offer. The school had decided to supplement its on-site resources with the use of the local sports centre facilities. During the research period the school basketball lessons took place at the sports centre. This might have been an asset if the structure of these PE lessons had been more favourable. It has been noted that pupils with the label BESD respond to lessons which are fast moving, structured and enjoyable. There was some evidence that a number of factors have influenced the pupils' perceptions of their PE lessons in a negative manner. The decision by the school to devote the whole of the PE time to one activity seemed to be one of the causes of pupil negativity. It might be assumed that by Year 11 the pupils would have experienced most of which the school could offer and possibly identified their own personal meaningful activities. The devotion of the whole week's PE time to one activity might be beneficial if the pupils found the activity meaningful, but if the reverse was true then these lessons had to be endured. In lessons perceived as boring, it was not surprising that disaffected pupils found other means of entertaining themselves. Basketball lessons involved travel to the sports centre which decreased the lesson time from 90 minutes' to 30 minutes' working time. In this travel time the pupils reported that they socialised with their friends and hence, in the perception of some of the pupils, PE

lessons came to be regarded as a time for socialising. This was evidenced not only during the basketball lessons, but also for most pupils during trampolining lessons and for some pupils in the gym/dance display practice.

An additional factor in the curriculum offer was the size of the teaching group since there were only 22 pupils in the whole year group. This in itself had implications on the curriculum offer. The challenge for the school was to provide a PE curriculum which benefited the majority of the pupils, could be resourced and would keep pupils motivated and on task. In a small school this was not easy to achieve, but it might be that pupil motivation might have been better served by having two different activities taking place each week.

The pupils reported that they had no choice of activity which although probably difficult to achieve in this small school would have increased the possibility of pupils being engaged in personally meaningful activities. In my research the benefits of being involved in PE lessons endorsed in much of the literature had not been achieved by many of the pupils. For them PE was just another lesson which might be enjoyable but was mostly experienced as boring.

The experiences and perceptions of the pupils, who had been selected by the school, raised another issue about which there can only be conjecture. Why did the school select these particular pupils from the year group of 22 pupils? It could be that the school thought that these pupils held positive views of PE. If this is correct it begs the question of what the perceptions were of some of the other BESD-labelled pupils within the year.

Given that this research focused on one small special school, the results of this research are necessarily contextualised. The research findings as a whole point to a situation in which pupils in this special school only experienced a pale shadow of the curriculum offered to their mainstream peers.

This negativity cannot be solely attributed to the curriculum offer or the constraints of the timetable. An important aspect of the findings of this research was the part played by the teacher of PE. It was perhaps unfortunate that in the school, which had a high proportion of pupils with the label BESD in its upper years, had decided on an authoritarian discipline policy and the person designated to oversee the policy was the Year 11 PE teacher. The pupils reported that they often felt that the teacher adopted a 'shouty' style and they resented this style in situations where they felt it to be unwarranted, although they accepted it in activities they deemed to be enjoyable and which were being disrupted by the actions of their peers. The small school situation meant that this was the only PE teacher the pupils had experienced which led in some cases to the perception that shouting was a pre-requisite of being a PE teacher and that all PE teachers managed discipline in this manner (there was another PE teacher in the school who took the lessons in the primary department; the pupils involved in the research had not had any experience of being taught by this teacher).

This perception ultimately led to feelings that PE involved being shouted at and this, coupled with the curriculum factors, fed perceptions that PE was a subject that the majority of pupils did not wish to take part in and did not wish to pursue after school since it was not meaningful.

A finding of much of the research into the perception of pupils of PE was the part played by the teacher in the development of positive relationships with the pupils through providing lessons that were meaningful, enjoyable and in which the pupil made progress. The ability to provide such lessons is a pre-requisite of being an effective teacher of any subject. The use of appropriate teaching styles is paramount if these objectives are to be achieved. In the research school the teacher had adopted what the pupils perceived to be a shouty style which at times the pupils found inappropriate. The fact that the PE teacher was also in charge of wider school discipline made discipline experienced within PE lessons not distinguishable from the discipline the pupils found within the rest of the school. Some pupils resented this. The findings of my research point to the PE teacher's

teaching style and his additional responsibilities as being partially responsible for some of the negative attitudes of the pupils and their lack of interest and learning within PE.

It is important to remember that the findings of this research, exploring as it did the perceptions of a small number of pupils labelled BESD attending a small special school, are necessarily contextualised. Important factors that impacted on the findings were personal relationships, the use of power, the limited curriculum with its lack of pupil choice, the use of competition within the lessons, poor lesson structure and the lack of enrichment opportunities.

It could be proposed that there is a need to develop a curriculum more suited to the needs of the pupils with the label BESD if they are to receive the same claimed benefits of taking part in PE as their mainstream peers.

### **8.3. Limitations of the Research**

Research which aims to hear the voices of pupils and is conducted within a school environment invariably faces some challenges. When the research explores the views of pupils with the label BESD and the research is carried out in a special school then there are additional and different challenges. The limitations of this research were a product of the challenges faced and which occurred despite the construction of a research methodology designed to limit these. The data produced in this research was affected by the challenges of working within a specialised school environment.

This research was placed in a special school environment and focussed on pupils aged 15 with the label BESD. Such special schools are highly specialised, and although there are generic special schools, finding a school with a high proportion of pupils labelled BESD in the required age group was difficult. In addition, in special schools especially those for pupils labelled BESD there is a gender bias towards boys. This gender bias in the research school was noted as being approximately 4:1. In the research school there was only one girl with the label BESD in the Year 11 group. This inevitably skewed the research sample

in terms of gender, with only boys initially being provided by the school to take part in the research. This selection of the pupils by the school placed a further limitation on the sample since it was not a random sample from all the possible pupils with the label BESD. However, all the pupils provided did wish to be included in the research and none had any limitations on being photographed. The initial research sample of boys only limited the ability to discuss matters specifically relevant to girls in the initial stages. In the latter stages of the research the gender balance was lightly less biased towards boys, as the only Year 11 girl with the label BESD volunteered to take part as an interviewee in the pupil investigator part of the research. The presence of mainly boys could be argued to have had a great influence on the research findings, since previous research noted that issues of masculinity and physical performance were paramount in boys' perceptions of PE. It might be that the contextualised nature of this research countered this general finding as the issue of masculinity was not being noted as a significant issue. Physical performance was an issue but not from the conventional standpoint of improvement and pride in performance, but rather the possibility of negative self-esteem through being seen to have inadequate performance.

One of the early decisions made at the planning stage of this research was that only the views and perceptions of the pupils involved should be heard. There was a decision not to allow the views of other adults or any official school documentation concerning the pupils to influence the data gathered from the pupils. School-held data on the pupils could have introduced bias, as the views of the adults could well have differed from the views of the pupils. Consequently, there was no discussion of the pupils with their teachers and the only insight gained into the background of the pupils came from chance comments made by the pupils themselves. The lack of information about each of pupils could be construed as a limitation, but in this research it was a positive attempt to obtain the pupils' views unfettered by preconceived researcher views about the pupils. A further factor regarding the non-involvement of teachers in the research occurred at the planning stage and concerned the gatekeepers of the school. One of the limitations placed on the research by the school was that a member of staff should be present at all meetings with pupils.

This had the potential to affect the responses of the pupils by the presence of a member of staff in the meeting. This effect has been reported as a possible limitation of previous research in school, as it is an unknown factor which could have affected the findings (Medcalf, 2010). This gatekeeper-imposed limitation fortunately did not materialise since the designated member of staff never attended any meetings with the pupils, despite several invitations. Although there was not a staff presence, there was a limitation on the research which has been noted by Medcalf (2010). In the early stages of the research, there existed a level of mistrust towards the researcher by the pupils.

The decision early in the research project to use photo elicitation served several purposes in that it was not only a means of generating data, but also a method to build positive relationships between the pupils and me. Time spent on this proved to be a positive factor in the latter part of the research with the pupil investigators, since good relationships had been developed. Something that could not have been anticipated when planning the research was a change of class teacher at a late stage of the research. This was significant since the teacher wished to spend the time previously allocated for the research to acclimatize herself with the class. As a result, the research period was cut short but there was enough time to talk to two of the pupil investigators about the experience. These experiences were hugely favourable and the:

‘best thing they had done in school’ (Pupil D and Pupil Y).

Further factors which had to be overcome were the pupils’ short attention spans and their reluctance or limited ability to talk about some of the subjects. This non-verbalisation could not have been foreseen at the research planning stage. It was addressed by choosing a more appropriate approach to gathering data. In order to motivate the pupils, the research needed to look and feel different to schoolwork and this was one of the reasons behind the decision to use photo-elicitation early in the research. This technique involves pupils being able to talk about why they took photographs and what they could see in the photographs. This allowed pupils not only to have practice in

talking to a new adult within a classroom and but also to practise verbalising their motivations and perceptions.

What could not have been foreseen at the planning stage was the pupils' reluctance or lack of ability to articulate their experiences. Pupils were used to being the subject of school-based discipline which they appeared to accept as a way of life. They appeared to be unused to talking about any issues which affected them, preferring to accept what the teachers told them. As a result, the pupils were not used to querying the stance of the teacher or school matters in general. A further factor was that the pupils seemed only to have limited memories of their past school careers. An example of this was their inability to remember what PE in their primary schools had been like.

The pupils found difficulty in verbalising their opinions about their perceptions of PE, suggesting that they were not used to being asked for their opinions and had therefore not considered these issues. This inability to address and conceptualise their feelings about PE led to some confusion, with some pupils reporting views which differed from lesson to lesson dependent on a number of factors e.g. how they were feeling and events in their own lives. Pupils often could not remember what had happened the previous week in PE and probing their responses proved difficult. Pupils reported a lack of previous opportunities when they had been invited to talk about their PE lessons, which had the effect that they were not able to explain using PE-specialist language exactly what their experiences had been in the various PE activities. There was some explanation but only at a basic level perhaps indicating some lack of the use of correct terminology in PE lessons. An example of this was the way all pupils referred to forward rolls as 'roly-polys'.

Part of the research process aimed at pupil ownership of the data was for all meetings with the pupils to be recorded and transcribed and approved by the pupil at the next meeting. Pupils gave the transcriptions scant attention often not reading them, merely signing them as true records thus allowing the possibility of false interpretations being placed on their replies due to vagaries in their use of language. The issue of not reading

the transcripts was addressed by raising the issue at the beginning of each meeting and encouraging the pupils to read the text. This issue was never satisfactorily resolved; the pupils felt that if they needed to read the document then they should receive their usual help from their dedicated TA, but having a TA present in the meetings could possibly have affected the authenticity of the responses given by the pupils. This process became one of the limitations of the research since it relied on the correct transcription of the recording which inevitably contained speech which was indistinct or individualised. This type of data collection has been criticised (Morison and Macleod, 2013) for not allowing pupils' body language or expressions to be recorded. Given this and the differences between some responses week to week, the pupils' accounts cannot be taken as a complete record of their experiences. This situation was helped, however, in the main part of the research with the use of videoed interviews.

This research did not set out to analyse the NCPE being taught in the school and the pupils' perceptions of the curriculum content noted stem from the pupils' own often varied accounts of their PE lessons. Pupils did provide an insight into the lessons but since these cannot be substantiated through observations of the lessons, their accounts needed to be treated as subjective reports. The possibility of lesson observations was considered but, whilst it would have provided a context for the pupils' accounts, it would also have introduced the possibility of bias in the interpretations. Informal unplanned observations did take place on two occasions with field notes being taken and these have been used to supplement pupils' description of the events of the lesson.

The difficulties in finding an appropriate school in order to conduct this specialised research meant that the research did not commence until October, by which time the PE curriculum was into its second half term with a new activity being taught. In addition, the restricted period allocated by the school for the research meant that data was only able to be collected from the first two terms of the school year. If the research had started at the beginning of the year and continued for the whole school year, it might have provided different results. As previously noted, pupils' views of their PE lessons differed weekly



dependent on their feelings and it is possible that pupils who viewed 'winter' activities with some negativity may well have thrived in 'summer' activities.

This research was designed to use participatory voice to examine perceptions and experiences within PE lessons. It was designed to use pupil-friendly methods to facilitate the research process and it was acknowledged that these methods might, as is common in qualitative research, be subject to change as the research process emerged. In this research it could not have been anticipated that the research would develop into using pupil investigators with the freedom to take the research in their own personally-construed directions. The development of the pupils as investigators provided a unique situation coming as it did part way into the data collection process. The pupils who subsequently became investigators had all been involved in the research from the beginning and had taken part in the pilot study. In the pilot study, they had already been asked about their perceptions and experiences of their PE lessons. The pupil investigators video-interviewed their peers and used some of the questions they had themselves been asked during the pilot study. It was when they decided to interview each other that a potential problem arose, since they had now been interviewed twice using similar questions. This meant that each of the pupil investigators had two transcribed texts on largely similar questions and, as described above, the answers provided often differed in nature and context. One of the positive aspects of this situation was that at times the pupil investigators did not accept interviewees' answers at face value; rather pointed out that they themselves had been present in the lesson and that the interviewees' answers were significantly different from the pupil investigators' memory of the lesson. I felt this probing of the answers provided more reliable data and turned a potential research limitation into a positive aspect of the research.

Time spent on using the audio/visual equipment plus the training needed to allow the pupil investigators to conduct interviews was positive, since it allowed the pupil investigator 'team' to become a more homogeneous unit.

This research was heavily dependent on the use of audio-visual equipment which caused some problems. Initially the need for digital cameras to be available to the pupils provided a sourcing problem with a reluctance on the part of the university to provide cameras for several weeks. This was eventually solved by the offer of cameras which had been taken out of circulation since they had been superseded by more advanced models. These cameras appeared to have all the properties needed for the research, but proved to be unsatisfactory in several ways. The pupils found the time lag on the camera difficult to cope with since, when trying to take photographs of physical activities, they had to anticipate the movement often resulting in 'interesting' photographs but more commonly leaving pupils frustrated with the equipment. The cameras came with their own battery chargers which meant that they needed to be regularly recharged. It proved difficult to find someone within the school staff who was prepared to undertake this responsibility conscientiously. This often led to pupils finding that their camera battery was uncharged. The storage of the cameras in school was also a problem since each method tried led to situations where cameras were not accessible when pupils required them. This hindrance could have been overcome if the pupils had been allowed to have the cameras in their possession, a solution not acceptable to the school involved. A similar situation arose when the pupil investigators decided on the use of video and therefore needed access to a suitable video camera. Once again, the search for a suitable camera proved difficult due to the length of the loan needed. It was suggested by the university that if 'up-to-date' equipment was needed then the cameraman would have to be a trained operative who would travel to the school as required. This was unacceptable due to time constraints, so a compromise once again was to use older inferior equipment. This older equipment proved to be entirely acceptable.

Communication between the school and myself proved to be an ongoing limitation. Such was the flexibility in timetabling in this small school that it allowed for changes to take place at short notice. On several occasions meetings with the researchers were cancelled due to the school arranging other activities at that time. These ranged from unexpected outings, last minute guest speakers, sponsored walks and training days. The

communication problem arose because the school failed to make me aware of these activities indeed on one occasion turning up at school find half of the researchers had gone skiing and the other half were absent.

#### **8.4. Future Research**

This research was designed to examine the lived experiences of PE of pupils labelled BESD. The research results are necessarily contextualised. It was never the intention of this study to offer any generalisations for similar schools. However, the findings of this research do provide several noteworthy contributions to the knowledge of how pupils with the label BESD experience PE in a special school. There seems to be significant differences in the way pupils labelled BESD experience PE compared to the findings of previous research in this field on their mainstream peers. The findings noted that pupils' socially-constructed perceptions were dependent on, amongst other factors, the curriculum offer and the characteristics of the teacher. In addition, the pupils in this research did not benefit from many of the benefits of taking part in PE as depicted by PE professionals and PE academics. These findings are important contributions to the field, and raise questions to be addressed by any future research.

At the forefront of any future research should be further investigation of the perceptions of PE of pupils with the label BESD attending a special school, to see if my results are duplicated. If so, further research could try to ascertain why pupils with the label BESD experience their PE lessons so differently. In order to achieve this there is a need to work with these pupils to a greater depth in order to obtain a better understanding of the influences that have led to the formation of their perceptions. This research has provided evidence of the effect this small special school experience, teacher characteristics and the curriculum offer have on pupils' perceptions. There is a need to understand these relationships and to examine in more detail pupils' behaviours and experiences within PE lessons. This could be achieved by developing methods to allow a greater understanding of the reasons behind pupils' perceptions of PE.

Some researchers in this field have already attempted to use more contemporary methodologies drawn from the social sciences; this research has used a 'novel' methodology to access the lived experiences of PE (Groves and Laws, 2000; Coates and Vickerman, 2008; Medcalf, 2010). There may be need to develop other novel methods to allow greater understanding of pupils with the label BESD. In addition, such research methods should be able to explore the needs and aspirations of the pupils concerned. In previous research these innovative methodologies have started to appear with the use of drama, art, media and games playing. These methodologies all have their own reported limitations and their use will be contextualised. Rather, the individualised contextual nature of the subject calls for individually-tailored methods for each context. The methodologies will need to be participatory, since it is important when working with this group of pupils that they have ownership of the research in all its constituent parts. The onus is placed on the researcher to develop methodologies in conjunction with the pupils in order to explore the research objectives. If the marginalised group of pupils with the label BESD are to be better understood, then future research will need to take into account the findings of this research, and compare them with other populations of BESD pupils attending special schools.

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Dear Parent/Carer

### **Research Project Information Sheet**

#### **Special School Physical Education Experiences: Pupils with Behavioural Difficulties Becoming Pupil Investigators**

I would like to ask your permission for your son/daughter to participate in a research project which is taking place at (school name). The school has given their support for this research and are a key partner in the project which will involve the making of a documentary style film about student experiences of physical education and school sport at the school.

#### **Why? Purpose of the research**

Recognising the importance of all school subjects, this study is particularly looking at physical education and school sport and the unique relationship that your child has with it. I am aiming to explore your child's experiences of physical education and school sport. This research will contribute to a growing body of knowledge about how children manage their experiences of physical education and school sport. Through the application of a range of methods, this project give voice to experiences and perceptions of physical education and school sport. I want to put the children at the centre of the research, giving them the opportunity to express their thoughts and their opinions.

#### **How?**

I have been working with four boys from (school name) who have been taking photographs and talking about their sporting experiences. It is now time to move on to the next part of the research project. This will involve these four student researchers conducting filmed interviews with other students to find out their views on physical education and school sport. Each student who becomes involved will take part in a short initial interview, with the possibility that they may be interviewed on further occasions in order to develop their thoughts. I will review all the interviews, transcribing exactly what has been said and closely monitoring the content. The final documentary film will only contain appropriate material that has been agreed by myself and the school.

I would like to ask your permission for your child to take part in the student researcher led interviews.

### **Impact?**

In accordance with the school's Safeguarding Children Policy and in compliance with Local Authority procedures for child protection, if (during my reviews of the interview films) I receive any information which I consider to put children at risk, I will immediately instruct the student researchers not to carry on. I am also obliged to pass on such concerns to Mr. (xxxx), the Child Protection Officer.

The school is supportive of this research. Your child can, of course, change their mind and decide to withdraw from this research at any time, and will be asked, at every interview if they are still willing to proceed.

Data will be collected using the procedures' outlined above and will then be analysed as part of a research degree (PhD) at the Sheffield Hallam University. I'd like to make you aware that the final film may be used by the school and will also be part of my ongoing research.

As the film forms part of my PhD research, it will be published and may be seen by a wider audience who are interested in learning more about student views on physical education and school sport. It may not be possible to completely prevent students being recognizable on the film but their names will not be used neither will the name or location of the school.

If you have any questions or thoughts about this project, then please feel free to get in touch with me. Alternatively, you can discuss these with your school via the headteacher or Head of P.E. Please contact me directly on the contact details given above or alternatively via the staff involved at your school.

Many thanks,

Chris Hill

**Contact details:** Chris Hill

Email: [b2046576@my.shu.ac.uk](mailto:b2046576@my.shu.ac.uk)

Director of Studies: [R.Mallett@shu.ac.uk](mailto:R.Mallett@shu.ac.uk). Tel 01142254669

School Contact: Mr. (xxxx)

**Please keep your copy of the consent form and the information sheet together.**



**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (PARENTS/CARERS)**

**TITLE OF RESEARCH STUDY:**

**Special school sporting experiences: listening to student researchers labelled with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties**

- I have read the Information Sheet. I am clear about what my child's involvement will be in this study and I am aware of its purposes.
- I have had the chance to ask questions. I understand I may ask further questions at any point.
- I agree for my child to take part in this project as described in the Information Sheet.
- I know that my child can refuse to take part in some of the project or withdraw from the project as a whole without having to explain why and without any negative consequences for my child.
- I understand that the outcomes of this research project will be used by the school and for academic purposes. I understand that the data will be stored securely, remain confidential in that names or locations will not be used, and give permission for images of my child to be used in the final documentary film.

**Parents/Carers Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant's Name (Printed):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Contact details:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Contact details:** Chris Hill

Email: [b2046576@my.shu.ac.uk](mailto:b2046576@my.shu.ac.uk)

Director of Studies: [R.Mallett@shu.ac.uk](mailto:R.Mallett@shu.ac.uk). Tel 01142254669

School Contact: Mr. (xxxx)



**Special School Physical Education Experiences: Pupils with Behavioural Difficulties**  
**Becoming Pupil Investigators**

You have been selected by your head teacher, to be involved in some research. I have already spoken to your school, and your [parent(s)/carer], and they have said that it is ok for me to speak to you. My name is Chris. I am visiting your school for ten weeks, to speak to pupils like you to help me gain a research degree (PhD) at the Sheffield Hallam University. I will be working with you to help you become pupil researchers and train you in digital photography.

This will involve me spending a lot of time with you. Importantly, I will also be speaking to you a lot. We will sometimes do this in small groups, and sometimes it will just be you and me. I am very interested in finding out what you think about your experiences in PE and school sport. There are no right or wrong answers. Everything you experience, everything that you think, and everything that you say to me, is important.

During our time together I will loan you a digital camera for you to take photographs about your interests what interests you in PE and school sport, we will talk about the photographs you have taken. We will talk about your experiences in PE and school sport. I might ask questions to help you to figure out what you think. This will sometimes be in a room and will sometimes be an informal conversation. I will either be taking notes or will record what we say on a voice recorder. I will then listen to this and, alongside my other notes, will write a piece of work that talks about your views.

When I write this piece of work, people may read it. In this report I will give you and your school different names, so that no one will know that it is your views which I am writing about. What we talk about is private, between you and me. However, in the same way in which your teachers would behave, if you tell me anything which I consider might put you at risk of being hurt, then I will have to speak to Mr. (xxxx) about it.

If you agree to take part in the research and then later decide that you do not want to be involved, then you can just tell me, and you can stop doing the research without anything happening.

If you agree to take part, I will ask you to sign below, which gives me permission to talk to you. If you have any questions, about any part of this research, then I hope that you will feel comfortable enough to either ask me or your teacher about it.

Chris Hill      Email: [b2046576@my.shu.ac.uk](mailto:b2046576@my.shu.ac.uk)

Director of Studies: [R.Mallett@shu.ac.uk](mailto:R.Mallett@shu.ac.uk). Tel 01142254669

School Contact: (xxxx)



#### ASSENT FOR RESEARCH INVOLVEMENT

#### **Special school sporting experiences: listening to pupil researchers labelled with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties**

Please read the following statements. Once you have had everything explained to you and you understand all this information, then please sign at the bottom.

- I have read the information sheet about this research and I am clear about what Chris is doing in my school.
- I understand what my involvement will be in this study
- I have agreed to take part
- I know I can decide not to take part at any time
- I have had the chance to ask questions

I have read this form and I understand it. I agree to take part in the study.

Name:

Signed ..... (Participant)

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact details: Chris Hill

Email: [b2046576@my.shu.ac.uk](mailto:b2046576@my.shu.ac.uk)

Director of Studies: [R.Mallett@shu.ac.uk](mailto:R.Mallett@shu.ac.uk). Tel 01142254669

School Contact: Mr. (xxxx)



**Special School Physical Education Experiences: Pupils with Behavioural Difficulties  
Becoming Pupil Investigators**

You have been selected by your head teacher, to be involved in some research. I have already spoken to your school, and your [parent(s)/carer], and they have said that it is ok for me to speak to you. My name is Chris. I am visiting your school for ten weeks, to speak to pupils like you to help me gain a research degree (PhD) at the Sheffield Hallam University

I have been working with four boys from your school who are now ready conduct research by asking questions of other pupils. I would invite you to take part in this research by allowing yourself to be interviewed by the pupil investigators. The interview will be videoed and some of your interview may be included in a short documentary film, the pupil investigators are making about how you feel about your PE lesson and school sport. This documentary film will be seen within your school and used as part of my PhD.

When I write this piece of work, people may read it. In this report I will give you and your school different names, so that no one will know that it is your views which I am writing about. What you talk about in the interview with the pupil researcher is private. I will look at the video, write down and record everything which has been said in the interview and treat it as private. However, in the same way in which your teachers would behave, if you say anything which I consider might put you at risk of being hurt, then I will have to speak to Mr. (xxxx) about it.

If you agree to take part in the research and then later decide that you do not want to be involved, then you can just tell me, and you can stop doing the research without anything happening.

If you agree to take part, I will ask you to sign below, which gives me permission to talk to you. If you have any questions, about any part of this research, then I hope that you will feel comfortable enough to either ask me or your teacher about it.

Chris Hill      Email: [b2046576@my.shu.ac.uk](mailto:b2046576@my.shu.ac.uk)



Director of Studies: R.Mallett@shu.ac.uk. Tel 01142254669

School Contact: Mr. (xxxx)



## ASSENT FOR INTERVIEW INVOLVEMENT

### **Special school sporting experiences: listening to pupil investigators labelled with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties**

Please read the following statements. Once you have had everything explained to you and you understand all of this information, then please sign at the bottom.

- I have read the information sheet about this research and I am clear about what Chris is doing in my school.
- I understand what my involvement will be in this study
- I have agreed to take part
- I know I can decide not to take part at any time
- I have had the chance to ask questions

I have read this form and I understand it. I agree to take part in the study.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed ..... (Participant)

Interviewee's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact details: Chris Hill

Email: b2046576@my.shu.ac.uk

Director of Studies: R.Mallett@shu.ac.uk. Tel 01142254669

School Contact: Mr. (xxxx)

## **Appendix      B      Letters about showing the film**

Dear ( names of pupil investigators)

First of all, let me say what a pleasure it was working with you making your film. I know that you all worked hard and helped me a great deal with my research project.

The film is now ready for you to see and I have enclosed a copy which can be played on your computer. I hope that you will be able to share the copy and be able to show your teachers, parents or carers what you have achieved.

This next point is very important: the film contains pictures of you all plus the other three interviewees and also contains your views on your school and the teachers. It is for this reason that you must be very careful who you show the film to, it's alright to show your family but NO PART of the film must appear on social media.

I have also sent a copy of the film to Mr (xxxx).

If you have any problems with the film then I can be contacted on [b2046576@my.shu.ac.uk](mailto:b2046576@my.shu.ac.uk).

Enjoy the film!

Address

12<sup>TH</sup> October 2016

Dear (Headteacher)

I would like to thank you, your staff and students for allowing me to conduct my research in your school. It has been a real pleasure to work with the student investigators and I hope that the results obtained will be mutually beneficial. I suspect that the most enjoyable part of the research is now over and the hard analysis of the results has to be undertaken.

I have enclosed a copy of the film the student investigators made for you to use for the benefit of the school and at your discretion. However, the production of the film, whilst being the work of the student investigators who undoubtedly have ownership of the material as their own work, does raise some serious ethical issues. The fact that the students who took part in the research are clearly identifiable on the film has its own problems and will limit who it can be shown to without parent/carer consent. You will remember that we obtained parent/carer consent to take part in the research and to make the film on the promise that it would not be widely shown. That is not to say that you cannot make the best use of the student investigators work for your own school promotion. I have consulted with the Ethics Committee at Sheffield Hallam University and we have come to a consensus view, that I know you will agree with, that under no circumstances must any part of the film appear on social media. This leads to the second and more profound concern that whilst it is right that the student investigators have a

copy of the film, the likelihood of social media use becomes more likely. I would therefore ask that I am kept informed of any viewing of the film if possible.

Once again thanks for the opportunity and feel free to contact me if you have any concerns.

Regards,

Chris Hill

## **Appendix C Focus Group Questions**

### **Focus Group Questions**

1. The pupils experience of PE in their previous schools.
2. The pupil affinity with PE.

What do you like/dislike about PE?

Are there any parts of PE that you like /dislike very much?

What do you think you learn in PE?

What do you think makes a good/bad PE lesson for you?

What do you enjoy most about PE?

Is PE important to you?

What is your favourite PE activity?

Are you a member of a team/ would you like to be?

How do you feel when you are on your way to PE, what do you expect?

What would you change about PE if you could?

3. The effect of relationships and physical space

Does taking part in PE help you make friends in your school?

What is your favourite place in which PE lessons take place?

Is PE better in school or away from school?

What do you think about PE changing/showers?

How do you feel when you have new PE kit/no PE kit?

4. Ability in PE.

What do you feel about pupils who are good/not good at PE?

Do pupils who are good/not good at PE spoil your enjoyment?

Do you like doing PE with all ability pupils or those with similar skills to yourself?

Is PE just for the more skilled pupils

Are PE lessons different from other lessons?

Is there a difference between PE and Sport?

Do you take part in any sports clubs inside/outside school?

5. The effects of the teachers and teaching within PE.

Is PE best when the teacher is strict/relaxed/makes jokes/works you hard?

How do you feel if the teacher joins in the lesson?

6. The effects differing aspects of PE have on the pupil behaviour.

How do you behave in PE?

What affects how well you behave in PE?

Is your behaviour different in school/ out of school?

Does the way you behave effect the way you learn and what you learn?

Do you behave differently in PE that in other subjects?

Are you expected to behave differently in PE?

Does PE effect your behaviour?

## **Appendix D Research Timetable**

### **Timeline for research**

#### **Sept 2015**

Getting approvals

#### **Oct 2015**

Photo Elicitation

#### **Nov 2015**

Focus Groups

Individual Interviews

#### **Jan 2016**

Pupil Investigators

Video Filming – original pupils

Video Filming – new pupils

**May 2016** Completion of research in school

### **Proposed Research Timetable (Photo Elicitation)**

**In School** – assume meeting with pupils on Fridays – to be confirmed

#### **W/c Sept 7<sup>th</sup>**

This will be a short week with staff INSET.

- Meeting with Headteacher to outline the research
- Collecting information from school on who can/cannot be photographed.
- Sending out research proposal letters to parents/carers.
- Collection of parent consent forms.
- Final polishing of research procedures.

#### **W/c Sept 28<sup>th</sup>**

- Meeting with pupils who have parental/carers approval.
- Collection of student assent forms.
- Negotiate timetable of meetings with pupils, tutors.
- Student researchers – explain:
  1. Research aims and procedures.
  2. Ethics of taking photographs of others.
  3. The camera and its functions.
  4. Rules for taking good photos.
  5. Camera storage and photograph procedures.
  6. Recording of discussions and transcripts.
  7. Deadlines.
  8. Taking photos to gain familiarity with camera.

#### **W/c Oct 5<sup>th</sup>**

- Collect photos/ recharge cameras -Thursday
- Confirm assent.
- Discussion/recording of photos taken in the previous week.

**Research task 1**    Photographs of things that you like



**W/c Oct 12th**

- Collect photos/ recharge cameras -Thursday
- Confirm assent.
- Approve and sign transcript.
- Discussion/recording of photos taken in the previous week.

Research task 2.      my favourite lesson

**W/c Oct 19th**

- Collect photos/ recharge cameras -Thursday
- Confirm assent.
- Approve and sign transcript.

Research task 3      Take photos of anything to do with sport in the half term holiday

**W/c Oct 26<sup>th</sup>****Half Term Holiday****W/c Nov 1st****W/c Nov 9<sup>th</sup>**

- Collect photos/ recharge cameras -Thursday
- Confirm assent.
- Approve and sign transcript.
- Discussion/recording of photos taken in the holidays

Research task 4      What we did in PE this week

**W/c Nov 16<sup>th</sup>**

- Collect photos/ recharge cameras -Thursday
- Confirm assent.

- Approve and sign transcript.
- Discussion/recording of photos taken in the last week

Research task 5. Interview your friend on video about what they like/dislike in PE

**W/c Nov 23<sup>rd</sup>**

- Confirm assent.
- Approve and sign transcript.
- Discussion/recording of videos taken in the previous week.

### **Focus Group 1**

Is PE important to you?

What is your favourite PE activity?

Are you a member of a team/ would you like to be?

How do you feel when you are on your way to PE, what do you expect?

What would you change about PE if you could?

### **Focus Group 2**

The effect of relationships and physical space

Does taking part in PE help you make friends in your school?

What is your favourite place in which PE lessons take place?

Is PE better in school or away from school?

What do you think about PE changing/showers?

How do you feel when you have new PE kit/no PE kit?

**W/c Dec 7<sup>th</sup>**

- Confirm assent.
- Approve and sign transcript.

### **Focus Group 3**

Ability in PE.

What do you feel about pupils who are good/not good at PE?

Do pupils who are good/not good at PE spoil your enjoyment?

Do you like doing PE with all ability pupils or those with similar skills to yourself?

Is PE just for the more skilled pupils

Are PE lessons different from other lessons?

Is there a difference between PE and Sport?

Do you take part in any sports clubs inside/outside school?

### **Focus Group 4**

The effects of the teachers and teaching within PE.

Is PE best when the teacher is strict/relaxed/makes jokes/works you hard?

How do you feel if the teacher joins in the lesson?

The effects differing aspects of PE have on the pupil behaviour.

How do you behave in PE?

What affects how well you behave in PE?

Is your behaviour different in school/ out of school?

Does the way you behave effect the way you learn and what you learn?

Do you behave differently in PE that in other subjects?

Are you expected to behave differently in PE?

Does PE effect your behaviour?

## **Appendix E Data Collection Thoughts**

### **Data Collection**

Issues already raised.

1. Students will only be available to work with me on Friday afternoons but only on a withdrawal basis which means that seeing the whole group of researchers for group discussion can only take place infrequently. However, I can see the individual researchers for short periods of time on rotation.
2. The head of the school has stated that he does not want my presence in the school to have any impact on the staff except for those directly involved (PE staff) and this general staff contact will be minimised by a concentration on my role as researcher not ex-teacher.
3. Timetable for the research will operate on small margins in order to maintain the interest of the pupils.
4. The school wants to select the pupils.

### **Data Collection Schedule.**

Given the constraints outlined above the ideal scenario for the data collection will be:

The outline of the project to all parties:

- Meeting with the school staff as a whole – the project has already been introduced in a previous staff meeting by the headteacher.
- Meeting with the prospective pupils and their parents/carers to outline the project and answer questions. Obtain the consents from parents/carers, assent from the pupils and photographic consents. The school is to supply a list of all students who are not to appear in photographs
- Establish a timetable for meeting the pupils after negotiation with their teachers.

### **Training for the pupils:**

- Initial meeting to more fully outline the research process and to introduce the research method photovoice.

- Discussion of the ethics of taking photographs of other students and an outline of guidelines and possible consequences.
- Training in the specific use of the camera and the composition of photographs.
- Explanation of the research process and the use of deadlines (see below).
- Explanation of ownership in relation to the photographs, the research data, the research findings and my role.
- First photographic task- take photographs that will describe your school day, your PE lesson or others taking part in a PE lesson. Take about 12 photographs in total.
- Discuss the photographs they have taken with the whole group.
- Introduction of recorded and note taking discussions with the students.
- Outline of the link between discussions, recording, transcription and the signing off of the transcripts

### Data Collection

- All photographic tasks will have a deadline of 1 week to complete with the task being set on a Friday, the photographs collected on the following Thursday and discussed on the Friday. Added into this timetable will be the transcription of the discussions. An essential part of this project will be to keep the students interested and motivated and this will only be achieved if a brisk pace of data collection can be maintained. This will mean that once the project is running the timetable will take on the following form:

Friday.

1. Discuss and sign off previous week's transcript.
2. Discuss previous weeks selected photographs and agree new direction and assignment for the next photo shoot.

Thursday.

1. Collect photographs, download to computer, charge cameras and make preliminary assessment of direction of the individual researcher direct within the overall aim of the project.

Rest of week.

1. Transcribe discussions and provide some initial coding.

The anticipated number of pupils is between 4-6, working with these numbers will inevitably mean that the start of the research will have to be staggered to enable 3 students to begin on the timetable in week 1 and the other 3 students to begin in week. This arrangement will mean only three transcripts having to be typed each week thus allowing time for preliminary analysis.

### Initial research tasks

The research aims to pose questions for the pupils to answer from their own individual perception. These broad-based questions are loosely collected into six areas, but these areas are not to be exclusively addressed as they are in many ways interconnected. The six areas are:

1. The pupils experience of PE in their previous schools (discussion).
2. The pupil's affinity with PE.
3. The effect of relationships and physical space on PE affinity.
4. The effect of curriculum choice.
5. The effects of the teachers and teaching within PE.
6. What effect do the differing aspects of PE have on the pupil's behaviour?

The following broad-based questions will be piloted at the forthcoming focus meeting with the schools Y11 students to ascertain what the likely responses, understanding or level of response could be in the substantive research.

7. The pupils experience of PE in their previous schools (discussion).
8. The pupils affinity with PE.
  - What do you like/dislike about PE?
  - Are there any parts of PE that you like /dislike very much?
  - What do you think you learn in PE?
  - What do you think makes a good/bad PE lesson for you?
  - What do you enjoy most about PE?
  - Is PE important to you?
  - What is your favourite PE activity?

Are you a member of a team/ would you like to be?

How do you feel when you are on your way to PE, what do you expect?

What would you change about PE if you could?

9. The effect of relationships and physical space on PE affinity.

What is your favourite place in which PE lessons take place?

Is PE better in school or away from school?

Does taking part in PE help you make friends in your school?

What do you think about PE changing/showers?

How do you feel when you have new PE kit/no PE kit?

10. The effect of curriculum choice.

What do you feel about students who are good/not good at PE?

Do students who are good/not good at PE spoil your enjoyment?

Do you like doing PE with all ability students or those with similar skills to yourself?

Is PE just for the more skilled students?

Are PE lessons different from other lessons?

Is there a difference between PE and SS?

Do you take part in any sports clubs inside/outside school?

11. The effects of the teachers and teaching within PE.

Do you learn much in PE?

Is PE best when the teacher is strict/relaxed/makes jokes/works you hard?

How do you feel if the teacher joins in the lesson?

12. The effects differing aspects of PE have on the pupil's behaviour.

How do you behave in PE?

What affects how well you behave in PE?

Is your behaviour different in school/ out of school?

Does the way you behave effect the way you learn and what you learn?

Do you behave differently in PE that in other subjects?

Are you expected to behave differently in PE?

Does PE have an effect on your behaviour?

The discussions with individual pupils will follow the format set out by Casteldine, (2008).

The steps will include;

- Overview of photographs.
- Matching photographs to descriptions in the transcripts.
- Confirming themes: these themes will need to be classified into broad categories as the research progresses moving on to a review of the photographs plus the individual transcripts to reveal 'open codes' (Corbin and Strauss, 1998). It will be on these emerging themes that the individual pupil will develop their own pathway but always being reminded of the overall aim of the research.

Later and away from the main data gathering process the data will need to have;

- Trends examined across descriptions using software (Nvivo-8 is recommended but training will need to be undertaken).
- Content analysed of all transcripts to compare to open codes.
- Reduction of all open codes to provide overarching explanatory themes.

CASTELDINE, H. (2008). Modifying Photovoice for community-based participatory Indigenous research. *Social Science & Medicine*. **66** (6). 1393–1405

CORBIN, M. and STRAUSS A. L. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. New York, Sage



## **Appendix F Field Note Transcripts**

### **Sample of Field Notes**

#### **9 October 2015**

Meeting with two pupils to review first set of photos. Arrived at school for 1 PM. Only two, pupils (Pupil Y) and (Pupil D), were available to talk, the third researcher (Pupil K) had been internally excluded. Discovered that the boys involved had not taken any photographs as they could not access the cameras stop Held a discussion as to how they might have greater access to the cameras and decided that we would give the cameras to their teaching assistant for safekeeping. This seemed to be a problem that we had solved. We then held a discussion about what problems they might have in taking the photos in the coming week. This led to a general discussion about the school in general and what they liked about it became obvious at this stage that the pupils were very unused to talking about themselves. I tried to open the conversation by talking about what subjects in the school they liked best hoping that PE school sport would be one of the subjects, it wasn't. We then tried to find out what made them like the subject. This is work that needs to be continued. It seems to me that there is a whole new research topic about getting this type of pupil to talk. It remains unclear at this very early stage if using photo voice will make information available.

Have arranged to meet the same boys in one week's time when their assignment has been to take up to 10 photographs of anything in their school that they particularly like.

The problems of seeing the boys every Friday, reviewing the photographs, getting them to talk about their work, and setting new targets for the forthcoming week remains to be addressed.

It is almost half term in the first term of the research and very little has been achieved, in fact, the only work done at this stage has been the collection of the parents and pupils

consent/assent forms, identifying the pupils, and setting out the nature of the research. This research is not going to be over by Christmas and is going to take longer than envisaged.

## **16 October 2015**

### **1.00**

Present. (Pupil D), (Pupil Y), (Pupil I)

All pupils had completed previous tasks (some in the lesson today). Problems arose when trying to download photos - cameras would not connect to laptop computer - took cameras away for further investigation. (Pupil Y)'s camera ran out of battery during filming (check). The keeping of the cameras by the teaching assistant proved to be a good idea and was working well. A further development of this will be to explain every week the task to the teaching assistant and to envisage a help in the completion of the task.

The pupils were still quite reluctant to talk about their experiences in anything but a superficial level although this is now making slight progress. This needs to be kept an eye on for the future if any real progress is being made. It seems that the pupils are unaccustomed to being asked their views, and when they're asked, giving their views.

We discussed what the pupils liked and disliked about their PE/sport lesson. The task for the next week is to take photographs of those two factors their likes and dislikes. I have suggested that they tried to take up to 5 photographs of what they like and five photographs of what they dislike. I appreciate that this will be quite a difficult task since they only have two lessons next week and both lessons are basketball lessons (?). In addition, next week is the last week of this half term, at this moment it is difficult to say whether I will see the pupils next Friday. Mr. B has agreed to email me during the week to let me know which pupils, if any, will be available for next Friday's meeting. It is that I have set two weeks work for the pupils: the first task is as outlined above; the second task is to gain experience in using the video output of the supplied cameras. The pupils

have been asked to make a small video of them interviewing one pupil and asking that pupil what they like/dislike about their PE lessons.

## **19 October**

### **1.30 at Leisure Centre**

#### Basketball lesson

Observed pupils playing game. Teacher was standing at the last moment as the proper teacher is required for an instant back in school. Arrived just after an incident of an elbow in the face which resulted in the loss of a tooth. Some behaviour problems with the boy who would use the elbow. He was sporting a plaster I was telling anybody who would listen that he was worried that he might catch something off the tooth he had knocked out. Saying such things as, I bet you never cleaned his teeth I could catch anything.

In the game I played well and with a good level of skill. He wandered around the edge of the game and took part only when the ball came near him, loss of on-call for our movement when he was not on task. As usual, he had lots to say. Clearly, he knew how to play the game but did not join in preferring to wonder about the court. One point he argued with teacher about the contact rule when he took the ball by repeatedly slapping the ball out of somebody's hands. He claims that basketball is not his favourite lesson. (Pupil Y) clearly was not enjoying the lesson, he much preferred to stand at the side and talk to one of his friends. When he was playing, he clearly knew what to do, but really wasn't taking much part.

Even though there were problems with the last-minute teacher change, and the incident with the tooth, most of the class seem to be enjoying the lesson.

It was quite interesting to note that the teacher in charge came up to me to explain what was happening, the teaching assistant told me the same story, plus the addition, that the teacher was asking her what they had been doing in the lesson, but she did not know

because the original teacher allowed her to sit in the restaurant whilst he was teaching. This lesson was due to start at 1.15 but did not start until 1.45 due to the travelling involved. At 2.30 the lesson finished to allow for travel back to school. This meant that the pupils were active for 45 minutes out of a possible 90 minutes.

### **October 23**

Arrived at school for a 1.00 meeting to be told the pupils had a sex education film. Could I return at 2.00?

Spoke to Mr. B about possible loan of the cameras to the four pupils over the half term holiday. MR. B had some reservations but basely thought it would be all right. Decided that it was time for the pupils to take some responsibility, I await the response.

Arrived in school at 2.00-the pupils did not appear until 2.20; the sex education film had overrun. This meant I had very little time to work with the three pupils present, Jacob was again absent from school. The pupils had to leave after 30 minutes to catch their school transport. (Pupil D) and (Pupil Y) were very excited after their sex education film. After the initial bout of noise and high spirits (Pupil D) and (Pupil I) started to talk sensibly. (Pupil Y) continue to be very silly and not willing to take part in our discussions.

Once again, the photographs taken in the PE lesson held this morning. This was a basketball lesson, the activity for this half term. The fact that basketball has been the only activity available for this half term has made it difficult for the pupils to take photographs of their favourite PE activity. I wait to see if the new half term will bring a change of activity and the possibility of the pupils taking photographs of something they enjoy.

I have not seen the pupils for two weeks (half term). The task set for the last two weeks was to take the camera home and record any sporting activities or any items of interest that occurred during half term. I await the results and the return of the cameras.

Arrived at school at 1.00 only to be told, yet again, that the pupils involved were taking part in sex education lessons. I was asked if I could wait 30 minutes for the pupils to finish this lesson. I asked if it was possible to see one of the pupils during this time. This request was granted, and I could talk to (Pupil I) on a one-to-one basis. I, when seen on his own, proved to be an intelligent, responsible boy who, even though he had recently been to see the headteacher about his behaviour, was very frank and forthcoming with his answers. I could talk to (Pupil D) about his photographs and their descriptions for a full 20 minutes before the other three pupils appeared. At this point I stress that I had given the pupils some responsibility over the last two weeks in overseeing their cameras at home. I suggested that they had been very responsible, all the cameras being returned, and that now was the time in the research to become more responsible and professional about the work. This seemed to work very well, and I could review the photographs and talk to (Pupil K) whilst (Pupil D) and Pupil (Pupil Y) reviewed and signed last times transcript. Talking to the pupils individually proved to be much more beneficial than seeing them as a group. All responded fully to the discussions and it seems that two distinct pathways seem to be emerging. In a review of the work undertaken by the pupils at home resulted in two pupils (Pupils D and Y) revealing that quite large amounts of time during half term had been spent playing on PlayStation's. When questioned further it became apparent that this was the overriding activity of the half term. In contrast (Pupils I and K) had led a very active half term, taking part in several activities, loosely physical, and had spent large amount of time outside of their homes. This apparent diversity of activity will need to be researched further in the next few weeks.

#### **Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> November**

Visiting school today because the school has a sponsored walk on Friday. Talk to Mr. B about access to the pupils and it was agreed that in future Thursday a. m. will be a good time to see the pupils and to maintain continuity.

All four pupils were present, and I use the format where I talked to one researcher whilst the other three read and signed last week's transcripts. This system seems to work better

but does not allow for the pupils to talk confidentially. This was highlighted by (Pupil J). (Pupil was listening whilst I talked to (Pupil Y). When I was talking to (Pupil Y) he gave me a lot of responses that seemed reasonable. I have found (Pupil Y) difficult to engage with the work. An example of this is that whilst we are talking, despite continual reminders to the contrary, he insists in spinning around on his chair. In fact, in an earlier conversation gave spinning as one of his favourite activities. All of this makes for a difficult environment in which to ask questions and to elicit answers. On this occasion when I had finished talking to and the other left the room, J told me that the answers (Pupil Y) had given to my questions were not the truth as he perceived it. He perceived that (Pupil Y) not enjoying the lessons, did not concentrate, failed to respond to instruction and generally just did his own thing, all of this in a trampolining lesson. This now provides something of a dilemma since, on the one and, I want to believe everything that (Pupil Y) tells me but I would also like to get the truth. This needs to be discussed with my supervisors. At the very least I need to arrange a lesson observation of to make up my own mind.

Had a discussion with the HT about the progress of the research. He seemed to be happy with the arrangements.

#### **Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> November**

Saw all four pupils, ask to see two at a time but this was not possible. Saw all four pupils in the art room at the same time. This is far from ideal-when the pupils have read last week's transcripts, they are not on any task, and poor behaviour is possible. On this occasion, it took the form of throwing erasers at each other, this was quickly quelled but it detracted from the research questions.

Three out of the four pupils had taken video footage of good/poor performance during their trampolining lessons. This provided a slight problem since the review of video evidence is more difficult than single photographs. In addition, quite a lot of the video evidence proved to be of poor quality.

An essential part of today's conversations was to follow up some of the points the Pupils made in the previous week. Of necessity, these questions were probing in nature. All four pupils showed a marked reluctance to answer these probing questions. This needs further investigation. It seems, and it needs investigating, that the pupils are either reluctant to give their views or do not have any views. If they do not have any views, what is the reason for this? Is it possible that the pupils see PE as a lesson in which they turn up, take part and then go to the next lesson, without being engaged in any intellectual learning?

It is proving quite difficult to develop the pupils own research programme when they are timetabled for two hours PE Time each week. In these two 1-hour lessons they are taking part in the same activity. In this half term that activity is trampolining. This concentration on one activity is providing little scope for the development of the pupil's own ideas. Perhaps this needs to be explored with the staff involved to see why they have chosen this format. It seems, and it needs researching, that the pupils are bored, devoid of challenge and undergo little discussion with the lessons. In other words, they have decided that PE is a subject that you just do.

A technical problem occurred nearing the end of the conversation with Pupil D. The voice recorder ran out of internal memory. These field notes provide the only record of the ongoing conversation with Pupil D. Pupil D is one of the more able and vocal pupils and I would like to give him more responsibility within the research. It was during discussions about the direction of his personal research that he became quite subdued. I was attempting to give him a different task to the other three pupils, I felt that he needed lots of encouragement to take on a personal task. I initially suggested a task in which he was clearly not interested, and it took a little time to encourage him into a different direction. Eventually we decided that an appropriate task would be to try to interview, on camera, between two and four pupils. The nature of this interview task was to find out what these pupils felt about their PE lessons. We talked about the skills needed to ask questions. We entered a small role-play of him doing the questioning with an emphasis on using the technique of asking a simple broad-based question, listening to the answer, and then

selecting a part of the response on which to base further questions. Whilst this was clearly something that he had never done before I felt that he was capable and responsible, and we agreed that he should take up to 2 weeks to complete the task. I stated that I would see him next week to find out what progress he had made.

### **Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> November**

Meeting with SHU IT support to discuss NVivo training. They reported that although there is no specific training available within the University, they had noticed that the software provider had placed training videos on YouTube. They agreed to forward me a link to these videos. On viewing the videos, it seems that they follow very simple sequential steps and appear to be very informative.

I am becoming quite concerned that I should be preliminary coding the data as it is being produced.

### **Thursday 26 November**

School visit, arrived at school to find that two of the pupils were absent (Pupil I, Pupil Y). I use this opportunity to talk in greater detail that was normally possible.

Held a conversation with one of the TA's about the difficulties I am finding when trying to engage with. She agreed that he is very difficult boy who tends to tell you what he thinks you want to hear. She confessed to also finding him very difficult and seldom achieving any, of what she perceived to be, the real (Pupil Y). (Pupil D) was concerned that he had not done his interviews, he was reassured to learn that he had an additional week to complete the task.

J is much more amenable in a small group situation, he regularly contributes to the conversation, makes salient points and is clearly involved in the whole situation.

Had a conversation with the assistant teacher about my concerns that the pupils were being taken out of their English lessons to meet me. We agreed for the next two weeks I



would visit the school on Fridays and talk to the pupils during their PE lessons. This arrangement suits me very well since I welcome the opportunity to see the pupils taking part in lessons. Previously the only evidence I have them performing in lesson times is their own video evidence in trampolining. I feel that seeing the pupils taking part in their PE lessons can only inform my understanding of what they are saying during conversations.

#### **Thursday 4th December**

This was a change of day from Friday and done schools request. When I arrived at 1 PM only three pupils were available. (Pupil Y) having injured his ankle attempting some sort of move in parkour. I found this to be quite outside the character for (Pupil Y) as I have not seen this side of him.

Struggled to find a room for the conversations with the pupils, eventually found a space in the music room and then had to move to the medical room.

Felt good progress made with (Pupil D, (Pupil K) were very forthcoming with their responses. (Pupil I) was a bit more reluctant.

Considering giving them a week off next week since they feel that I need to refresh the research process to keep their pupils on task. In the run-up to Christmas, and with things happening within the school, it seems a good idea to restart the research process in the New Year.

#### **Monday 8th December**

I had a meeting at SHU.

We discussed my thoughts: -

I felt the research was being conducted at a slow pace due in part to the pupils not having, or being not willing to share their views

from the previous week's conversations with the pupils it had become clear that the pupils were bored with some of their PE activities. Need to explore the reasons for this, could it be, for teaching, poor planning, poor facilities/poor activities or the lack of pupil involvement.

We discussed the development that had resulted from the last pupil researcher videos which could potentially reveal a new way ahead. It now seems possible that in the future the pupils could take on full responsibility for the content of any future videos. Clearly this will need thought and organization but with more training and possibly working in twos, it will be possible for the pupils to interview other members of the school population. If this were possible then it would be BESD labelled pupils finding out about school sport within the school.

We discussed the ethics of such a move and decided that further university ethics approval would not be needed since we had had approval to talk to BESD labelled pupils within their school situation. Before any other pupils could be involved in any interviews that I would need to follow the same procedure which was used for recruiting the pupils. I would need to obtain written parent/carer confirmations and the pupil's involved consent.

We also discussed the ethical dilemma which I found myself namely that I had on my computer and interview by one of the pupils but with the pupil for which we did not have the necessary consent/consent. We unanimously agreed that this interview form no part of the ongoing research

### **Monday 15<sup>th</sup> December**

Had arranged the school visit to see the headteacher and Mr. B regards the new direction for the research. I arrived in the school to find some of the pupils I knew taking part in a mini trampolining lesson. The hall was laid out with a mini trampoline surrounded by thick mats. On watching the lesson, with the teacher and two teaching assistants sitting

down on the benches at the side of the hall, I noticed that only two boys were performing, and the other six boys had job mats did not move. It is quite difficult not to assume that this was normal, however, it was near the end of term so this may have been a special lesson. I watch this lesson for 10 minutes without a change.

In the meeting, I explained my ideas for the new direction of the research which were greeted with unanimous approval. It was agreed that the school would select some more pupils for the pupils to interview. This is not an ideal situation, but to be pragmatic, does provide pupils to be interviewed. We discussed the need for more parent/carer permissions, and I undertook to reword the consent/assent documents to reflect the video interviews. We agreed that I would provide this documentation before Christmas and that the school would distribute the letters to the appropriate pupils. This was achieved.

#### **Friday 15<sup>th</sup> January**

Arrived at school at 1 o'clock to find that all the pupils had been involved in what the school called an 'incident'. I had thought that this session would be used to reinvigorate the pupils and to outline the new direction of the research. However, when I did finally see the pupil Investigators was only able to see three of them since the fourth was in a meeting with the headteacher. I believe that all the pupils had had a severe conversation with the assistant head. Not surprisingly the mood in the room was very subdued and I found it quite difficult to instil any enthusiasm in the pupils. I had decided previously to give each of the pupils a specific role in the forthcoming interviews with school pupils. I then set up a mock interview which was videoed. This mock interview could not be described as going well since it was clear that the pupil researcher's minds when not on the task involved. Basically, after the mock interviews I decided to cut my losses but the day.

#### **Monday 18<sup>th</sup> January**

When I reviewed the mock interview, it became apparent that the sound quality was not good, in fact it was so poor that I was not able to transcribe the video. At the time, this posed a huge problem since if we were to make a documentary type film and would be a need for good quality audio.

The solution to this problem was to explore within SHU the possibility of obtaining better quality equipment. I eventually contacted a department called media arts who suggested that I might like to talk to Mr. John Blythe. After some difficulties in getting to speak to him I finally managed to talk to him about my problems. He was sympathetic and gave me two options. There was a difficulty since I was a student within the faculty of D & S and not a member of the ACES faculty. However, I was offered the potential use of the most modern equipment, but this will have to be operated by an ACES student who was willing to help and subject to the necessary equipment being available. This option was not compatible with my work with the pupils in school. The second option was to be allowed the use of an older Sony camera which they had in store; this could be available on extended loan. I collected the camera from store and set about learning how to use it in readiness for my visit to the school.

### **Friday 22nd January**

Arrived at school to find the pupils quite excited about using the professional looking equipment. After it was set up, I decided to allow the designated pupil researcher cameraman to use the camera and do some filming just to get used to equipment. He noted that whilst the camera was set up correctly and was doing everything as expected, the images produced were green, on inspection he noticed that the camera was set to night vision.

While (Pupil I) was getting used to the camera I took the opportunity to talk to (Pupils Y and D) about the possible interview questions that they might ask. I carefully wrote down all their suggestions bought they both found it quite difficult not only to ask questions but also to concentrate as they were being filmed at the same time. We then tried out a mock

interview on camera with me asking the questions and (Pupil D) answering them. (Pupil D) found it very difficult to concentrate and was embarrassed to answer the questions in front of the other pupils. However, he eventually relaxed and began to will provide some more in-depth answers. We then discussed the session pointing out how difficult it was to look at the camera and answer questions at the same time knowing that all the time you can see what's happening behind the camera. Since the role of this mock interview was to provide some insight into the technique of interviewing for (Pupil D) the potential pupil research interviewer. When we reverse the roles and gave the opportunity to E to ask the questions of (Pupil Y) I quickly realized that more work would be needed with (Pupil D) before he could think on his feet and start to ask more probing for questions. He needed to be encouraged to not accept any answers which he knew were not correct. When he asked (Pupil Y) if he always behaved during is PE lessons and the answer yes, the look on (Pupil D) face showed that he knew this was not a correct answer. He needs much encouragement to able to ask argumentative questions of the pupil interviewees.

### **Monday25th January**

Started to try to transcribe all the filming taken last Friday. Found that I did not have on any of my four computers the necessary software to enable me to download the videos. A telephone call to the media arts helpdesk told me that I needed to download a piece of software called premium pro. On downloading this software, I found that none of my computers can connect to the camera using the provided FireWire. After much Internet research, it became apparent that the only computer, in my possession, capable of this connection was the MacBook. Even then I would need to purchase the correct connections since the camera FireWire is 400 technologies and the computers is800 technology. Whilst I was awaiting delivery of the connections a further conversation with John Blythe revealed that they had the necessary connection cable. On collection of this cable I was also treated to a demonstration of how the software worked. Downloading the video from the camera revealed that whilst this worked perfectly the making and editing of the film by this software will take some training. I mentally gave myself a

provisional timetable of finishing all filming in school before the Easter holidays and then editing and making the film before my pupils leave the school in the summer.

### **Friday 29<sup>th</sup> January**

INSET day

### **Friday 5<sup>th</sup> February**

spend the whole of the afternoon practicing for the interviews. This involved setting up the camera position talking to the cameraman about the correct way to film interviews, this was followed by some trial interviews but not using any of the material that may be used in the formal interviews. At the end of this the pupils and myself reviewed the footage and talked about the mistakes that we could see. The most prominent mistake from the cameraman was the stability of the picture, he was constantly panning in and out and indeed side to side, making the film very difficult to watch. The interview readily identified that his speech was not clear, he was mumbling, and agreed that he was speaking far too quickly.

All the time as we were analysing the film (Pupil Y) was showing his usual behaviour of spinning around on a chair. When asked to concentrate on the task and to move to a non-spin able chair he became quite non-communicative and sullen.

The pupils decided that when filming the interviews proper that the camera should be at a lower angle and that both the interviewer and the interviewee were both in shot all the time, thus cutting down camera movement. It was also decided that the room in which we had to work (Art room) was unsuitable in its present form. It was decided that some form of plain background would be needed for the proper filming.

The tasks for the three investigators present- (Pupils Y, I and D)-were to research a suitable background material, to think about all aspects of operating the camera during

interviews and to look at the proposed interview questions and see how they might be more probing.

### **Friday 12<sup>th</sup> February**

the plan for today was to film the pupils interviewing each other. The day got off to a poor start when (Pupil K) requested that he no longer wish to take part in the research project. In keeping with the ethics of this research project his wish was granted without question. In some respects, this withdrawal had not been unexpected as (Pupil K) had not attended many of the previous sessions either through absence or exclusion. In hindsight, the withdrawal of J has left a hole in the research since (Pupil K) behaviour in school and that he would have provided a different insight into these physical education and sport experience within the school. It is hoped that the pupil interviews with the second tranche of pupil interviewees will fill the gap left by (Pupil K)

Once again, the only room available was the art room and we set about providing a white background for the interviews, setting up the equipment and generally getting ready for the filming.

Such is the nature of work in school that no one had been informed that we would be filming in the art room. We were faced with a teacher/learning support assistant who had decided to use the time and space to do some preparation. When we explained that we would due to do some filming they agreed to work elsewhere. This seemed a very satisfactory solution to the problem but from that moment on there was a steady stream of pupils coming into the room to collect pieces of equipment. This constant movement was compounded by the noise of a loudly squeaking door. The first interview with ((Pupil Y) had to be filmed twice and on review will need to be done again.

On the day, we managed to film an interview with each of the three pupils. It was noticeable that (Pupil D) grew in stature asking is own questions and in his observation of

the other pupils asking questions. By the end of the session (Pupil D) had become proficient in not only asking questions but also in asking probing follow-ups. H also proved proficient, not only as a cameraman but also in its ability to ask questions. (Pupil Y) found it difficult to answer the questions and often gave single word answers or refused to answer the question altogether. This was despite attempts by the other two pupils to get him to be more involved and to say more.

This was the last session before the half term holiday, and it is hoped that the pupils can remember how much progress we have made. In the next two sessions, it will be necessary for the pupils to interview the additional pupil interviewees.

I took the opportunity to walk around the school with (Pupil D) and this camera and for him to identify what parts of the school outside he would like to film.

### **Friday 4<sup>th</sup> March**

visit school was postponed until 1.50. The class, from which the pupils were drawn were having a first aid lesson by TA.

I had a conversation with the assistant head who assured me that the pupils would leave the first aid lesson at 1. 50 and I would be able to work with them plus the additional interviewees until the school.

As time passed it became obvious that TA was not willing to release the pupils and as the Thai got to 1.50 I resolved that the only way to gain access to the pupils was by standing in clear view of the lesson. Finally, the teacher supervising the lesson saw me and came across to see what I needed. In addition, the usual which I used was not available and I had to search for a suitable alternative. Finally ended up in the art room, not ideal but would have to do. In the event only (Pupil I) and (Pupil Y) were in school. Used the time to be interviewed (Pupil D) (previous interview spoiled by background noise-door creaking). The assistant head re-appeared with the missing still camera-had all five, plus the news that only one of the new interviewees was present school. (Pupil I, Y) and H expressed



doubts that we could conclude the research before the Easter holidays. It took quite some time for them to be reassured. When ahead with the interview of the new volunteer.

### **Friday 11<sup>th</sup> March**

Reviewing the previous weeks filming it was obvious that the do interviewee was very conscious of my present and did not answer the questions fully. He seemed embarrassed answer with me present and constantly looked at me before giving an answer. This situation needed to be resolved and after thinking through all the ethical and child protection issues, I decided that a new bolder approach is needed. In addition, I felt that I had achieved a reasonable relationship with my pupils. This relationship was enough for me to allow them autonomy over the interview filming. I decided that I will talk to the pupils and outline what I wanted to achieve. This was that I would be present whilst the interview was set up and then I would leave the and watch the proceedings through the outside window, this I felt would preserve child protection issues. I talked this over with the assistant head who agreed that it was worth trying. This new procedure proved to be a resounding success as far as the pupils where concerned. In fact, the director (Pupil Y) stopped the filming on three occasions when he felt that there was too much outside noise. The filming was again taking place in the music room which was far from ideal. A review of the film will provide a more realistic decision of whether this procedure was a total success.

Hopefully, the interview filming is now complete, and I will have enough content to make into a film. I talked to the pupils about the future processes and assured them that I will try to have a draft film for them to review two weeks after the forthcoming Easter holidays-end of April.

### **Issues of the week**

My trial period for the film editing software Adobe Premiere Pro has now ended and to install the full program on my desktop would cost £15 per month. I contacted SHU to try to find out if they had licenses that would give me access to Creative Cloud the overall programme of which Premier Pro is part. The answer to this question was that I could have Creative Cloud downloaded onto a SHU computer in the place where I work. Since I work at home not University this solution was very unsatisfactory.

More seriously my desktop computer has unfortunately been attacked by adware which is preventing me working on the desktop. Hope to have this situation resolved over the weekend and to have some additional hardware installed that will allow me to do the film editing on my desktop. This remains an unresolved issue since I told that there are issues with trying to use fire wire technology with Windows10.

### **25<sup>th</sup> April**

Early session 12.35.

It had been the Annual Gym/Dance Display, so things were running late. Did not see the investigators till much later. Whilst waiting I chatted to the newly appointed class teacher who was eager to tell me about her new pupils. Diverted the conversation since I did not want to hear all views on the investigators to have any influence on the research.

Pupils D and Y arrived, and we talked about how the filming was progressing.

When the recorder was switched off, we got into a conversation about technology and sitting in their rooms playing games and making films for YouTube. Reminded the boys that their film was not to be uploaded. Some rivalry about who had achieved the most 'hits'.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> May**

Change of meeting day and time. Some problems of getting the pupils released from lessons so only short time left for meeting.

Talked about the film to be provided to the school and what it should include. It was agreed that the school should get 1 copy together with 1 copy each for the investigators.

It was agreed that the investigators should agree on the film content, but all the material was available for me to use in my writing.

Long-ish discussion about not putting any of the pupils comments about their teacher into the film.

### **9th May**

Only (Pupil D) (Pupil Y) present at the meeting and we decided on the edit of the film.

### **16<sup>th</sup> May**

This turned out to be my final meeting with the investigators as the classroom teacher had made the case with the HT that she needed to spend more time with her class in order to get to know them better.

Ran a final session on what had been achieved and what the investigators had learned in the process.

Appendix G Ethics Approval Letter



Our Ref AM/RKT/D&S-49  
27 April 2015

Mr C Hill  
148 Walkley Crescent Road  
Sheffield  
S6 5BB

Dear Chris

**Request for Ethical Approval of Research Project**

Your research project entitled "**Special school sporting experiences: listening to student researchers labelled with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties**" has been submitted for ethical review to the Faculty's rapporteurs and I am pleased to confirm that they have approved your project.

I wish you every success with your research project.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A Macaskill".

Professor A Macaskill  
Chair  
Faculty Research Ethics Committee

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