"We've got a few who don't go to PE": learning support assistant and special educational needs coordinator views on inclusion in physical education in England

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Abstract

Britain's 1981 Education Act stimulated a partial migration of pupils from special to mainstream schools. The onus has since been on teachers to meet the needs and capitalise on the capabilities of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in mainstream school settings. The research analysed learning support assistant (LSA) and special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) views on inclusion in physical education (PE). Individual interviews were conducted with 12 LSAs and 12 SENCOs working in mainstream schools in North-West England. Open, axial and selective coding was performed on interview transcripts to identify reoccurring themes. The research found that SENCOs and LSAs considered PE to be an inclusive subject, the conceptualisation of which was left to them. However, developing PE provision that met the needs and optimised the capabilities of pupils with autism spectrum disorders (ASD), and supporting pupils with SEND during team games and competitive sports, were identified as key challenges to inclusion in PE. This may be of concern to some educationalists given that these types of curriculum activities have recently been repositioned at the heart of PE in England. A key challenge for all those involved in educating pupils with SEND in PE, especially teachers and LSAs, is to plan and teach team games and competitive sports in ways that meet the needs of and stretch all pupils, in particular those with ASD.

Key words

Disability, learning support assistants, physical education, special educational needs, special educational needs coordinators.

Introduction

The inclusion of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in mainstream schools in Britain gained much political and public attention in the aftermath of Baroness Mary Warnock's report into the education of so-called 'handicapped' (*sic*) children (Department for Education and Science, 1978). The report was stimulated, in part, by the British Government's ostensible commitment to the human rights movement and associated United Nations agendas that swept much of Western Europe and North America (Maher, 2010a). What followed the passage of the 1981 Education Act (Department for Education and Science, 1981), which was underpinned by many of the recommendations of the Warnock Report, was a gradual and partial transference of pupils from special to mainstream schools in Britain (Halliday, 1993). This education migration was based on the assumption that 'access' to the mainstream school system would go some way to ameliorating physical, social and economic barriers between people with and without disabilities. This decision was very much in keeping with the dominant individual ideology of disability (Finkelstein, 2001) in that the expectation was for young people with disabilities to 'fit in' to a rigid educational structure that was developed by people without disabilities for young people without disabilities. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (US Department of Education, 2004) aimed to achieve similar educational outcomes in the United States (US), with some degree of success (see US Government Accountability Office, 2012).

An increased number of pupils with SEND in mainstream schools in England posed additional challenges for physical education (PE) teachers in particular, many of whom were inadequately trained to develop and teach lessons that catered for the needs of pupils with SEND and aimed to capitalise on their capabilities (Vickerman, 2007). Limited experience of adapting physical

activities and working with pupils with SEND were considered by PE teachers to be two reasons restricting the extent to which they could be inclusive pedagogues (Vickerman, 2007). An inadequate understanding of inclusion as an educational concept, limited support from learning support assistants (LSAs) and special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs), and restricted opportunities for inclusion training as part of continued professional development (CPD) have also been highlighted by teachers as key challenges to the successful inclusion of pupils with SEND in mainstream PE (see, for example, Morley, Bailey, Tan and Cooke, 2005). Fitzgerald (2005) is one of a growing number of British academics who have attempted to empower pupils with SEND by seeking their views and experiences of mainstream secondary PE. Much of that research is quite critical of the extent to which teachers are willing and, indeed, able, to plan and teach inclusive PE lessons (see, for example, Fitzgerald 2005). More recently, Maher (2014) and Maher and Macbeth (2013) have attempted to broaden the focus by using online surveys to explore LSA and SENCO views on their endeavours to change social arrangements (Finkelstein, 2001) to create an inclusive culture in mainstream secondary school PE in England. In particular, light has been cast on SEND resource distribution; the training of facilitators of PE; and the dissemination of SEND information (Maher, 2014; Maher and Macbeth, 2013). Much of this research suggests that the subordinate position of PE in subject hierarchies, inadequate training of key stakeholders, and insufficient resources and information, may restrict the extent to which an inclusive culture can develop in PE (Maher and Macbeth, 2013; Maher, 2014). It remains, however, that LSA and SENCO perspectives and experiences of PE are under-explored despite their value for offering a broader understanding of the subject. Therefore, this paper aims to build on the research conducted by Maher (2014) and Maher and Macbeth (2013) by using individual interviews with LSAs and SENCOs to provide a more in-depth analysis of the inclusion of pupils with SEND in mainstream secondary PE (pupils aged 11-16). More specifically, focus is cast on addressing,

for the first time, the following research objectives: (1) analysing what inclusion in PE means to LSAs and SENCOs; (2) exploring the extent to which PE is inclusive according to LSAs and SENCOs; (3) identifying the key challenges to inclusion in PE from the perspective of LSAs and SENCOs.

In England, a SENCO is an educationalist whose remit is often broad, varied and can depend on the needs and resources of their particular school (Maher and Macbeth, 2013). SENCOs are expected to liaise with and advise teachers, parents, senior management team (SMT) and external agencies when it comes to issues associated with the inclusion of pupils with SEND. The role also includes managing LSAs, assessing pupils with SEND, and managing the records and statements of pupils with SEND (Department for Children Schools and Families, 2009). It is argued that a SENCO perspective is of value because many hold positions of authority within their school structure and, thus, are able to influence the SEND resources available to PE, and the SEND training offered and undertaken by those involved in planning and teaching PE lessons such as teachers and LSAs (Maher and Macbeth, 2013). In England, the role of LSA is, arguably, equally broad and diverse, much the same as in Western Europe, and the US where the terms paraprofessional and paraeducator are often used (Bryan and McCubbin, 2013). Department for Education and Skills (2000) charged LSAs with supporting pupils, teachers, schools and the curriculum. While LSAs do not necessarily hold positions of authority, they can and often do influence the extent to which an inclusive culture develops in a particular subject because of their key role in curriculum teaching (Maher, 2014).

When it comes to the politics of inclusive education, it is important to conceptualise and differentiate between the terms special educational needs (SEN) and disability (D) because

there is a propensity in Britain to consider them synonymous and, thus, use them interchangeably. According to the Department for Education and Skills (2001) SEN is used to refer to those pupils who have educational needs – and, thus, require provision – additional to that given to the majority of their age-peers. In Britain, 'disability' is defined under the 2010 Equality Act as a 'physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities' (Stationary Office, 2010, p. 4). Medical connotations aside, a disabled child will only have special needs in mainstream schools if provision additional to that required by their age-peers is necessary to ensure social and educational inclusion. While a pupil who requires a wheelchair for mobility may not need additional provision in a mathematics lesson, for instance, they may require additional support during a game of rugby on the sports field. Therefore, the importance of analysing PE as a relatively unique learning environment which poses different challenges *vis-à-vis* other subjects becomes apparent. The next section outlines the participants, method, procedure and data analysis techniques used in the research.

Methodology

Participants

Twelve LSAs (male n=6; female n=6) and 12 SENCOs (male n=1; female n=11) participated in the research. These were recruited for stage two of a much larger study, which aimed to analyse: (1) the role and responsibility of LSAs and SENCOs; (2) the training and professional development opportunities and experiences of LSAs and SENCOs; (3) LSA and SENCO conceptualisations of SEND and inclusion; (4) best practice and key challenges *vis-à-vis* inclusive education; (5) the development and dissemination of SEND resources and information. While stage one of the research involved a survey distributed to all LSAs and

SENCOs working in mainstream secondary schools (pupils aged 11-16) in North-West England (see, for example, Maher 2014; Maher and Macbeth, 2013), stage two – from which the data used here was generated – involved individual interviews. Recruitment of participants involved contacting all LSAs and SENCOs who expressed interest, in the survey, in participating in a follow-up interview. This type of sampling strategy is both strategic and pragmatic in that those selected meet the criteria of being most able to answer the research questions, and are readily accessible for interview (Mason, 2002). Interviewing 12 LSAs and 12 SENCOs ensured that saturation occurred (Webster *et al*., 2013) in that the data generated revealed a detailed tapestry of views and experiences relating to the issues associated with inclusion in mainstream secondary school PE. Indeed, there comes a point in qualitative research such as this when interviewing additional participants becomes a fruitless endeavour because no new information relating to the research questions is generated (Webster *et al*., 2013). This point came after interviewing 12 SENCOs. Therefore, it was decided to cease SENCO interviews and interview 12 LSAs for consistency despite LSA saturation occurring earlier.

Of all those contacted, 24 interviews were conducted. The number of male LSAs (n=6) was the same as the number of female LSAs (n=5). The SENCO gender balance was much more uneven in that the number of females (n=11) far outweighed the number of males (n=1). This trend is unsurprisingly consistent with the research conducted for stage one where 88 percent (n=119) of SENCOs who responded to a call to complete an online survey were female (see Maher and Macbeth, 2013), perhaps suggesting that SENCO is a gendered occupation. Other biographical information is presented in the tables below:

INSET TABLE 1 HERE

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Method and procedure

A semi-structured format was selected because it gave structure and focus to the discussions which ensured that areas of pertinence to the research would be covered. The semi-structured format also meant that there was scope to explore serendipitous issues of relevance to the LSAs and SENCOs (Bryman, 2012) providing, of course, those issues did not stray too far beyond the aim and purpose of the research. When this did occur, the onus was on the interviewer to steer the discussion back towards more germane points of focus to avoid the generation of irrelevant data. Given that the research aimed to analyse the inclusion of pupils with SEND in mainstream secondary PE, the following key objectives informed the questions that were asked during interview: (1) what inclusion in PE means to LSAs and SENCOs; (2) whether PE is inclusive according to LSAs and SENCOs; (3) the key challenges to inclusion in PE from the perspective of LSAs and SENCOs. Two separate guides were developed for LSA and SENCO interviews to ensure that the interviews had a degree of structure, and that questions were asked that allowed the research objectives to be addressed. The questions relating to the research objectives of this paper were the same for both LSAs and SENCOs. A few examples have are stated below:

- How would you define inclusion?

- What would an inclusive PE lesson involve?

- How inclusive is PE?

- What are the greatest challenges to inclusion in PE?

Prior to the interviews, an information letter was given to participants reminding them of the aim and purpose of the research (the same was done prior to the distribution of the survey). Written permission was given for interviews to be audio recorded. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in the schools of LSAs and SENCOs, and each interview lasted between 30 and 120 minutes depending on the time available to participants and the depth and relevance of answers provided by each participant. None of the LSAs or SENCOs worked at the same school. LSAs and SENCOs are referred to, in the discussion, by pseudonyms. All LSAs and SENCOs confirmed that the transcripts accurately reflected the interview discussions, which can help to ensure validity and reliability in small scale qualitative studies such as this (Flick, 2009). Given that the sample is small, it is worth noting here that the claims made below cannot be extrapolated to other schools or other LSAs and SENCOs. Nonetheless, the findings can be added to the growing body of empirical research to increase our understanding of SEND and PE in mainstream secondary schools in England.

Analysis of interview transcripts

The computer software package NVIVO was used to store, manage and analyse interview transcripts. The textual interpretations of interviews were read and reread until immersion occurred (Bryman, 2012). At this point, the researcher had gained an understanding of the prominent issues identified by LSAs and SENCOs. Open coding was then performed, which involved the giving of labels to chunks of the text identified as being of salience to the social realities of LSAs and SENCOs (Saldana, 2009). Next, axial coding was performed to identify relationships between open codes. Through the systematic filtering and ordering of data, NVIVO helped increase rigour (Flick, 2009) because analysis occurred across all data, not just

those compatible with dominant ideologies and assumptions (Seale, 2010). The key themes that emerged from the coding underpin the discussion provided below. SENCO and LSA perspectives have been presented separately, which is indicative of their differing roles and responsibilities within the school power structure (Maher and Macbeth, 2013), but are drawn together in the conclusion. The key themes are: SENCO conceptualisations of inclusion in PE; SENCO views on developing separate PE provision; SENCO perceptions of challenges to inclusion in PE; LSA views on the inclusivity of 'types' of PE activities; LSA perceptions of peer-led exclusion in PE.

Findings and Discussion

SENCO conceptualisations of inclusion in PE

SENCOs were asked whether they thought PE in their school is inclusive. In response, Stacey suggested: 'The PE department in this school is absolutely brilliant at including everybody and they make sure that everybody has a role and that everybody is involved in the lesson'. Whilst it is perhaps encouraging to hear Stacey promote the inclusive nature of PE, ensuring that all pupils have a relevant 'role' does not necessarily constitute an inclusive culture in PE. For instance, although not explicitly stated by the SENCO, expecting pupils to perform duties associated with a learning activity, separate from those performed by the majority of the class, because the pupil cannot assimilate into a dominant practice or activity (Barker, 2008), can go some way to increasing marginalisation rather than breaking down barriers (Fitzgerald 2005; Fitzgerald, Jobling and Kirk, 2003; Smith, 2004). It also means that they are not receiving the same learning experiences as their age-peers and casts the pupil as the 'problem' rather than the way the learning activity is organised, structured and taught, which is in line with an individual ideology of disability (Finkelstein, 2001). Laura and Vicky also commented on the

inclusive nature of PE, but Paula went one step further in her praise of PE by claiming: 'I'd say of all the departments in the school PE is the most inclusive'. As part of her justification for such a claim, Paula suggested: 'They [PE] are the one department where they take the SEN registers... They cut them up and they stick the information in their planners. They read the healthcare plans and know the kids' needs inside out. They're all about inclusion' (Paula). What is perhaps interesting in this regard is that Paula is one of four SENCOs (also Katherine, Samantha and Suzanne) who stressed the importance of using SEND information to a teacher's ability to shape an inclusive PE environment. This comment appears largely consistent with social ideology (Finkelstein, 2001) conceptualisations of inclusion because the emphasis has been placed on the importance of subject-specific information and learning targets to increase teacher and LSA knowledge and understanding of how best to meet student needs (Maher, 2013).

SENCO views on developing separate PE provision

For most SENCOs (Katherine, Laura, Suzanne, Zoe, Vicky, Deborah and Sharon) there was an acknowledgement that it was not always possible to cultivate a wholly inclusive PE lesson for all pupils. Some pupils, in fact, require a bespoke timetable that does not include PE. For Zoe, however, 'A personalised timetable is a last resort. We do not personalise timetables easily'. First, other approaches are adopted and possibilities exhausted before pupils are withdrawn from PE:

> We do have many different approaches such as a small group. If I've got one of my staff working, they might do small group skills sets. They might do individual skill sets, then build it to 2, then build up to 3, and then build to 4. That's within the lesson and we might cordon off an area of the space, be that on the field, be that in the sports hall, so that the immediate distress of everybody being around that pupil is minimised. We do an awful lot. To be honest, you don't always have the answers (Zoe).

Two points of particular interest emerge from comments made by Zoe. First, importance is attributed to the pedagogical practice of using small groups to develop skills pertinent to a learning activity, especially when it relates to a team game: '… with the game of rugby you have to be able to walk down the pitch and that might not always be possible so we will develop coaching skills; small skills activities… every PE lesson has a small skills activity' (Zoe). These comments are supported by PE teachers in research conducted by Maher (2010b) who suggested that they found the skill development aspect of PE more inclusive because they could plan for pupils' individual needs and capabilities, and support the pupils who need it most, without it impacting upon the development and achievement of the rest of the class. The second point worthy of note is that the comment made by Zoe appeared to be underpinned by a social ideology of disability (Finkelstein, 2001) because it promoted deviating away from established traditions and practices by adapting and modifying traditional learning activities as a way of trying to be inclusive in PE. It is worth noting here that Zoe is a qualified PE teacher – the only one of the SENCOs interviewed – so she will, arguably, be more aware of subject specific issues, some of which may be unique to PE. It may also mean that because she has access to a key decision-making position within the school power structure, and has a teaching timetable, she will be more able to shape the inclusive culture of PE: 'with me being the SENCO and PE specialist, as a department we have really extended our approaches in physical education' (Zoe). At the same time, it may also result in bias because it is unlikely that Zoe will suggest that PE is not inclusive given that it is her subject specialism and, as SENCO, partly her responsibility to ensure that PE is inclusive: 'Yes, PE is inclusive. It is because it is my specialism' (Zoe).

SENCO perceptions of challenges to inclusion in PE

Other SENCOs (Stacey, Katherine, Laura, Suzanne, Deborah and Sharon) openly acknowledged that they have pupils in their school who do not do PE. Stacey, for example, suggested: 'We've got a few who don't go to PE. A lot of our ASD [autism spectrum disorders] students don't like doing PE because they don't like getting changed in the main changing rooms so we let them get changed separately' (Stacey). Two key points here were repeated by other SENCOs: first, those with ASD are less likely to do PE and, second, changing facilities often deter pupils with ASD from participating in PE. Katherine, for instance, suggested: 'A lot of our girls who have got Asperger's, well, not a lot, but it has happened a lot, they don't really like PE. There are issues around changing. Communal changing, they struggle with it' (Katherine). This finding is, perhaps, unsurprising given that some pupils with ASD avoid noisy and frenetic environments (Attwood, 2008). This is, perhaps, an example of disability and gender intersecting (Flintoff *et al*., 2008) in that girls generally, and those with ASD in particular, see communal changing facilities as a barrier to inclusion in PE. In order to try and combat this issue, 'We've had to do special changing facilities' (Katherine). The use of separate changing facilities is perhaps a 'reasonable adjustment' (Stationary Office, 2010) for schools if, of course, they have the space and additional staff to supervise the arrangement. This measure, however, is underpinned by an individual ideology of disability (Finkelstein, 2001) because it casts the pupil as the problem rather than the social arrangements. It, too, runs the possibility of further marginalising some pupils by restricting the opportunities they have to interact with their age-peers and, thus, develop much needed social and communication skills (Attwood, 2008).

In an attempt to ensure that the pupil does not disengage from their educational experiences more broadly, the SENCO had agreed a 'compromise':

> What you find is that she [pupil with Asperger's] will stay off the day she has PE so we've had to reach a compromise. We've said, ok, so you don't do PE but you'll come and do some other work or you'll do work from PE which is associated with sport. Otherwise, she'll miss four lessons for the sake of one (Katherine).

It is difficult to determine whether changing facilities are the only reason why the pupil will not attend PE, or if it is because of other negative experiences. Given that many pupils with ASD have difficulty with social and communicative elements of interaction (Baron-Cohen, 2008), it is fair to suggest that the way PE is currently organised, structured and taught may pose additional challenges to inclusion because of its more dynamic and interactive nature *vis-à-vis* other curriculum subjects. Further research is required to explore the needs and capabilities of pupils with ASD in PE from their own perspective. Whether SENCOs would allow some pupils to be removed from core subjects such as English, maths and science, is difficult to say with the evidence available. The SENCO's compromise may be simply indicative of an educational ideology that casts PE as a subordinate subject in England (Maher, 2014; Maher and Macbeth, 2013; Vickerman, 2007).

The changing facilities were not the only issue identified by SENCOs. The more fluid and comparatively less structured nature of PE was identified as posing additional problems to developing an inclusive culture:

> When they [pupils with SEND] are in the classroom and it's very structured and formal, when there are rows of chairs and desks and everyone sits in the same place and they do not move, that formal structure which is replicated in many lessons, gives them [pupils with SEND] security. However, when it comes to unstructured lessons such as performing arts and physical education, whilst there is definite structure, you haven't got the formal structure of being still and in one place. You've also got more interaction

with your peers and some pupils don't like that invasion of personal space. So that is always challenging to differentiate. For athletics, it's great such as individual throwing events. There, you can space the children out so they are not near anybody (Zoe).

Katherine is another SENCO who mentioned interaction with age-peers and personal space as issues posing challenges to inclusion: 'Some of the girls who've got Asperger's don't like touch, don't like people being in their body space, so that's been quite a problem in the past'. The 'type' of activities that lend themselves more to inclusion will be analysed later in this paper. Nevertheless, it is easy to see how these inclusion issues can become more apparent in PE where the prioritisation of team games and competitive sports (see, for example, Green, 2008), which require and promote group interaction and degrees of bodily contact, is evident. This point supports claims made elsewhere (see, for example, Fitzgerald, 2005; Smith, 2004) suggesting that team games are more difficult to plan and teach inclusively. The next section will explore which 'type' of PE activities are more inclusive in greater detail from the perspective of LSAs. This will provide a foundation to analyse wider inclusion issues in PE.

LSA views on the inclusivity of 'types' of PE activities

In the course of discussing inclusion in PE, LSAs were asked what 'type' of activities they found easier or more difficult to include pupils with SEND. Attempt was made here to focus on social arrangements rather than pupils (Finkelstein, 2001). LSAs, rather than SENCOs, were asked this question because they are better positioned in the organisational structure to have the experience to provide an informed answer relating to PE curriculum content as key facilitators of lessons. A number of key issues emerged from the question but the most prominent related to team games and individual activities. Many LSAs (Michael, Ruan, Michelle, Paul, Sarah and Joanne) identified team games as being the least inclusive, whilst

some identified individual activities as most inclusive. It is perhaps unsurprising to hear that many of the LSAs consider team games more difficult activities in which to include pupils with SEND given that research conducted elsewhere (see, for example, Fitzgerald, 2005; Smith, 2004) has, as noted above, found that many PE teachers share this view.

Maher (2010b) drew on the work of Waddington (2000) to attempt to explain why team games are more difficult to include pupils with SEND than, say, individual activities by examining the different patterns of social relations and dynamics. While participating in an individual activity (for example, swimming) a pupil with (or without) SEND can determine the duration and intensity of their physical exertion because they are not being constrained by any other individual. However, this control can diminish significantly when participating in team games. When competing with or against another individual or group the pupil with SEND has to initiate moves and react in relation to the moves of other players (Waddington, 2000): the pupil with SEND is only one player in a complex interweaving of a plurality of players who are both restricting and enabling the actions of each other. When participating in team games, therefore, the pupil with SEND has far less control over the intensity and duration of the activity. Consequently, it has been argued that PE teachers find it easier to fully include pupils with SEND in individual activities because these type of activities are easier to modify in ways which best suit the individual's capabilities and requirements without other pupils restricting their involvement (see also Morley *et al*., 2005; Smith, 2004).

The above explanation provided by Maher (2010b) is, to some extent, supported by some of the SENCOs in this study who, as noted above, identify interaction with age-peers as a particular issue. When the LSAs were asked why team games pose additional problems to

inclusion, some of the replies also supported the theory: '[Some pupils with SEND]… find it difficult to keep up with their peers' (Michael). Similarly, Ruan suggested that team games '… require strong social interaction and good co-ordination skills', whilst Michelle argued: 'The pupil [with SEND] is often unable to keep up with other children'. It is worth noting that these comments, and many others provided by LSAs, appeared to be underpinned by an individual ideology (Finkelstein, 2001) because emphasis was often placed on reasons why pupils with SEND cannot assimilate into the established traditions of team games. In fact, some of the LSAs did not mention a type of activity but, instead, cast pupils as the problem by emphasising the perceived limitations of the pupils involved. For example, Tom suggested: 'Each child is an individual and depending on their disability is to which [sic] activity is best for them', whilst Kathleen agreed by arguing: 'It really depends on the individual pupil and what their SEN needs are'. Tom extended this point by providing a practical example: 'It depends on the needs of each individual student. If a student is in a wheelchair then things like cross country running will be impossible'. Whilst the fact that LSAs drew attention to the needs and requirements of individual pupils when discussing the development of an inclusive culture in PE is perhaps encouraging, it is worth noting again that ideologically, whether LSAs are aware of it or not, there is a common sense tradition (Sissel and Sheard, 2001) in education generally, and PE in particular, that expects some pupils to 'fit it' to established arrangements, some of which are not inclusive.

LSA perceptions of peer-led exclusion in PE

Some comments made by LSAs suggested that some pupils with SEND find it difficult to participate with and against pupils without SEND because of ostensibly inferior physical and cognitive capabilities. According to some LSAs (Andrew, Michelle, Jason and Jessica), this

has resulted in a culture of peer-led exclusion. Andrew, for example, suggested: 'other pupils do not want them on their team'. Michelle expanded on this by suggesting: 'their [pupil's] differences tend to be highlighted [in team games] so they feel different. Other students are less tolerant in a team game… children with SEN don't get picked for teams by their peers' (Michelle). One quite simple way of negating this issue would be for teachers to select teams, rather than devolving power to pupils. Attempts to increase autonomy amongst young learners can help to increase enjoyment, competence and motivation (Mandigo *et al*., 2008) but should never be used if it compromises inclusion. These findings are supported by research conducted by Fitzgerald (2005) who found a process of peer-led exclusion whereby some pupils with SEND suggested that they were bypassed in certain activities, particularly in team games (during a passing move, for example), because of their seemingly inferior capabilities. An analysis of the power dynamic between pupils with and without SEND is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this study (see, for example, Fitzgerald, 2005). Nonetheless, the findings do appear to emphasise the power and influence of pupils without SEND over the extent to which PE can be and is inclusive. By legitimising and promoting an ideology of superiority in PE, the actions of some pupils without SEND are shaping and being shaped by the culture of PE, which appear to be restricting the extent to which some pupils with SEND can have meaningful experiences in that subject. Ultimately, team games enable some pupils without SEND to experience and exercise a greater degree of power unless, of course, the teacher or LSA uses the influence they have over lesson planning and teaching to modify or adapt the game to restrict the influence and domination of some pupils without SEND. Little mention was made during the interviews of what is, if anything, done by PE teachers and LSAs to challenge peer-led exclusion. Future research could explore strategies that can be used to remove opportunities for peer-led exclusion.

The power of some pupils is further demonstrated by the fact that their actions, whether knowingly or not, are contributing to the subordination of some pupils with SEND. According to Ruan, some pupils with SEND are blamed 'for letting the team down' which makes them 'feel useless'. Similarly, Tom suggested that some pupils with SEND 'get laughed at' because they cannot perform a physical task during a team games as well as their age-peers. The use of a discourse of subordination, coupled with low social acceptance because of the prevalence of an ideology of physical and cognitive inferiority can increase the risk of victimisation and result in higher levels of bullying (Carter and Spencer, 2006; Monchy, de Pijl and Zandberg, 2004). Research by both Goodwin and Watkinson (2000) and Fitzgerald (2005) identifies processes of bullying by peers, which usually manifests in name-calling and the allocation of outsider status (Elias and Scotson, 1994). The fact that some LSAs are aware of these issues is, again, further indication of the power of some pupils given that little appeared to have been done to challenge the relative pervasiveness of this overt form of subordination. It could be argued that a lack of action on the part of LSAs, whether the onus is on them to intervene or not, is contributing to its legitimisation because LSAs are not making social arrangements themselves, nor do they appear to be informing teachers of these issues so that they can make social arrangements (Finkelstein, 2001) to ensure that all pupils have equitable and meaningful experiences of PE.

Another reason why some LSAs consider team games to be less inclusive is because they: 'cannot work with individual pupils' (Michael). Jessica expanded on this point by explaining that team games are 'harder to control and get involved. I can't help the pupils during games because it would disrupt the flow of the game'. These findings echo comments made by PE teachers in research conducted by Morley *et al*. (2005) and Smith (2004) who suggested that they found it difficult to support those pupils who most needed it during team games without

having to interrupt the game. Similarly, there was concern expressed that any intervention in team games would disrupt their flow and, potentially, have a negative impact on the development and achievement of the more able pupils (Morley *et al.*, 2005; Smith, 2004). Here, teachers and LSAs appear to be prioritising those pupils without SEND, rather than those who require additional support to be included. In the US, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (Lieberman and Houston-Wilson, 2009; Rapp, 2014) was developed in an attempt to ensure that all learners have equitable and meaningful educational experiences. UDL involves a set of curriculum principles to help teachers to plan lessons and assessment strategies that are flexible enough to meet the needs and capabilities of all learners (Rapp and Arndt, 2012), especially those with SEND. In recent years, US teachers have attempted to apply these inclusion principles to PE generally and team games specifically. Unfortunately, there is, to date, little research that has systematically analysed the appropriateness of UDL for teaching pupils with SEND in PE. Nonetheless, its use in other subjects in the US has been well documented (see, for example, Rao *et al.*, 2014) and findings hint at its potential appropriateness for teaching team games in England. Future research will be needed in England which evaluates the uses of UDL when teaching pupils with SEND. Nonetheless, what can be said in England is that PE lessons are seemingly more inclusive when LSAs and teachers can tailor the activities to suit individual needs and can provide extra support to those who most need it.

Conclusion

The research aimed to analyse LSA and SENCO views and experiences of inclusion in mainstream secondary PE in England. Whilst most SENCOs claimed that PE was an inclusive subject in their school, the teaching of pupils with ASD and team games were identified as challenges to inclusion. A limitation of this research is that it did not explore how best to

include pupils with ASD in PE. Therefore, future research is required to increase our understanding of inclusive pedagogies for teaching pupils with ASD because, at present, we have little appreciation of how to provide meaningful and enriching learning experiences for pupils with ASD in mainstream secondary PE. Some SENCOs claimed that some pupils had decided not to attend PE at all; they had, in effect, withdrawn themselves from a compulsory curriculum subject, which was identified as a key challenge faced by some schools. More needs to be done in this regard by school staff to convince pupils of the importance of engaging in PE, of motivating pupils to participate, and of planning and teaching a curriculum that meets the needs of pupils and capitalises on their capabilities. It is important that all pupils have meaningful experiences of PE, and are able to engage in physical, cognitive, social and affective learning experiences (Casey and Goodyear, 2015). Communal changing facilities were identified as one reason why pupils with ASD disengage with PE. So, too, was the prioritisation of competitive sport and team games, which is of particular concern given that the most recent National Curriculum in England has repositioned team games and competitive sport at the heart of PE (Department for Education, 2013) despite concerns that it will impact negatively on the current and future participation in physical activity of pupils with SEND (Maher, 2015). The principles of UDL may assist PE teachers in England to overcome some of the challenges to the inclusion of pupils with SEND in team game activities. First, however, systematic research will be needed in England which evaluates the use of UDL when teaching pupils with SEND.

Another limitation of the research conducted for this paper is that the views and experiences of pupils with SEND generally, and those with ASD in particular, have been neglected. Thus, future research must 'give a voice' to pupils with ASD in mainstream secondary PE in England to validate (or challenge) the claims made in this paper. It is hoped that this paper has

contributed in some way to the greater debate of inclusive (physical) education by exploring the views and experiences of LSAs and SENCOs, both of whom play an important part in attempts to provide meaningful and successful educational experience for pupils with SEND.

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