



LEEDS
BECKETT
UNIVERSITY

Citation:

Drury, S and Stride, A and Firth, O and Fitzgerald, H (2022) The transformative potential of trans*-inclusive PE: the experiences of PE teachers. *Sport, Education and Society*. pp. 1-14. ISSN 1357-3322 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2022.2034142>

Link to Leeds Beckett Repository record:

<https://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/id/eprint/8412/>

Document Version:

Article (Accepted Version)

Creative Commons: Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0

The aim of the Leeds Beckett Repository is to provide open access to our research, as required by funder policies and permitted by publishers and copyright law.

The Leeds Beckett repository holds a wide range of publications, each of which has been checked for copyright and the relevant embargo period has been applied by the Research Services team.

We operate on a standard take-down policy. If you are the author or publisher of an output and you would like it removed from the repository, please [contact us](#) and we will investigate on a case-by-case basis.

Each thesis in the repository has been cleared where necessary by the author for third party copyright. If you would like a thesis to be removed from the repository or believe there is an issue with copyright, please contact us on openaccess@leedsbeckett.ac.uk and we will investigate on a case-by-case basis.

The transformative potential of trans*-inclusive physical education: the experiences of PE teachers

Scarlett Drury, Annette Stride, Olivia Firth & Hayley Fitzgerald

Key words: Physical Education, trans*, inclusion, queer, feminist, social justice

Abstract

Transgender inclusion has become a prominent issue on the agendas of policy makers in education and sport in recent years. Despite this, teachers face continued challenges in providing inclusive experiences for transgender young people. This is particularly apparent in Physical Education (PE), which is a unique subject in its potential to perpetuate gender norms. There is a growing body of literature exploring LGBTQ+ issues in PE (Landi, Flory, Safron & Marttinen, 2020). However, there is a need to consider how trans* young people's experiences may differ from their LGB counterparts. A small number of existing studies offer insight into the experiences of trans* youth in PE (e.g. Caudwell, 2014; Drury, Stride, Flintoff & Williams, 2017). However, comparatively little is known about the challenges faced by PE teachers in providing inclusive PE experiences for trans* young people.

This paper presents a creative non-fiction monologue that reflects findings from seven interviews with secondary school PE teachers about their experiences of working with trans* young people. We draw on a 'feminist-queer' theoretical approach to examine the potential for PE pedagogies to reproduce, disrupt, and transform binary gender discourse. Findings present three key themes: 1) teachers' knowledge and understanding of trans* identities in PE; 2) trans* challenges to PE practice; and 3) moving towards trans*-inclusive PE. We conclude by arguing that the benefits of trans*-inclusive approaches to PE are far reaching, and extend to all young people.

Introduction

1988 was a pivotal year in the history of educational policy in England. The Conservative government's introduction of Section 28, which prohibited the 'promotion of homosexuality' in schools, established the foundations that would influence the educational landscape for LGBTQ+ youth for decades to come. Whilst transgender people were not specifically considered, the rhetoric of Section 28 contributed towards a moral panic around the policing of gender boundaries, and undoubtedly helped to frame trans*ⁱ identities as a threat to society. The repeal of Section 28 in 2003ⁱⁱ should have led to a more accepting society. However, a change in legislation does not automatically lead to a change in culture, and the damaging repercussions of this clause continue to affect the daily lives of the LGBTQ+ community. For example: 45% of LGBT pupils and 64% of trans* pupils have experienced bullying in Britain's schools; more than two in five trans* young people and one in five lesbian, gay and bi students have attempted to take their own life; 35% of LGBT adults hide their sexuality at work due to fear of discrimination; and only 46% of lesbian, gay and bi people and 47% of trans* people feel able to be open about their sexuality or gender identity to everyone in their family (Bachmann & Gooch, 2017). Worryingly, recent Home Office (2019) figures suggest a rise in hate crime against the LGBTQ+ community with 14,491 crimes committed against people because of their sexuality and a further 2,333 offences against transgender people reported to the police.

Yet Stonewall argue these are a conservative estimate with only one in five LGBTQ+ hate crimes reported, and prosecutions for these crimes decreasing (Bachmann & Gooch, 2017). Disconcertingly, many of these crimes are often perpetrated by young people (Bryant & Stephenson, 2018), adding credence to the argument that more must be done to educate about diversity. Whilst some schools have attempted to openly address these concerns, this has not

escaped opposition, with a number of schools across the country picketed by parents, whilst teachers, governors, religious leaders and ministers wade into the debate (Parveen, 2019). However, the new Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education curriculum, introduced in September 2020, heralds a move towards a more inclusive education which requires all secondary schools in England to teach about sexual orientation, gender identity, and same sex relationships (Department for Education, 2019). Teachers are key to the success of this shift, and more needs to be done to understand their experiences of supporting LGBTQ+ students, particularly in the context of Physical Education (PE), a subject in which many of the issues faced by LGBTQ+ youth are magnified (Drury, Stride, Flintoff & Williams, 2017).

As Landi, Flory, Safron and Marttinen (2020) note, there is a 'rising tide' of research exploring LGBTQ+ issues in PE. This work has made significant progress in identifying the role of PE in reproducing dominant norms around gender and sexuality. Yet there is reason to be cautious in overstating the impact of this research. As Landi et al. (2020) identify, studies into LGBTQ+ issues occupy a marginal position when compared to the broader body of literature on PE, which has largely adopted a heteronormative lens that fails to engage meaningfully with debates surrounding sexuality and gender identity. This critique comes at a time when LGBTQ+ issues have never been more prominent on the agendas of educational policy makers and those responsible for the provision of sport (Jones, Arcelus, Bouman and Haycraft, 2017; Hayton, 2019). Whilst we are beginning to understand more about the experiences of LGBTQ+ young people in sport and education, there is a propensity to focus on 'LGB' identities, with comparatively little known about the 'T' part of the initialism (Caudwell, 2014). With this in mind, the aim of this paper is to explore secondary school PE teachers' knowledge and experiences of working with trans* students. Specifically, we seek

to: establish teachers' levels of understanding of issues affecting trans* young people; explore the challenges teachers face in supporting trans* students in PE contexts; and explore potential strategies for trans*-inclusive PE practice.

(Trans) Gender and Physical Education

The role of PE in shaping dominant gender norms is widely documented. For several decades, PE scholars have criticised the profession for its propensity to marginalise young people who do not conform to narrow expectations of what it means to be male or female (Clarke, 2013; Landi, 2018). It is argued that PE is a 'bastion of masculine values', underpinned by a heteronormative discourse that is stubbornly resistant to change (Larsson, Redelius & Fagrell, 2011, p. 59). Early research by Scraton (1992) highlighted the negative impact that this has on girls' PE experiences. This sentiment has been echoed by numerous others, who express concerns that girls are problematised for their perceived lack of engagement with PE, with the norms of the profession remaining unquestioned (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Oliver & Kirk, 2015). Similarly, scholars have highlighted how boys are expected to develop their masculinities through competitive athleticism in PE, resulting in the victimisation of those who fail to embody dominant masculine norms (Mooney and Gerdin, 2018).

Homophobia is central to the process of policing gender boundaries in PE (Clarke, 2013). This is evident for both boys and girls, but has a differing impact with respect to their engagement. For girls, their very involvement in physical activity is underscored by the threat of homophobic abuse (Clarke, 2013). For boys, homophobic slurs are readily used as punishment for failure to demonstrate the required levels of skill, strength and stamina needed to excel in sport (Tischler and Mcaughtry, 2011). We use the term 'sport' here quite

deliberately. Whilst PE and sport are two distinct contexts, there is evidence that the problem of homophobia and heteronormativity could lie within the sports performance driven pedagogies and policies that dictate the way PE is delivered (Block, 2014). For lisahunter (2019), sport and PE are highly conservative institutions where challenges to traditional practices are met with resistance. This is particularly apparent in relation to the protection of norms surrounding gender and sexuality. Despite this, there is evidence that within contemporary society, young people are becoming increasingly accepting of diverse sexualities and gender identities (Anderson, 2012; lisahunter, 2019). This provides a somewhat ironic indication that young people are perhaps more progressive than the systems within which they are educated.

The heteronormative climate of PE is problematic for *all* young people (Larsson et al., 2011), but poses particular issues for LGBTQ+ youth, as a small number of studies attest (Block, 2014; Drury et al., 2017; Morrow & Gill, 2003). PE has been identified as a ‘hotspot’ for homophobia, transphobia and heteronormativity in schools, and is arguably more profound for trans* young people than their ‘LGB’ counterparts (Drury et al., 2017). Caudwell (2014) and Williamson and Sandford (2018) argue that PE can be alienating, distressing, and detrimental to trans* young people’s wider involvement in sport and physical activity. In England, PE remains the most likely school subject to involve sex-segregated provision (Stride, Brazier, Piggott, Staples & Flintoff, 2020). The division of girls and boys often involves the delivery of different activities, with traditionally ‘masculine’ pursuits such as rugby and football continuing to dominate boys’ provision, and games such as netball offered to girls (Ahmed, 2020; Stride et al. 2020). For trans* youth this can mean either navigating their way through a curriculum that is not aligned with their gender identity, or being permitted to ‘switch’ PE classes but facing alienation from pre-established social dynamics

that mark them as 'other' (Devis-Devis et al., 2018). Changing rooms further exacerbate feelings of otherness (Ahmed, 2020; Devis-Devis et al., 2018; Foley, Pineiro, Miller & Foley, 2016). Whilst there may be an established requirement for single sex changing facilities, for trans* young people the prospect of changing in a single-sex space with little privacy can cause considerable anxiety. This is compounded by the fact that changing rooms are spaces where students are unlikely to be under the continuous surveillance of teachers. This means homophobic and transphobic bullying can prevail without sanction, leaving trans* young people feeling vulnerable (Ahmed, 2020). PE uniform presents another problematic area, particularly when schools require boys and girls to wear different clothing (Landi, 2018).

The issues highlighted so far are underscored by deeper concerns regarding the centrality of the body in PE (Block, 2014; Sykes, 2011; Williamson & Sandford, 2018). Few other subjects require the body to be 'on show' in the way that is fundamental to engagement in PE (Ahmed, 2020; Devis-Devis et al., 2018). Gendered bodies are gazed upon, critiqued, and regulated in PE by prevailing norms (Scraton, 1992). Bodies are the instruments of attainment in PE; they are expected to appear and move in specific ways in particular activities (Larsson et al., 2011). Yet it is not only the activities that hold gendered connotations. As Sykes (2011, p.2) argues, 'even the skilled movements of the human body, perhaps the very essence of physical education, are labelled masculine and feminine'. Thus, for trans* young people, PE presents a constant reminder of the dominance of binary gender logic. In secondary schools, these issues exist against the backdrop of adolescence, a period when young people experience heightened awareness of their bodies, and a key time for the exploration of LGBT identities, which often involves a great degree of confusion and uncertainty (Block, 2014; Caudwell, 2014).

Whilst a small number of studies consider trans* young people in PE, less is known about the role of teachers in shaping their experiences. Literature on trans* issues in schools more broadly suggests that teachers can play a significant role in challenging heteronormative educational frameworks and fostering spaces of safety for trans* youth (McQuillan & Leininger, 2021). However, many teachers do not feel adequately equipped to enable positive educational experiences for trans* young people. Indeed, Foley et al. (2016), Ahmed (2020) and Williamson and Sandford (2018) highlight PE teachers' lack of knowledge about trans* issues generally, and how to appropriately support trans* youth in PE. For some, this manifests as a 'fear' of addressing trans* students' needs (Foley et al., 2016). In other instances, where teachers demonstrate a more proactive approach, uncertainty prevails in relation to what is considered good practice regarding the inclusion of trans* young people in PE.

Queering Gender and Queering PE

Exploring transgender issues in PE requires consideration of the underlying discourses of the PE profession within which trans* young people are situated. Feminist scholarship in PE has been instrumental in uncovering the gendered nature of PE. A key facet of this work is a concern with the socially constructed nature of binary gender discourses that underpin PE practice. It has also been pivotal in demonstrating how discourses of homophobia are used to regulate gender expression, which has particular ramifications for trans* youth (Clarke, 2013). However, as lisahunter (2019) notes, a focus on homophobia alone risks overlooking subtle social processes that maintain the dominance of heterosexuality and gender normativity. To address this, a shift towards a queer consideration of PE is required (Landi et al, 2020; Sykes, 2011). Queer theory offers a lens through which normative constructs of gender, sex and sexuality, and their assumed interconnectedness, can be reconsidered, and

where heteronormativity is forefronted as a primary concern (lisahunter, 2019). Given that PE is a particularly heteronormative landscape, this is an important theoretical shift.

Heteronormativity refers to a complex discourse associated with ‘the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality not only coherent – that is organised as a sexuality – but also privileged’ (Berlant and Warner, 1998, p. 548). In simple terms, this refers to the ways in which heterosexuality is positioned as ‘normal’. Yet more significantly, the process of normalising heterosexuality reasserts the binary gender logic that positions men and women in relationships of opposition. Thus, the discourse of heteronormativity is instrumental in the regulation of normative gender identities (Larsson et al., 2011). It is this aspect of queer theory that makes it particularly useful in exploring trans* issues. Yet queer theory is not solely limited to exploring discourses of gender, sex and sexuality. The anti-normative philosophy that underpins queer theory provides a useful means to consider other normative discourses that sustain dominant ideas about ability, health and the athletic body, many of which are reproduced through the traditional practices of PE (Sykes, 2011). In this sense, adopting a queer position has potential to promote inclusive practice in PE more broadly (Landi et al., 2020). Our approach to understanding trans* identities in PE can be described as feminist-queer. We argue that feminist critiques of the gendered nature of PE still hold relevance in challenging inequitable gender relations, yet we draw on queer theory to further interrogate the discourse of heteronormativity that permeates the PE landscape.

Methodology

A critical interpretivist stance was adopted, which places value on participants’ feelings and beliefs, and recognises the diversity that stems from their unique lived experiences (Sparkes

& Smith, 2014). This requires the use of qualitative methods that explore individual insights through open dialogue. Semi-structured interviews provided a consistent approach to data generation whilst offering flexibility to enable each participant's experiences to be shared (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Participants were recruited through professional contacts by Olivia, and consisted of one man and six women PE teachers from various secondary schools in northern England. They ranged in age from early 20s to early 60s, and teaching experience from 2-30 years. Interviews were conducted on an individual basis in person by Olivia in January 2020. Each interview lasted between 30 and 40 minutes. Questions covered broad topics related to teacher training, the PE curriculum, and pedagogical approaches, and prompted participants to reflect on their level of awareness of trans* issues and experiences of working with trans* young people. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

In adopting a theoretical thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), Annette and Hayley familiarised themselves with the data, independently reading and annotating each transcript with initial observations (Smith, 2016). We are mindful that 'data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). Thus Scarlett, acting as a critical friend, questioned the themes that were identified, interrogating how these interpretations were shaped through Annette and Hayley's prior experiences, positionality and theoretical understandings. This enabled the development of a more critical interpretation and coherent set of themes around knowledge and understanding, challenges, and solutions. Rather than adopting a more traditional approach in presenting these themes, the research team were in agreement that the use of storytelling would bring various benefits to this paper.

Polkinghorne (1988, p. 7) describes stories as 'a special type of discourse production [whereby] ... events and actions are drawn together into an organized whole by means of a

plot'. It is through storytelling that we begin to make sense of ourselves and our relationships to others (Smith 2016). Dowling (2012) notes that individuals use storytelling to shape their social realities, which in turn are shaped by the grand narratives of society. Stories therefore provide opportunities to explore how people's experiences are influenced by complex processes of negotiation between the structures of society and their individual agency (Smith, 2016). As we have argued elsewhere (Fitzgerald, Stride and Drury, 2021), stories can help bring to life participants' understandings of particular issues whilst providing structure to the fluid and fragmented experiences that are reflective of lived experience. We also recognise that stories can provide opportunities to better understand different kinds of lived experiences. By offering glimpses into the actions, emotions and lives of others, the perspectives of those we believe we have little in common with can be shared and related to (Bochner, 2014).

Whilst we recognise the benefits that stories offer, we are also aware of the challenges they can bring. For example, like data analysis, our individual and collective biographies and experiences of LGBTQ+ issues are intertwined within the story, rather than distanced from it (Scott, 2020). We are aware of the potential ontological complexities of this approach, not least the potential for our situatedness to influence our re-presentation of the participants' lives. However, we argue that storytelling is no more challenging to the integrity of the findings than any other forms of qualitative data re-presentation. Furthermore, we advocate for the use of stories as a means of translating research findings in accessible ways and to a wider audience (Griffin & Phoenix, 2014). Thus, on finalising the themes from the analysis of the data, Hayley adopted a 'storyteller' position, mapping out the plot, context and characters (Smith, 2016). Annette then worked with Hayley to meld together the voices of the PE teachers to craft a creative non-fictional monologue that reflected the themes identified from the analysis of the transcripts and the shared nature of these teachers' experiences. In

utilising stories to present our findings, we move between the standpoints of ‘storyteller’ and ‘story analyst’ (Smith, 2016). Whilst we have embedded the themes identified from the analysis of the transcripts within the story, we also recognise that without these being made explicit the narrative offered next can be read in different ways. As such, we follow the story of Frankie, Jo and Clareⁱⁱⁱ with our interpretations (Frank, 2010).

Frankie, Jo and Clare’s story: Non-binary! What’s that?

I stride purposefully towards the sports hall to get my school registered, small bodies running past, desperate to get to the playing fields. Heads down, arms and legs pumping, they nimbly avoid me without losing speed. ‘WALK’ a voice booms from behind. I turn to notice a tall, imposing figure, stationed in reception. The bodies comply, maintaining momentum with some fast paced walking. I continue, taking a right turn and the noise level noticeably increases with excited chatter. As I approach the sports hall I notice the familiar banner above the entrance, ‘Welcome to the Youth Games’. Then I spot the queue of teachers waiting to register, inwardly groaning we didn't set off earlier. As the queue shuffles forward I scan the notice boards lining the walls, each one promoting a school value - ‘Resilience’, ‘Respect’, ‘Responsibility’ - with students’ achievements in PE neatly presented under each heading. Someone behind coughs gently, waking me from my thoughts and I notice the queue has magically disappeared.

As I make my way into the hall I take in the scene: registration desk, engulfed with people; event schedules neatly aligned on the far wall; and announcements blasted from the tannoy. Volunteers, in green t-shirts, dash around setting up stalls - refreshments, medals, first aid, lost property. Teachers, looking stressed, attempt to direct their charges, like herding sheep. The energy is palpable. Then I hear my name, ‘Frankie, over here’ and I follow the voice, spotting an arm waving from a sea of bodies. I make my way to the familiar face, smiling,

‘Ey up Jo, thought I’d see you here. I was gonna call you, but you know how it is!’ The herds of bodies continue in motion and we slowly get pulled apart as if by some invisible force. Jo hastily suggests ‘Let's grab a coffee at 11, meet you over there?’, pointing to the canteen. ‘Perfect’ I say, giving her the thumbs up as my voice is drowned out by another announcement. ‘Please make your way to the playing fields, the Games are about to begin’.

Come 11 o’clock I am desperate to escape the heat, leaving my kids in the capable hands of my NQTs^{iv}, who are as excited as the kids to be here. Their enthusiasm reminds me of my first teaching year. I signed up for everything - after school clubs, sports day organiser, trips away. That’s how I got to know Jo, our first outdoor adventure week. I spot her instantly in the canteen, shock of red hair marking her out, sat with Clare, an ex-colleague who's been teaching for years, must be nearing retirement but still as energetic as the NQTs. Others clearly have the same idea as us, small groups huddled together, enjoying a catch up. As I approach the table, I’m reminded of Jo’s familiar coffee routine and sweet tooth - three sugars ceremoniously sprinkled in swirls on the froth of her cappuccino. I collapse on the chair opposite them, as they greet me in unison with an ‘Ey up mate’, before Jo plunges the teaspoon into her mug, stirring until all traces of sugar are removed.

For the next ten minutes our chat flows like a brief news update on partners, families, the challenges of teaching. This leads us on to a familiar discussion point, the increasing diversity within our lessons, one we feel unprepared for through our training. Over the years we’ve offered each other advice on integrating students with disabilities and those new to English, but today’s issue seems to be troubling Jo. She takes her time, choosing her words carefully, ‘I’m at a loss with this one. We’ve a couple of’, she hesitates. It’s as if I can see her mind whirring with the complexities of what she wants to express. ‘Girls’, she wiggles her index fingers to indicate quotation marks, ‘well, they’re boys wanting to be girls if you know what I mean?’ she continues. ‘It's not just me, no one in my department knows what to do. We’ve

never been taught how to deal with this.’ Her voice rises as she verbalises what has clearly been troubling her.

I feel a little useless, it’s not something I’ve come across. ‘We don’t have any transgender students. We’ve a couple of boys who prefer to participate with the girls. Plus, some girls have joined the boys. And, there’s one student who identified as a boy in primary, but is now a girl again, but that doesn’t really count, does it? I think there might be a few unsure of their gender or is it a sexuality thing? Either’s fine, but I’ve no experience with it, nor any training, although I wish I did. The only transgender pupil I’m aware of doesn’t attend school’ I babble. Clare has remained quiet throughout this exchange, sipping her smoothie methodically, ‘I have experience with three transgender students currently in PE, and there are more in the school’. ‘At St Edmunds? No way!’ exclaims Jo. ‘Yep’ Clare nods. ‘The school’s really supportive. I’m not sure it would’ve been when you were with us but we’ve had a change in SLT^v who are quite forward thinking. All students have lessons about LGBTQ+ issues, there’s a transgender and non-binary group, pastoral support is excellent, they bring in external organisations, and we’ve had assemblies that transgender students have led on.’

‘Non-binary! What’s that?’ Jo asks. I remain quiet, feeling out of my depth. ‘It’s kind of like when someone doesn’t see themselves as either male or female’ Clare shares. I’d forgotten how calm and patient this woman is. She seems so comfortable with any challenges thrown her way, thrives off them in her attempts to get everyone participating in PE. ‘Isn’t that trans? I’ve not got a clue. I don’t know what’s what, or when to say ‘he’ or ‘she’, I’m confused to be honest’ says Jo. I begin to feel more comfortable sharing my own inadequacies, ‘I don’t have a great understanding either. Isn’t transgender when someone identifies as the opposite gender and transitions to become the gender that they feel most comfortable in. You know, it’s where they were one gender at birth and now they’ve become another gender.’ It sounded

better in my head but comes out awkward and confused. 'It's so bloody confusing all this terminology, I get into a right muddle' Jo mutters. 'And you don't want to offend anyone by getting it the wrong way round, do you? Or calling them by the wrong name' I add.

'I know what you mean' says Clare 'And you're right Frankie, transgender is when you feel your gender is different to the one you were assigned at birth, like a boy identifies as a girl... but then some feel the boy-girl binary is too simplistic and don't identify as one or the other' Clare explains, 'But I know what you mean, you can trip up with the correct terms. I take my guidance from the student and figure it out from there. The bottom line is this, a girl transitioning to be a boy, is a transboy... or just a boy. Does that make sense?'

'I think I need to come and spend time at St Edmunds' I add, 'In all the schools I've taught in we've had nothing on transgender students, maybe because there weren't any so they didn't think it necessary. I've seen no external training, and we did nothing about it during our PGCE^{vi}. To be honest there was a lack of anything PSHE^{vii} related. But PE isn't just PE is it? We have to deal with all sorts - eating disorders, self harm, new to English, mental health. Most I've figured out how to deal with, but I don't have a clue how to support a transgender student. I'm not sure it was really a 'thing' when we were training. I think it's still quite new to schools. Don't you?'

'We did have some whole school training on definitions and legalities, but can't say I learnt anything that'd help me' Jo responds, 'And they followed this up with something specific to the two students in school. The CP^{viii} officer and SLT delivered it, but it didn't help from a PE perspective. I even booked on external training, but again, nothing PE specific was delivered. Like, what about the changing rooms? Do they go with the boys or the girls? It's not like you can just say don't do PE, they're a protected characteristic aren't they?'

Excluding them from PE, or extra-curricular, is discrimination. More PE specific training would be good, practical solutions, you know?' 'Yeah, all students have a right to access PE and feel safe,' I add, 'So what do you do then?' I direct my question to the both of them, realising it's probably a matter of time before I'm confronted with this issue.

'Talk to the student', Clare jumps in, 'how the transgender student conducts themselves has to be considered. Most students are in the process of finding themselves aren't they? This is always considered in PE at St Edmunds. At first the transgender students were hesitant about doing PE, but we offered them alternatives to get changed, although it's important you don't force them out of the changing room. I find as they get older students prefer to get dressed in the shower cubicles, certainly the girls anyway. It's their choice. We allow them to wear clothes they feel comfortable in which, again, suits other students, especially those with body issues. We'd rather a pupil do PE in any sports clothes than not at all - it's about making them feel confident to be active'. 'I guess we are flexible about PE clothing. Like we have a boys' uniform - shorts, polo shirt, and a girls' one - skorts and a more feminine top, but quite a few girls opt for shorts and a baggier t-shirt, as long as it's school branded gear that's fine' adds Jo.

'Yeah, I guess some of those changes would be helpful for other students, like you say' I add. 'I have some that are gay and not comfortable in the changing rooms, or with the uniform, or some lessons to be honest, depends what we're doing. But, I think the biggest challenge for us might be the changing situation. You'd want to accommodate the transgender students but have to make sure the others felt comfortable too. What are other students like with the transgender pupils?' I ask. 'I'm seeing some low level bullying but it's difficult to pinpoint whether it's aimed at the transgender students. And if it is, again, no real training on it', Jo

jumps in. 'If I came across any issues, I'd definitely want to challenge them, but how, I'm less sure of. I'd be worried I'd make things worse' I admit. 'Changing is a big issue for us' Jo offers, 'the transgender students currently change on their own which I think makes them feel isolated. I can see how a school could offer changing options, maybe stagger times?' She scrunches her face in concentration and adds, 'There's talk of our new building having communal changing with cubicles and designated boy and girl spaces.'

'I can see how transgender students could struggle with the gender specific curriculum that most of us have. If it was more common the curriculum might need changing, perhaps adapting it to suit them, involving them in the choices that are offered?' I suggest. 'Exactly' says Clare, 'I just ask the students what they need. Teenagers have all sorts going on in their heads. We have to know what we're dealing with, and you don't get that from a leaflet, or some CPD^{ix}. The problem is, our transgender students need to feel they can have open conversations with us, but we don't have enough time to spend with them to fully understand their issues. We're tasked with too many other things - progress, attendance, learning objectives, lesson plans, marking.' She lists them off, one by one on her fingers. 'Let's face it, I went through teacher training in the 80s. Who'd heard of transgender then? But you have to adapt, or become a dinosaur.' 'Ain't that right!' Jo exclaims.

'Sounds to me like you need training and some guidance around what it's like to be transgender' offers Clare, 'and more talking with parents and students.' 'I guess being open helps break the stigma, so everyone sees it as the norm' adds Jo, 'I think more support needs to be given to all schools regardless of whether it has transgender students or not. And, knowledge on transgender issues must be part of teacher training.' '100%' I agree, 'It's my responsibility to make every pupil comfortable, happy and safe. If this isn't the case I've failed.' 'I agree to a point, but can we guarantee every student's safety?' asks Jo. 'Like, if we

have boys, well transgender girls, playing say netball with girls, or transgender boys doing rugby with the lads, would that be fair?’ she adds. ‘What about today? What are the rules? Are there any transgender students here?’ I ask ‘Can they compete? Was there something in the pre-event information? I should really read that stuff ...’ and my flow is interrupted as my name is announced over the tannoy. ‘Can Miss Spencer please make her way to the first aid room?’ We look at each other, smile and roll our eyes in unison. ‘Later’ Jo shouts as I dash off to the next challenge of the day.

Discussion

In the following section we discuss the three themes that were identified from our readings of the data, and that are captured in the narrative. These include: knowledge and understanding of trans* identities; trans* challenges to PE practice; and moving towards trans*-inclusive PE.

Knowledge and understanding of trans* identities in PE

Knowledge of the needs of trans* students varied considerably amongst the teachers. Their level of understanding appeared to be dependent on a number of factors, including where and when they trained, the schools they had worked in, and the practices of their current school with respect to trans* inclusion. For teachers who appeared more knowledgeable about trans* issues, this expertise resulted from a need to be responsive to issues they had encountered with trans* young people. In this sense, we argue that when good practice took place, it followed a reactive rather than proactive approach. Whilst the teachers showed a willingness to learn and develop strategies to become more trans*-inclusive, their lack of prior knowledge limited their readiness to deal appropriately with difficult situations involving trans* students. Whilst our findings did not provide evidence of the fear or avoidance of

trans* issues that has been highlighted elsewhere (Foley et al., 2020), a lack of knowledge of how to address the needs of trans* students identified by previous work was apparent.

One of the most frequently cited issues related to teachers' lack of knowledge on trans* issues was the lack of education received in their PE teacher training. As Jo highlights, the issue was dealt with only at a superficial level, if mentioned at all. For some, CPD opportunities within their school helped compensate for the lack of attention to trans* issues during their teacher training. Jo describes how her school had instigated measures to increase awareness of trans* issues, including drawing on the expertise of external organisations. However, she also explains that the training was generic and lacked focus on the specific challenges that PE teachers encounter. All of the teachers referred to gaps in their knowledge around trans* inclusive practice related to changing facilities, PE uniform, and extra curricular competitive sport. This is particularly concerning, given that PE is understood to be one of the most challenging aspects of schooling for trans* young people (Drury et al., 2017).

Trans* challenges to PE practice

Some of the challenges are undoubtedly faced by all teaching staff within schools and not limited to PE. For instance, the narrative highlights a level of confusion around terminology and pronouns. Whilst Clare appeared confident in this area as a result of her experiences with transgender students, other teachers expressed uncertainty. Jo revealed that she did not always know which pronouns to use, and Frankie expressed worries about causing emotional harm to students by misgendering them, or using incorrect names. This highlights a need within schools to ensure that teachers are better informed about the pronoun and name choices of trans* students. Bullying presented another whole-school challenge. Three of the

teachers interviewed expressed concerns around the likelihood that trans* students might be more susceptible to bullying from peers. Some spoke positively about the 'zero tolerance' approach adopted by the school, as illustrated by Clare, but others discussed a lack of clarity around how to identify and address transphobic bullying.

Beyond these more generic challenges, the teachers discussed a host of other concerns that were specific to the context of PE. Somewhat predictably, all of these challenges were underscored by concerns about the gendered nature of PE that have long been highlighted by academic research (Caudwell, 2014; Clarke, 2013; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001). Teachers alluded to the prevalence of separate boys' and girls' curricula, and the difficulties this presents for trans* students who do not conform to the expectations placed on those of the sex they were assigned at birth, or to narrow binary views of gender altogether. They referred to uncertainty over whether they should enable individuals to 'swap' to the 'opposite' group, or whether mixed PE might provide a solution. PE clothing was also a recurrent theme. Three of the teachers interviewed acknowledged that their school PE uniform was different for boys and girls, presenting another sensitive issue for trans* students to navigate. Promisingly, others referred to the flexibility afforded to students to choose aspects of the uniform available.

Changing rooms were also highlighted as problematic by all teachers in the study. All felt it important that transgender students had somewhere comfortable to change for PE, but there were different responses regarding how this might be facilitated, with two alluding to the fact that their current arrangement made trans* students feel isolated. The experiences discussed in the narrative reflect the difficult balance of providing 'safe' alternative places for trans* students to change without them feeling 'forced out' of changing facilities offered to other students, whilst ensuring that changing arrangements for trans* young people do not provoke negative responses from other students that may exacerbate bullying. Although some teachers

were comfortable sharing ideas around how they may adapt current practice to address these issues in curricular PE, extra-curricular activities presented an added challenge for which there were fewer clear solutions. The questions posed by Jo at the end of the narrative point towards awareness of the bigger regulatory forces imposed by competitive sport that influence *if* and *how* trans* individuals can compete. Given that there is not always consensus across sports governing bodies on this issue (Fischer & McClearen, 2020), it is no surprise that this is an area of uncertainty for teachers in facilitating extra-curricular sport.

Moving towards trans*-inclusive PE

Despite concerns over a lack of knowledge of trans* issues and the associated challenges that this presents in PE, all teachers interviewed were willing to learn, and had ideas about how to ensure the inclusion of trans* students. They were clear that a proactive, whole-school approach, established by a forward thinking SLT was needed. Rather than this being a top-down management-dictated strategy, they signposted the need for all staff, students and parents to be involved. This requires the education of all stakeholders about gender identity and trans* issues, and a zero tolerance stance on transphobic bullying. Whilst we acknowledge that this may appear a somewhat obvious suggestion, we are cognisant that issues of equity, inclusion and diversity appear less of a priority in some contemporary school settings. Issues of social justice might be readily espoused in school value statements, but in the neo-liberal climate of contemporary education, they can become pushed to the periphery and lost in the competing performance-driven demands of league tables and school inspections (Mausethagen, 2013). An important facet of this whole-school approach is that it must centralise the voices of trans* students. In the narrative, Clare shares that when faced with uncertainty, she ‘takes her guidance from the student’. It is this student-centred approach that is fundamental to fostering inclusive PE spaces for trans* young people.

The result of such action is not only that trans* students feel safe and valued, but that others learn from their experiences and teachers recognise the heterogeneity of the trans* student population that is often hidden beneath the term 'transgender'. An important message presented in the narrative is that there is no 'one size fits all' approach to trans* inclusion in PE, but that teachers need to be responsive to the individual needs of different trans* young people. Here, the application of an intersectional lens is useful for acknowledging (trans*) students' diversity and enabling a more differentiated and inclusive pedagogy. Like all young people, trans* youth are positioned at the intersections of different identity markers, and are in a constant process of identity work, which influences their experiences in fluid and diverse ways. As Clare highlights, 'teenagers have all sorts going on' and most 'are in the process of finding themselves'. Hill Collins and Bilge (2016) argue that an intersectional approach enables a better understanding of social inequalities which, in turn, can help to mobilise effective strategies against social injustice. They argue that one such strategy is critical praxis and, in this regard, these teachers demonstrated this to a certain degree, as we discuss next.

As the previous section highlights, many of the challenges experienced by the teachers in relation to supporting trans* students stemmed from the gendered, sex-segregated approach to PE provision in their schools. Despite this, all teachers were keen to think differently about how they might change their practice to become more inclusive. They were open to allowing students to swap groups, change in more appropriate facilities, and choose a PE uniform they felt most comfortable in. Frankie's consideration of changing the curriculum based on consultation with trans* young people offers a glimpse of how a student-centred approach might lead to a more inclusive outcome. Similarly, Jo's rethinking of traditional PE changing rooms illustrates how solutions can be put in place to offer facilities that meet the needs of trans* students without fears around the impact this might have on their cisgender counterparts. However, although their motives were clearly student-centered, it was apparent

that their options were still constrained by dominant binary constructions of gender. The idea of ‘swapping’ groups, whilst enabling flexibility, still relies on the idea of a clear two-sexed model to the delivery of PE in which boys and girls are taught separately. Similarly, Jo describes allowing students the freedom to decide which clothing to wear, yet this remains limited to a choice between two distinct options clearly labelled “boys” or “girls”.

The issue of competition posed a particularly difficult dilemma which teachers felt less able to resolve. Their concerns around how to ensure ‘safe’ and ‘fair’ competition in team sports were testament to this, as well as being reflective of broader debates that circulate within competitive sport around the ethics of trans* inclusion. Whilst too complex to discuss in full here, such debates often buy into a paternalistic logic that emphasises fears surrounding the ‘threat’ of transwomen competing in women’s sport, and to a lesser extent, concerns related to the safety of transmen in men’s sport (Lucas-Carr & Krane, 2011; Fischer & McClearen, 2020). This discourse reasserts binary gender logic and fails to account for the diversity among women competing in women’s sport, and of men competing in men’s sport, whilst simultaneously buying into the fallacy of the ‘level playing field’. These discussions are further illustrative of the need within PE to decentralise competition and depart from an emphasis on traditional sports, which are known to alienate many young people along multiple axes of difference including dis/ability, social class and ethnicity.

Conclusion

This paper has explored issues encountered by PE teachers in meeting the needs of trans* students. An important finding was that PE teachers felt they lacked the knowledge and experience required to facilitate safe and inclusive learning environments for trans* young people. Whilst some had encountered brief CPD opportunities around trans* issues, this was largely generic and did not focus on specific issues that arise in PE. Despite this, all teachers

expressed a willingness to develop their expertise in this area, and saw it as their duty to provide inclusive PE experiences for trans* students. The narrative attests to the range of solutions the teachers identified in relation to the presence of trans* students in their schools. Our analysis and re-presentation of the data via the narrative brings to light four key areas that schools must critically reflect upon to foster trans*-inclusive PE. The first is that the voices of trans* young people must be centralised. Where appropriate, this may involve consulting with trans* students to identify strategies for inclusion. Relatedly, the second recommendation focuses on the need for a whole-school approach to educating all stakeholders about the needs of trans* young people, as well as establishing clear strategies to identify and respond to transphobic bullying. The third involves thinking beyond the gender binary in relation to the provision of PE uniforms, changing facilities, and activities that comprise the school PE curriculum. Offering gender-neutral uniforms with scope for student choice, providing changing facilities that offer the option of private individual spaces, and rethinking activities with gendered connotations delivered exclusively to either girls or boys would be welcome developments for trans* young people. Careful consideration of the rationale for same-sex provision may also be relevant here. A final aspect for consideration involves the need for continued critical reflection on the presence, and often overemphasis, on competition in PE (see for example, Lynch, Walton-Fisette & Luguetti, 2021; Stirrup and Hooper, 2021). Some of the suggestions outlined above are of course reflective of well-rehearsed debates around inclusive PE in general. In this sense, we argue that like other social justice agendas in PE, adopting trans*-inclusive practice is not only beneficial for trans* students, but has the potential to foster inclusive climates that cater to the needs of other young people who feel alienated from PE (Drury et al., 2017). The pursuit of trans*-inclusive PE therefore represents an important juncture in extending critical dialogue around inclusion in contemporary PE.

References

- Ahmed, D. (2020). Physical education and transgender youth: supporting all students. *Physical Education Matters*, 15(3), 23-25.
- Anderson, E. (2012). 'Inclusive Masculinity in a Physical Education Setting'. *Journal of Boyhood Studies*, 6(2), 151-165.
- Bachmann, C. L. and Gooch, B. (2017). *LGBT in Britain: hate crime and discrimination*. Stonewall. https://www.stonewall.org.uk/system/files/lgbt_in_britain_hate_crime.pdf
- Berlant, L. and Warner, M. (1998) Sex in Public, *Critical Inquiry*, 24(4), pp.547-566.
- Block, B. (2014). Supporting LGBTQ+ Students in Physical Education: Changing the Movement Landscape *Quest*, 66(1), 14–26.
- Bochner, A. (2014). *Coming to Narrative*. California: Lefty Coast Press.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Bryant, B. and Stephenson, W. (2018, December 21) *How LGBTQ+ hate crime is committed by young people against young people*. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-46543874>
- Caudwell, J. (2014). [Transgender] young men: gendered subjectivities and the physically active body. *Sport, Education and Society*, 19(4), 398-414.
- Clarke, G. (2013). 'Challenging Heterosexism, Homophobia and Transphobia in Physical Education'. In G. Stidder & S. Hayes (Eds.), *Equity and Inclusion in Physical Education and Sport* (pp. 87-101). Oxon, Routledge.
- Department for Education (2019). *Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education: Statutory guidance for governing bodies, proprietors, head teachers, principals, senior leadership teams, teachers*.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/908013/Relationships_Education__Relationships_and_Sex_Education__RSE__and_Health_Education.pdf

Devís-Devís, J., Pereira-García, S., López-Cañada, E., Pérez-Samaniego, V., & Fuentes-Miguel, J. (2018). Looking back into trans persons' experiences in heteronormative secondary physical education contexts, *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 23(1), 103-116.

Dowling, F. (2012). "A Narrative Approach to Research in Physical Education, Youth Sport and Health." In F. Dowling, H. Fitzgerald & A. Flintoff (Eds.), *Equity and Difference in Physical Education, Youth Sport and Health*. (pp. 37–59). Oxon: Routledge.

Drury, S., Stride, A., Flintoff, A. & Williams, S. (2017). Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people's experiences of PE and the implications for youth sport participation and engagement. In J. Long, T. Fletcher & R. Watson (Eds.), *Sport, Leisure and Social Justice* (pp. 84-97). London: Routledge.

Fisher, M., & McClearn, J. (2020). Transgender athletes and the queer art of athletic failure. *Communication and Sport*, 8(2), 147-167.

Fitzgerald, H., Stride, A., & Drury, S. (2021). Throwing your hat in the ring: Women volunteers in boxing. *Sport in Society*, DOI: 10.1080/17430437.2021.1878148

Flintoff, A., & Scraton, S. (2001). Stepping into active leisure? Young women's perceptions of active lifestyles and their experiences of school physical education. *Sport, Education and Society*, 6(1), 5–21.

Foley, J. T., Pineiro, C., Miller, D., & Foley, M. L. (2016). Including Transgender Students in School Physical Education. *The Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, 87(3), 5-8.

Frank, A. W. (2010). *Letting Stories Breathe*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

- Griffin, M., & Phoenix, C. (2014). Learning to run from narrative foreclosure: One woman's story of aging and physical activity. *Journal of Aging and Physical Activity*, 22(3), 393–404.
- Hayton, D. (2019, May 10). Supporting transgender students: what you need to know. *The Times Educational Supplement*.
- Hill Collins, P., & Bilge, S. (2016). *Intersectionality*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Home Office (2019) *Hate Crime, England and Wales, 2018/19*. Home Office Statistical Bulletin 24/19.
- Jones, B.A., Arcelus, J., Bouman, W.P., & Haycroft, E. (2017). Sport and transgender people: a systematic review of the literature relating to sport participation and competitive sport policies. *Sports Med*, 47, 701-716.
- Landi, D. (2018). Toward a queer inclusive physical education. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 23(1), 1-15.
- Landi, D., Flory, S. B., Safron, C., & Marttinen, R. (2020). LGBTQ+ research in physical education: A rising tide? *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 25(3), 259-273.
- Larsson, H., Redelius, K., & Fagrell, B. (2011). Moving (in) the heterosexual matrix. On heteronormativity in secondary school physical education. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 16(1), 67 –81.
- lisahunter. (2019). What a queer space is HPE, or is it yet? Queer theory, sexualities and pedagogy. *Sport, Education and Society*, 24(1), 1-12.
- Lucas-Carr, C. B., & Krane, V. (2011). What Is the *T* in LGBT? Supporting Transgender Athletes Through Sport Psychology. *The Sport Psychologist*, 25(4), 532-548.
- Lynch, S., Walton-Fisett, J.L. & Luguetti, C. (2021). *Pedagogies of Social Justice in Physical Education and Youth Sport*. London: Routledge.
- Mausethagen, S. (2013). A research review of the impact of accountability policies on teachers' workplace relations. *Educational Research Review*, 9(1), 16-33.

- McQuillan, M. T., & Leininger, J. (2021). Supporting gender-inclusive schools: educators' beliefs about gender diversity training implementation plans. *Professional Development in Education*, 47(1), 156-176.
- Mooney, A., & Gerdin, G. (2018). Challenging gendered inequalities in boys' physical education through video-stimulated reflections. *Sport, Education and Society*, 23(8), 761-772.
- Morrow, R. G., & Gill, D. L. (2003). Perceptions of homophobia and heterosexism in physical education. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 74(2), 205-214.
- Oliver, K. L., & Kirk, D. (2015). *Girls, Gender and Physical Education: An activist approach*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Parveen, N. (2019, March 4) *Birmingham school stops LGBT lessons after parents protest*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/mar/04/birmingham-school-stops-lgbt-lessons-after-parent-protests>
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1988). *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Scott, D. (2020). The Boxing Gym as Masculine Space. *Sport in History*, 40(3), 356–369.
- Scruton, S. (1992). *Shaping up to Womanhood: Gender and Girls' Physical Education*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Smith, B. (2016). "Narrative Analysis in Sport and Exercise. How Can It Be Done?" In B. Sparkes, A. C., & Smith, B. (2014). *Qualitative research methods in sport, exercise and health: From process to product*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Stirrup, J. & Hooper, O. (2021). *Critical Pedagogies in Physical Education, Physical Activity and Health*. London: Taylor & Francis Ltd.

Stride, A., Brazier, R., Piggott, S., Staples, M., & Flintoff, A. (2020). Gendered power alive and kicking? An analysis of four English secondary school PE departments. *Sport, Education and Society*, DOI: 10.1080/13573322.2020.1825933

Sykes, H. (2011). *Queer Bodies: Sexualities, Genders and Fatness in Physical Education*. New York: Peter Lang.

Tischler, A., & Mcaughtry, N. (2011). PE Is Not for Me. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 82(1), 37-48.

Williamson, R., & Sandford, R. (2018). "School is already difficult enough...": Examining transgender issues in physical education. *Physical Education Matters*, 13(3), 57-61.

ⁱ For the purpose of this paper, we adopt the term 'trans*', which is widely regarded within the LGBTQ+ community as an inclusive term to define individuals whose gender identities are perceived as different from the gender norms typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. This may include people who identify as transgender, transexual, intersex, androgynous, third gender, bigender, genderqueer, transmasculine, transfeminine, and non-binary.

ⁱⁱ The clause was repealed in Scotland at the earlier date of 2000, and then in 2003 for the rest of the UK.

ⁱⁱⁱ All names and references to schools and other defining features have been anonymised.

^{iv} NQT stands for 'Newly Qualified Teacher', which is the term used in England to describe those who have recently completed their initial teacher training and gained Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and are in the process of completing their compulsory one-year induction to the teaching profession.

^v SLT stands for 'Senior Leadership Team' and refers to the team of senior staff, usually composed of the headteacher and deputy headteachers, who oversee the management and leadership of the school.

^{vi} PGCE stands for 'Postgraduate Certificate in Education', which is a one-year full-time teacher training course that provides one of the most common means of gaining Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) in England.

^{vii} PSHE stands for 'Personal, Social, Health and Economic education', a non-statutory subject taught in English schools.

^{viii} CP stands for 'Child Protection'. Most English schools have a member of pastoral staff responsible for child protection, welfare and safeguarding issues.

^{ix} CPD stands for 'Continuing Professional Development'.