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# Editorial

Welcome to our seventh edition of Innovations in Practice. We have eleven papers for you to read in this edition that span submissions from both within the Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure, the wider university and externally to the institution.

Over recent months we have been debating the future of the Innovations in Practice journal and how it contributes to our research and scholarship agenda. It is obvious from feedback I have received that many colleagues do wish to see the journal continue as a means for us to share ideas, disseminate practice and learn from other colleagues. With this in mind we will continue as in previous editions to encourage a wide range of submissions that either have a pedagogical or subject focus.

Can I thank all the authors and reviewers who have contributed to this edition and I hope you enjoy reading it.

**Professor Philip Vickerman**
**Editor**

Contents

# Innovations in Practice

# Self esteem and dieting in a Cypriot population.

**Koftidou, L., Jackson, A., Davies, I.**

## Abstract

Diet–related subjects are constantly reported through various media outputs with an explosion of interest in body image and various eating behaviours. Social constructs, portrayed through the media, have been shown to be associated with eating behaviours, body image, and self esteem and evidence shows women are more likely to pursue the "thin beauty ideal" through "dieting". There are no known studies that have investigated the difference in gender and the relationship of "dieting" on self-esteem in a Cypriot population. The main aim of this pilot study, therefore, investigated the effect of gender on self esteem in relation to "dieting" attempts. Participants (n = 100) were asked to complete a questionnaire on general information about their "dieting" status and a second questionnaire to investigate self esteem. Questionnaires were scored and statistical analysis employed: Chi–Squared Tests, Mann-Whitney U tests, Kruskal-Wallis tests, and Spearman correlation (SPSS, V17.0). Results showed an overall significant correlation between the amount of times a "diet" had been attempted and overall self-esteem score (R = 0.47, p=0.00), with women showing a greater amount of "dieting" attempts (median ± IQR: F=3.0 ± 5, M=1.0 ± 1.0, p=0.003) and males to have greater overall self-esteem score (M=1.4 ± 0.2 vs. F=1.6 ± 0.5, P = 0.000) (low score = high self esteem). This pilot study has shown that females have lower self esteem and are more likely to repeatedly attempt weight loss through "dieting". These results are in agreement with previous work in that women pursue the thin ideal, are dissatisfied with their bodies and this is related to lower self-esteem. The current study adds to the literature showing a correlation with the amount of "dieting" attempts and low-self esteem in a Cypriot population. Evidence suggests societies are one of the reasons why people have low self esteem; they reflect the pursuit of cultural and gender explicit body shape ideals where males tend to desire a muscular physique and women a thinner physique. In conclusion, in a Cypriot population women are more likely to "diet" and have lower self esteem compared to men and dieting may be a predictor of low self esteem. While there is evidence to suggest media may play a role in the different behaviours of the two genders, further studies are warranted to investigate this phenomenon in this population.

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## Introduction

Diet related subjects are in vogue and it seems that over the past few years there has been an explosion of interest in any aspect of a diet, from healthy eating to eating disorders (Luff and Gray, 2009; Lóópez-Guimeràà et al, 2010). The human diet and eating behaviour cannot be considered as simple, since it provides focus not only on what people eat, but it is also highly influenced by social and psychological constructs (Ogden, 2010). Healthy eating is considered to be the consumption of a variety of foods, in the right proportions, and the right balance between food groups (FSA, 2010). The diet people follow on a daily basis plays a critical role for health and can contribute directly to their psychology, since food has been linked to sexuality, pleasure and guilt, expression of self control and worth (Ogden, 2003). Under those circumstances, an individual's

diet can have a major impact on their perception of body image. Body image is multidimensional and is governed by self perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and feelings and behaviours related to one's body (Dittmar, 2009). A significant impact on body image is gender; gender differences in body image are among the strongest evidence in the psychological literature. Males and females feel, think and behave differently with regard to their bodies. However, both genders' body image constitutes a dynamic relationship between the individual, the body and the social environment and self esteem (Calogero & Thompson, 2010).

Viewing one's identity as a "healthy eater" has been shown to relate to healthy eating behaviours (Strachan & Brawley, 2009), creating a linear relationship of good nutrition with a linear increase in trans–theoretical model variables such as self esteem (Shepherd, 2006). Gross (2009) defines self esteem or self regard as the level of acceptance an individual has for themselves, and how worthy they believe they are. Usually it is formed by the experiences people have during their life (White, 2009). Some characteristics, however, have greater value in society which can have a greater effect on individuals' self esteem, such as the measure of attractiveness (Gross, 2009).

It is well known that healthy eating can improve each individual's life to its maximum. A healthy balanced diet usually contains a variety of food and it has the ability to limit a large number of possible diseases and maintain a healthy weight. There are many factors influencing the food choices people make, but the two significant influences are social and psychological determinants (Ogden, 2010). Social determinants are the influences an individual has from family, friends and society (EUFIC, 2010). The eating behaviour an individual has is adopted mostly during childhood from family, and later as adolescents from friends and peers (Kalavana et al., 2010). Fieldhouse (2002) refers to the socialisation of food habits that are acquired early in life which are more likely to be long lasting and resistant to change once they are established. Socialisation of food habits is the process by which people acquire their food habits from one generation to the next. Evidence also suggests emotions and moods have a clear interaction with food choice. Emotions can provide an internal stimulus to food choice. For example, stressful periods, like examinations for students, are associated with high intakes of energy from fat and sugar in people who habitually restrain their food intake (Gibson, 2006). Eating behaviour is strongly linked with self efficacy and esteem (Long and Stevens, 2004). Evidence suggests that about sixty percent of people with low self esteem turn to food for comfort. Those people overeat in response to emotion in order to mask a negative mood, a temporary high mood is caused by eating; this is known as the 'Masking Hypothesis' (Odgen, 2003).

It is important to note body image is closely related to self esteem, this is mainly because people tend to link self esteem with weight and shape and this can encourage a dieting mentality (Bacon and Aphramor, 2011). Indeed, 'Weight Concern' has an interdependent relationship with self esteem and body dissatisfaction, which has been shown to play a critical role on self esteem and vice versa (Odgen, 2010); therefore, the current study investigated if there is a relationship between "dieting" attempts and self esteem in a Cypriot population.

## Methods

The investigation was conducted in Limassol, Cyprus; with a convenience sample of 100 participants, between 18 and 30 years old. The questionnaire had two parts; the first part consisted of thirteen questions and the second part seventeen questions. The first ten questions of part A, asked general questions about the participant, such as gender, age, if they exercise or have any nutritional knowledge. Also it included questions on height and weight, in order to calculate BMI. Further questions consisted of nutrition and dieting attempts; for example, if they have nutritional knowledge, how many times did they follow a healthy diet and why. The last three questions of part A, as well as the whole part B, consisted of psychometric questions, which was based on Rosenberg's self esteem questionnaire (1979), questions were designed to address self esteem with a likert scale e.g.: 'I do not like what I see in the mirror', or in general; 'On the whole I am satisfied with myself' – with a ranking of 1 – 3 for Usually, Sometimes and Always or Agree, Neutral, Disagree dependent on the question. The last three questions of part A and whole part B, were also scored. The summated scale which was used aligned people according to their responses (Fink, 2009). Scoring is a procedure where each question takes an initial scale score; in this case 1 for high/ positive score, 2 for mutual score and 3 for low/ negative score for part B and 1 to 10 with 1 the lowest/ negative score, for part A. The mean average score was collated

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## Statistics

Continuous variables were investigated for normality and were shown to be skewed; transformation of the variables did not normalise the data therefore non-parametric statistical tests were employed: Spearman rank for correlation, Mann Whitney U and Kruskal Wallis tests were used for group comparisons. Chi squared tests were employed for comparison of two categorical variables. All data was analysed using SPSS version 17.0

### Questionnaire

**PART A: Please answer all questions.**

1. Gender :
   a. Male b. Female
2. Your age is:
   a. 18 – 20 b. 21 – 23 c. 24 – 26 d. 27 – 30
3. Height:
   .....
4. Weight:
   .....
5. Do you exercise?
   a. Yes b. Sometimes c. Not at all
6. Do you have nutritional knowledge?
   a. Yes b. Not much, from what I heard from school, media, etc
   c. No
7. Have you ever tried to follow a healthy diet?
   a. Yes b. No (Go to question 10)
8. Why have you tried to follow a healthy diet? (Go to question 11)
   a. Family Influence b. Weight Loss.
   c. To have better health. d. Sports / Exercise
   e. other reasons
9. How many times have you been on a diet?
   .....
10. Why haven't you tried to follow a healthy diet?
    a. 'Healthy Diet' makes me think of foods that I wouldn't enjoy.
    b. I want to, but for some reason I keep postponing it.
    c. I do not have health problems.
    d. Family Influence
11. On scale 1 to 10; with 10 being the highest rating, how much would you rate your body?
    1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
12. On scale 1 to 10; with 10 being the highest rating, how much would you rate your social settings?
    1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
13. On scale 1 to 10; with 10 being the highest rating, how much would you rate your academic/ professional skills?
    1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**PART B: please tick the box that appropriate box (Rosenberg, 1970).**

| Question | Statement | Usually | Sometimes | Rarely |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |
| 14 | I am often kind about myself. | | | |
| 15 | I do not like what I see in the mirror. | | | |
| 16 | I feel I am good enough as a person. | | | |
| 17 | I blame myself when things go wrong. | | | |
| 18 | I forgive myself for my mistakes. | | | |
| 19 | I do not worry about what others think of me. | | | |
| 20 | I believe I deserve the best life has to offer. | | | |
| 21 | I accept myself for being what I am. | | | |
| 22 | I have fear of being rejected by other people. | | | |
| 23 | I am comfortable around successful people. | | | |
| 24 | I do not express my opinions openly. | | | |
| 25 | I respect myself. | | | |
| | | **Agree** | **Neutral** | **Disagree** |
| 26 | On the whole, I am satisfied with myself. | | | |
| 27 | I feel I have a number of good qualities. | | | |
| 28 | I am able to do things as well as most other people. | | | |
| 29 | I feel I do not have much to be proud of. | | | |
| 30 | I take positive attitude toward myself. | | | |

## Results

Table 1 indicates general information about the participants. There are 5 variables which show the status of the population; gender, age, BMI status, exercise and the nutritional knowledge. In this study there were 100 participants; 50 of them males and 50 females. The age limit was 18 to 30, with the most common age group 21 – 23 y with 36 participants, following by 24 – 26 y and 18 – 20 y with 24 and 21 participants correspondingly. The less common age group was 27 – 30 years old with 19 participants. The third indicator, Body Mass Index (BMI) status was used to discover weight status of the participants. The majority; 63% were normal, 27% overweight, following by 7% of underweight and only 3% were obese. The results of exercise were similar, since 37 were exercising sometimes and only 1 less usually, whereas 27 participants were not exercising at all. Finally, when participants were asked if they had nutritional knowledge, 41 answered 'Not Much, From What I Heard From School, Media etc.', 38 answered positively and the rest 21 negatively.

**Table 1.** Gender, age, BMI status, exercise and nutritional knowledge

| Category | Sub – Category | Frequency |
|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | Males | 50 |
| | Females | 50 |
| **Age** | 18 - 20 | 21 |
| | 21 - 23 | 36 |
| | 24 - 26 | 24 |
| | 27 - 30 | 19 |
| **BMI** | Underweight | 7 |
| | Normal | 63 |
| | Overweight | 27 |
| | Obese | 3 |
| **Exercise** | Yes | 36 |
| | Sometimes | 37 |
| | Not at All | 27 |
| **Nutritional Knowledge** | Yes | 38 |
| | Not Much | 41 |
| | No | 21 |

Figure 1 shows the BMI status of all participants according to their gender. There are 4 categories which show BMI status: underweight, normal, overweight and obese. In this study there were 100 participants; 50 of them males and 50 females. Results showed male participants were normal (n = 24), overweight (n = 23), obese (n = 2) and underweight (n = 1). On the other hand, over half of the female participants were normal (n = 39), followed by underweight (n = 6), overweight (n = 4) and finally only 1 obese participant. Chi Squared test revealed a statistically significant difference between gender and BMI (P = 0.000).

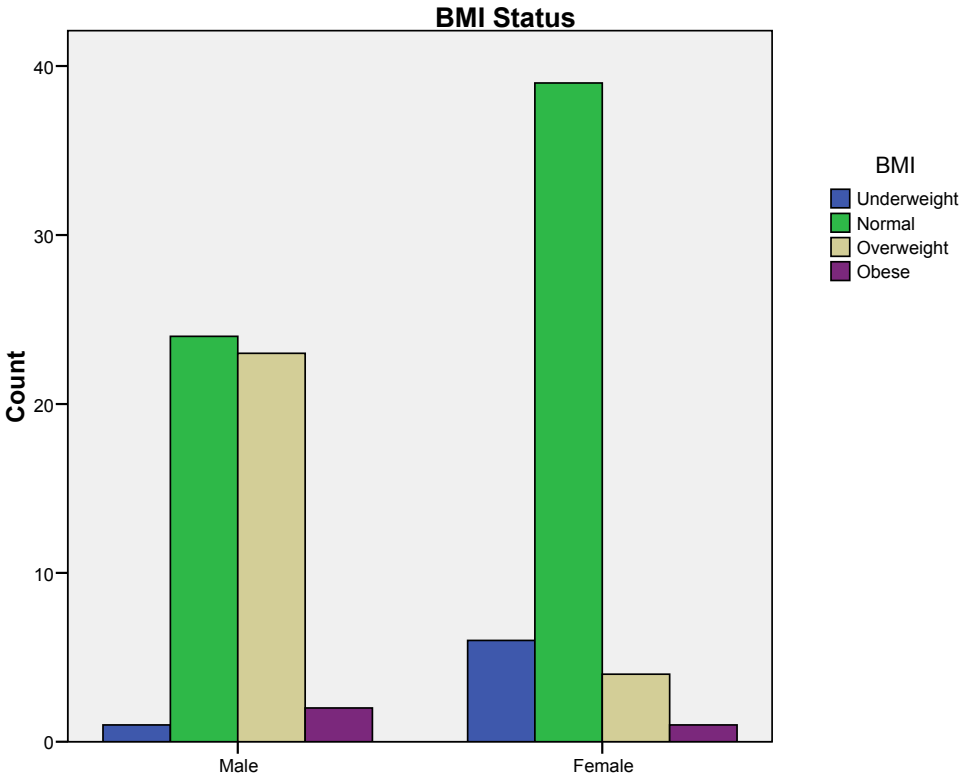



**Figure 1. BMI and gender**

Participants were asked about the amount of times they had attempted “dieting” for weight loss, results showed a significant difference between males with females attempting “dieting” F = 3.0 ± 5, M = 1.0 ± 1.0, p=0.003 (medians ± IQR). Interestingly some of the females had attempt “dieting” up to 15 times (Figure 2). However, there were no statistically significant differences between “dieting” attempts and BMI with a median of 2 for each BMI category but the range was much higher for the normal and overweight category (Figure 3)

**Figure 2. “Dieting” attempts and gender**

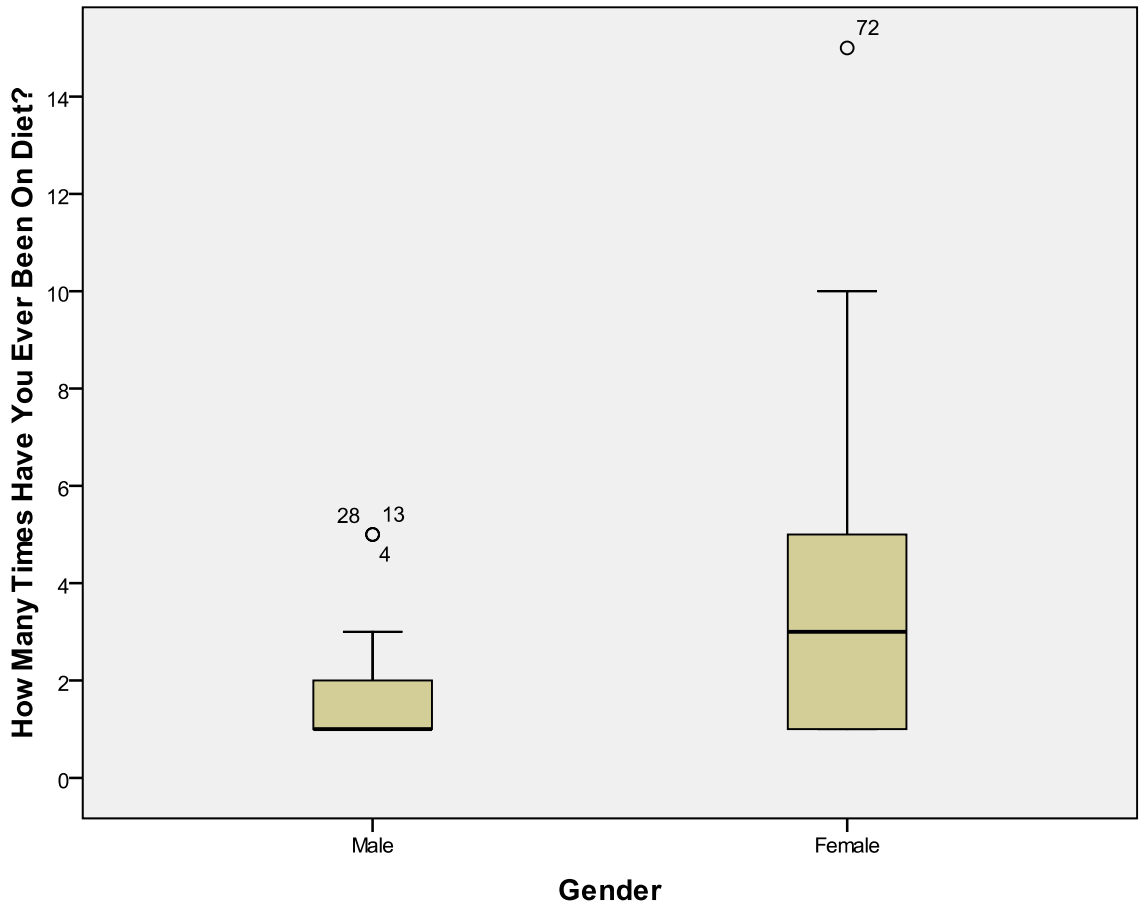
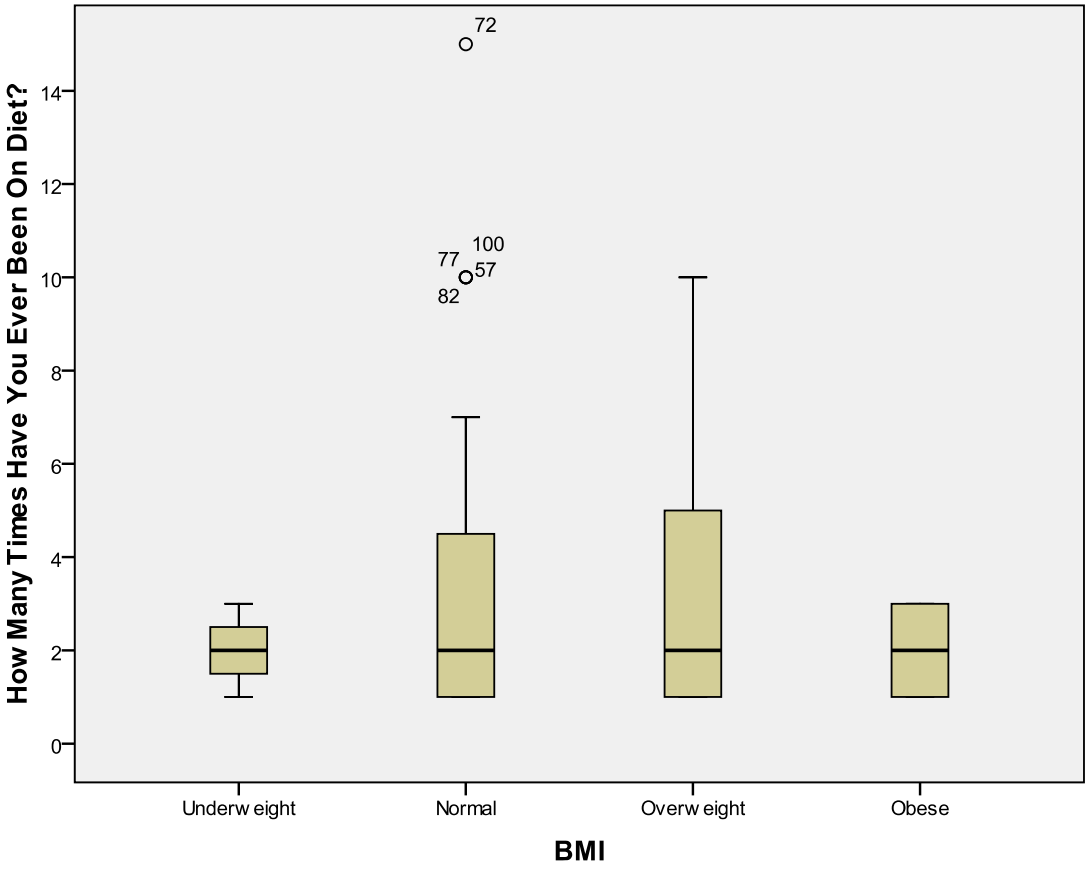


**Figure 3. "Dieting" attempts and BMI.**




Self esteem score showed significant differences between the genders (M=1.4 ± 0.2 vs. F=1.6 ± 0.5, P = 0.000 (median ± IQR) (Figure 4). There was also an overall correlation between "dieting" attempts and self esteem showing a positive medium correlation between "dieting" attempts and low self esteem (R = 0.47, p=0.00; Spearman correlation); however when the two genders were analysed separately the correlation only remained with females (R = 0.44, p = 0.007) (Figure 6). Furthermore, there were no significant differences between BMI categories and self esteem score but a higher range was observed for the normal and overweight categories (Table 2).

**Table 2. Median self esteem score and BMI**

| BMI Category | Median Self esteem score | Range |
|---|---|---|
| Underweight | 1.3 | 0.5 |
| Normal | 1.5 | 1.4 |
| Overweight | 1.4 | 1.4 |
| Obese | 1.3 | 0.2 |

**Figure 4. Self esteem score and gender**

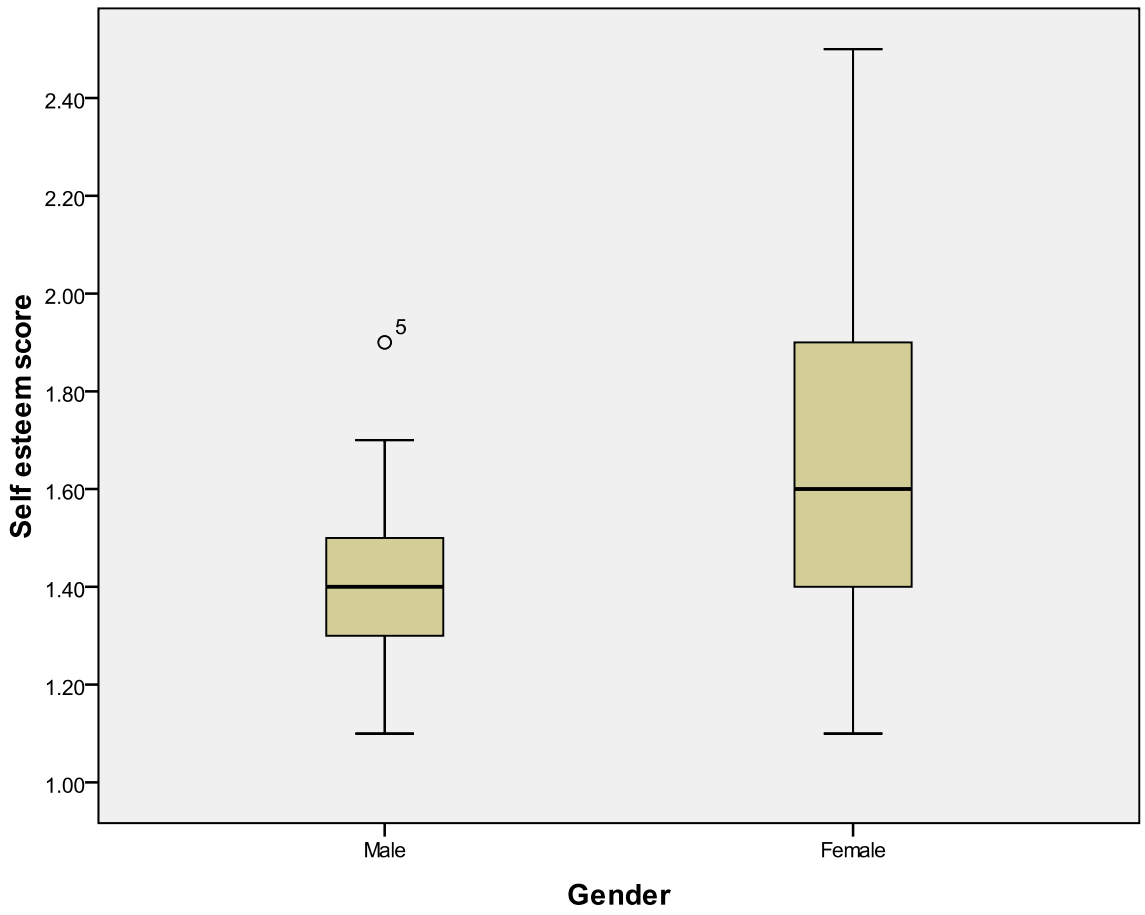
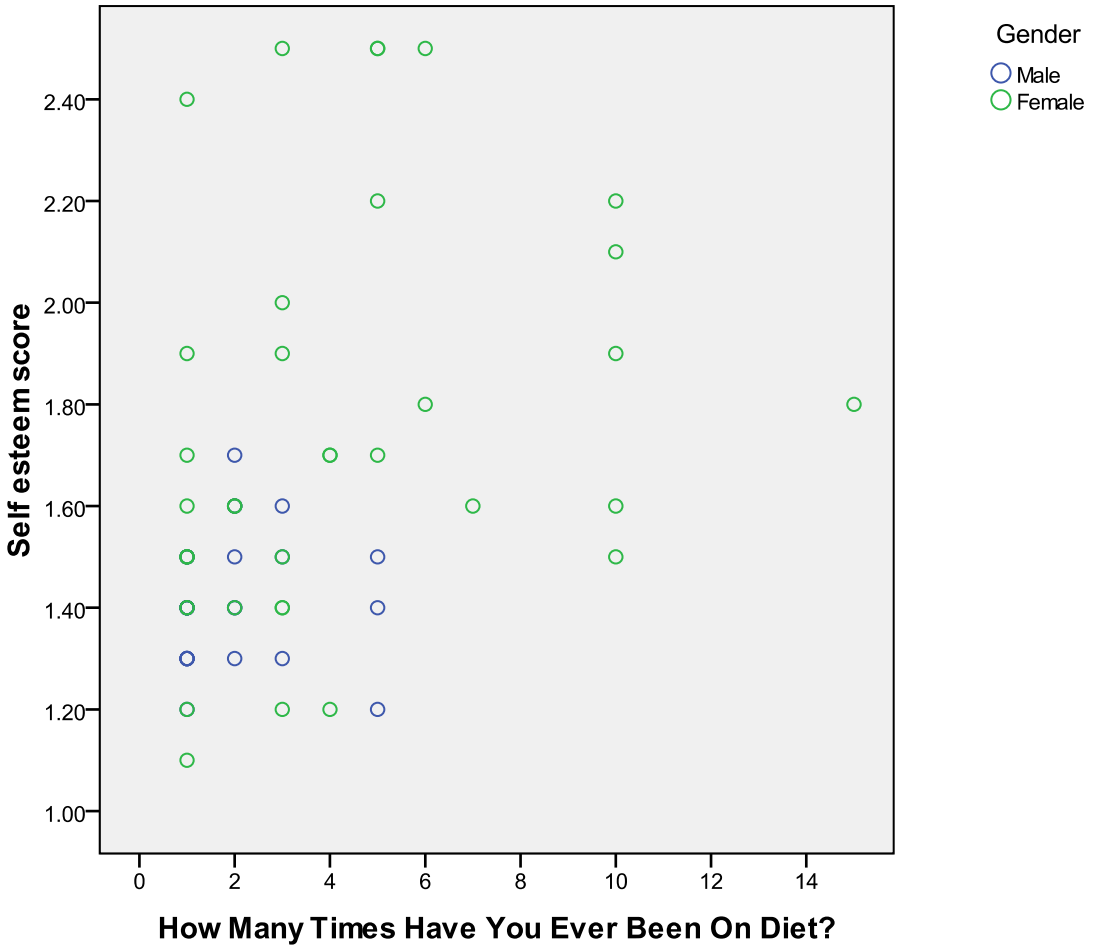


**Figure 6. Self esteem and "dieting" attempts**



## Discussion

This current study aimed to investigate the relationship between self esteem and "dieting" within a Cypriot population. The results showed there was a positive and moderate correlation between "dieting" attempts and low self esteem (Figure 6) with this phenomenon being present mainly amongst females ($R = 0.44$, $p = 0.007$). Evidence shows that society can have an influence on self esteem with attractiveness being related to low body weight (Gross, 2009). An overall increase in dieting for weight loss has been previously observed (Kenardy et al., 2001) and Lam et al. (2010) suggests that overweight people are more likely to be stigmatised with weight and are more inclined to be fearful of social disapproval as well as experiencing low self esteem. The current study did not show any significant differences between BMI status and self esteem; however, the normal and overweight categories did numerically show lower self esteem compared to the obese and underweight (Table 2). There was, however, a greater range of responses for both the normal and overweight categories and this data may therefore be unrepresentative as the two groups were the majority of the sample.

The difference between males and females with "dieting" attempts and self esteem was apparent with females attempting "dieting" more and showing a lower self esteem than males (Figure 2 and Figure 4). These results are in agreement with Aubrey (2010) that showed women who reported "dieting" with the main aim to improve their appearance, were more likely to have low body dissatisfaction scores, experience dietary disinhibition, and have low self esteem. "Dieting" attempts are linked with increased weight cycling, a phenomenon where body weight reduction occurs after weight control with rapid restoration to the initial/or increased body weight (Yoo et al, 2009). Weight cycling is associated with alterations on metabolic rate that may explain the regain in body weight (Isomaa et al, 2010) - the body has a feedback mechanism to maintain adipose tissue (Royal et al., 2005). The increased association with weight cycling and "dieting" may be related to the "thin" ideal projected in the media (Esnaola et al., 2010). Roberts and Good (2010) explain this phenomenon by showing that negative effects of media exposure are attributing to social comparison. Women compare themselves to thin and beautiful images in the media leading to negative mood and body dissatisfaction. Martin and Baugh (2009) showed the internalisation of the projected "thin" ideal has been linked with lower self–esteem, decreased performance in academic/professional obligations, psychological problems, depression and eating disorders (Martin & Baugh, 2009).

The current study showed the males had higher self esteem and very few attempts at "dieting". In agreement, Van den Berg et al. (2010) showed no significant difference between younger and older boys and body dissatisfaction and self esteem. Therefore, being slim is far less important for men; this is supported from the present study with a median value of $1.0 \pm 1.0$ "dieting" attempts had been made by men. However, the male beauty of a lean yet muscular body has become an important issue for men (Ensaola et al., 2010; Furnahm et al, 2002). Under those circumstances, men are less sensitive to their weight and therefore they experience less body dissatisfaction and higher levels of self esteem (Lam et al., 2010). In that way their perceived body weight has less impact on their self perception and may explain why self esteem scores were higher in men in the present study.

## Limitations

The current report is only part of larger student dissertation that investigated various aspects of eating behaviour, body image, and self esteem. Only part of the quantitative results are shown in this report, for a more complete report of all of the results a copy of the dissertation can be obtained on request. While questionnaires are a useful tool to obtain a cross-sectional, "snap shot" of human behaviour for a more in-depth analysis qualitative research may reveal more. Qualitative research can explore thoughts, feelings and opinions to

sensitive issues such as self esteem and body weight (Denscombe, 2007) and provide a more in depth approach to understand the reasons why people act, believe and value the way they do.

Other limitations include the sample size, BMI was separated into 4 categories with only a very small sample for the underweight and obese categories. A larger sample size with a higher sample size in each category would be needed for appropriate statistical analysis.

## Conclusion

Self esteem results show that females have significantly lower self esteem than males and this was related to "dieting" attempts; however, there were no differences between BMI categories and self esteem or dieting attempts. These results may be explained due to females being more sensitive to their own image and are subjected to greater social pressure to meet cultural norms of physical attractiveness; however, further studies with statistical power are warranted.

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# Investigating the conceptual gap between patient expectation and perception of GP and Exercise Professional interactions in Physical Activity Referral Schemes.

**Vinson, D., Adams, I., Ibbetson, A., Baugh, P.**

## Abstract

Physical Activity Referral Schemes (PARSs) have long been plagued with poor adherence. Social support surrounding exercisers is crucial to maintaining activity. This investigation develops understanding of the gap between patients' perceptions and expectations of General Practitioner (GP) and Exercise Professional (EP) interactions. Participants and key stakeholders of five PARSs within the UK were studied. REFERQUAL was mailed to 3,117 patients yielding 1,024 useable returns. Five patient focus groups and five key stakeholder interviews featuring EPs, Scheme Organisers and patients were also conducted. Although there are few differences in the conceptual gaps between patient perception and expectation, findings highlight the void caused by disparity in the historical foundations of PARSs, illustrated by patients drawing confidence from quasi-medical procedures and being sceptical of the competency EPs. GP and EP support are crucial to benefiting maintenance of exercise programmes. Patients did not perceive GPs to be apathetic towards PARSs, although the schemes appear low priority. Clients' confidence was affected by EP knowledge. Future studies should consider exploring deeper into the social networks surrounding PARS patients. PARSs need to de-medicise the process whilst also examining the management of the hierarchies of perceived competence between the medical and exercise communities.

## Introduction

The purpose of this investigation was to develop understanding of the gap between patients' perceptions and expectations of General Practitioner (GP) and Exercise Professional (EP) interactions in Physical Activity Referral Schemes (PARSs). The study also seeks further understanding of the impact of this gap on patient adherence to 'prescribed' exercise programmes. This paper reports part of a larger investigation regarding the wider concept of service quality within PARSs considering the impact on client adherence. This investigation draws opinion from patients (clients) and key stakeholders directly affecting and experiencing the operational aspects of PARSs, rather than focus on health professionals involved at the point of referral.

Evidence concerning the relationship between sedentary lifestyles and many physical and mental health problems has become overwhelming (Giné-Garriga *et al.*, 2009; Lee,

Griffin and Simmons, 2009). Numerous authors have also indicated physical activity's twofold benefit as preventative aid and therapeutic intervention (Hagberg and Lindholm, 2006). Despite this, research commonly suggests anything up to 80% of UK adults are insufficiently active to derive meaningful health benefit (Thurston and Green, 2004). This is further contextualised by Cock, Adams, Ibbeston and Baugh's (2008: 48) suggestion that "reducing the proportion of sedentary individuals within the population may be the single most effective strategy for reducing the risk of CHD in this country". It is broadly accepted that physical activity at moderate intensity five days a week, for 30 minutes, is the minimum required dose to obtain meaningful health gain (National Health Service [NHS], 2001). Mental health benefits of regular physical activity are also well reported in the literature, comprising numerous aspects including depression, anxiety (Mental Health Foundation, 2005), as well as benefiting self-efficacy (Cox *et al.,* 2003; Hardcastle and Taylor 2001; Schutzer and Graves 2004).

## 1. 1 Physical Activity Referral Schemes

PARSs involve medical professionals (usually GPs) referring patients to exercise centres (Gidlow, Johnston, Crone and James, 2005). An individualised exercise programme is designed for patients, facilitating and encouraging life-long adherence to physical activity (Leijon *et al.*, 2010). Since conception, PARSs have been plagued with poor adherence, hindering acceptance by the health promotion literature as a cost effective and efficient system in aiding the alleviation of the problem outlined above (Harrison, Roberts and Elton, 2004; McAuley *et al.,* 2003). Once referred, the patient becomes a client of the exercise centre and is assessed and monitored by an EP; the health care professional has no direction over the activity prescribed.

An abundance of evidence exists to suggest PARS are essentially a good thing. Harrison *et al.* (2004) suggest PARS operating efficiently and enhancing patients' physical activity levels could cost just £300 per life saved. Furthermore, increased physical activity levels could reduce GP visitations and reduced dependence on medication (Schutzer and Graves, 2004). PARSs are philosophically concerned with developing life-long physical activity adherers. The health benefits of physical activity being transient (Buckley, Holmes and Mapp, 1999), concentrating on anything other than life-long adherence would be of limited health benefit. The future of services such as PARS is dependent upon proof of a successful and sustainable intervention; therefore, evaluating the impact on adherence of the core components of the PARS process is fundamentally important to developing the effectiveness of such a potentially beneficial health-related intervention.

## 1.2 The perception-expectation gap

The importance of understanding and addressing the difference between expectations and perceptions has most commonly been considered in relation to the concept of service quality. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry's (1985; 1988) service quality articles issue sparked ongoing academic debate for 20 years (e.g., see Brady, Cronin and Brand 2002), particularly concerning conceptualisation and measurement. Client perceptions of good service quality are crucial to adoption and maintenance of exercise programmes, something commonly reported within other service industries (Park and Kim, 2000). Customer retention is highly dependent on client perceptions of excellent service quality (Newman, 2001). Considering PARS' foundational basis as a service (NHS, 2001) and the importance the related literature places on service quality, alongside the underpinning theoretical framework of these topics (the perception-expectation gap), the potential to develop understanding of issues relating to the most pressing and fundamentally problematic aspect of these interventions is clearly evident.

## 1.3 Problems and the importance of staff support

The majority of GPs appear unengaged with the PARS process (Harrison *et al.* 2004). Considered alongside poor adherence, the lack of evidence concerning the long-term benefit of PARSs has led to numerous influential publications suggesting these interventions could be substantially more effective than is currently the case (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence [NICE], 2006a). Adherence difficulties extend beyond PARS; 50% of those commencing exercise programmes will drop-out within six months (Leijon *et al.*, 2010), whilst the recommended activity level is rarely achieved by those whose attendance is maintained. Although some success has been reported, scepticism usually surrounds the long-term impact of PARSs (Morgan, 2005; NICE 2006b).

Perceptions of quality are inextricably linked to the availability and close supervision of staff (Williams *et al.,* 2007). Failure to provide quality supervision is potentially a barrier to exercise adherence (French and Hainsworth, 2001). Stathi, McKenna and Fox (2004) report success of PARS to be dependent on the availability of quality staff support. Furthermore, the role of staff in class-based exercise sessions underlines the importance of quality leadership and the subsequent impact on adherence (Bray, Millen, Eidsness and Leuzinger, 2005). Taylor (2003) suggests the quality of EP is inextricably linked to expertise. Furthermore, referrals should be 'de-medicised' (moving the referral system away from medical settings and processes) in order to counter the generation of unrealistic patient expectation of EP capability (Taylor, 2003). It is clear that quality staff support can affect adherence rates, although substantial future research is required.

## 1.4 GPs' role in exercise referral

GPs are the most effective people to counsel clients, particularly the elderly, in relation to adopting exercise programmes (Schutzer and Graves, 2004). Furthermore, McKenna *et al.* (1998) reported 70% of GPs and Practice Nurses in England claimed to regularly promote physical activity; however, this conflicts with other findings reporting exercise counselling in health care settings to be rare (Balde, Figueras, Hawking and Miller, 2003). Furthermore, McKenna and Vernon (2004) reported only 3% of GPs felt a 'strong' influence over patients in terms of the adoption of the recommended physical activity dose.

GPs hold a revered status within British culture, enhancing the credibility of health-related counselling (Dutton, Davis Martin, Welsch and Brantley, 2007), especially among ethnic minorities (Seefledt, Malina and Clark, 2002) and the elderly (Schutzer and Graves, 2004). This gives referrals from GPs added weight and these are more likely to be followed than similar recommendations from EPs or even friends and relatives. GPs' potential for increasing physical activity across the population is underlined by findings that 95% of people visit a GP over each three-year period (Taylor, 1999) and that frequency increases with age (Schutzer and Graves, 2004).

GP counselling has been reported as an effective physical activity intervention, especially if allied with expert feedback (Aittasalo, Miilunpalo, Kukkonen-Harjula and Pasanen, 2006; Eakin *et al.,* 2007), although Aittasalo *et al*.'s (2006) study focussed on short-term indictors of success. Most studies have lacked quality of research design, preventing generalizable findings and hence understanding of these issues is greatly limited (Wee, McCarthy, Davis and Phillips, 1999). Dutton *et al.* (2007: 622) also describe the short-term effectiveness of GP physical activity counselling as "limited". Despite this, there are some positives signs; Almeida *et al.,* (2005) found using a simple stimulus control strategy enhanced the number of GP referrals and the likelihood of patients taking up the recommended exercise programme, whilst Dutton *et al.* (2007) suggest tailored and more intensive interventions than are commonly implemented, may be more effective. However, Hagberg and Lindholm (2006) underline the lack of understanding generated in this topic

area and suggest the need for much further research.

GP enthusiasm is essential in raising the likelihood that a patient will adhere to an exercise programme (Schutzer and Graves, 2004). However, GPs have often been reported to be apathetic towards PARSs, commonly attributed to perceptions of being insufficiently qualified to counsel patients in exercise adoption (Spetch and Kolt, 2001). The limited time available in consultation is potentially a factor contributing to the limited number of GPs willing to display enthusiasm about PARS; McKenna *et al.* (1998) reported that adding between 90 and 120 seconds to a consultation time increased the chances of the patient receiving guidance regarding the adoption of an exercise programme by over 50%. The lack of evidence concerning the long-term health benefit may be hindering the advancement of physical activity promotion (Almeida *et al.,* 2005). The NQAF suggests physically active GPs make more successful referrals (NHS, 2001). However, many GPs believe clinical guidance with regard to lifestyle change such as exercise adoption is ineffective (Dutton *et al.,* 2007). It seems reasonable to accept that GPs do have the ability to influence patients' attitudes, given GPs' status coupled with evidence concerning persistent messages regarding adoption and maintenance of an exercise programme.

# Methods

## 2.1 Participants and measures

This investigation featured a two-stage methodological process featuring the distribution of REFERQUAL (Cock, Adams, Ibbetson and Baugh, 2006) to 3,117 clients of five selected PARSs and a series of five focus groups and five interviews held with key stakeholders. REFERQUAL is a 35-item service quality scale developed from Parasuraman *et al.*'s (1988) original SERVQUAL instrument modified and validated for the PARS setting (Cock *et al.,* 2006). The quantitative element of this investigation reports the GP-related dimension within this instrument alongside one further item concerning clients' EP-related expectations. These two-part items, featuring an expectation-minus-perception format are each measured on a seven point Likert scale. The investigation yielded a 32.85% response rate, totalling 1,024 respondents.

## 2.2 Procedures

Due to the difficulties in conceptualising success and failure within PARS, it is impossible to accurately select high and low performing schemes. Therefore, schemes were chosen depending on differences in key operational factors such as volume of referrals, length of time since establishment of scheme, range of exercise opportunities available and social deprivation statistics (Office for National Statistics, 2004). The social deprivation statistics indicate two relatively affluent areas, two underprivileged and one close to the national average.

REFERQUAL asks patients to self classify into one of five exhaustive and mutually exclusive groups. These are:

A. Referred clients who did not attend at all
B. Clients who started, but dropped out before completion
C. Clients attending, but had not completed the referral at the time of receiving the instrument.
D. Clients who completed the referral but did not continue exercising
E. Clients who are still exercising having completed referral

This study is delimited to include groups B-E. Very few schemes keep sufficiently accurate and extensive attendance data to allow a more reliable mechanism of adherence and retention. Gender and age are also collected within REFERQUAL. The predominant dimension of REFERQUAL in question features items which

consider clinicians' enthusiasm to the exercise referral procedure, patient perception of personal GP physical activity behaviours, knowledge of the benefits of physical activity and the regularity of such counselling. One further item of REFERQUAL is reported, relating to perceptions of EP knowledge of the benefits of physical activity to allow greater contextualisation through comparison with the GP item.

One client focus group session was conducted at each of the five sites. Participants were selected at random from those responding positively to the possibility of attending a focus group. Attendance at the focus groups ranged between three and seven participants and lasted between 60 and 75 minutes. One semi-structured, in-depth interview was conducted at each site with either the Scheme Organiser or senior EP. Each interview lasted between 60 and 75 minutes. Each interview and focus group was recorded on cassette and subsequently transcribed verbatim.

### 2.3 Analysis

All item scores were calculated in REFERQUAL's perception minus expectation format, yielding a score between +6 and -6. Scores of less than -1 are usually considered problematic (Cock *et al.,* 2006). Mean scores were analysed by cross tabulation with the demographic factors, utilising independent samples t-test or Mann-Whitney U, and simple analyses of variance (ANOVA) as appropriate. *Post-hoc* analysis was conducted using the Scheffé method.

Analysis of the qualitative data represented a confirmatory deductive framework of the issues established as part of the REFERQUAL instrument. Findings were themed and then cross-indexed to ensure each contribution was attributed to every relevant item (Pope, Ziebland and Mays, 2000). Data found not conforming to the REFERQUAL framework were considered inductively, allowing the creation of new streams of adherence-related issues within the PARS setting. These new streams will be reported alongside those REFERQUAL issues shown, via cross indexing, to impact upon these factors. Ethical approval was gained via the NHS North West Multi-centre Regional Ethics Committee (MREC). The confidentiality and anonymity of all participating subjects was assured and informed consent gathered. Only aggregated data are reported.

## Results and Discussion

### 3.1 GP Dimension Issues

Item GP1 focuses on GPs' enthusiasm towards the exercise referral process and reflects the critical importance of this factor in generating long term behaviour change (Taylor, Doust and Webborn, 1998). Analysis of GP1 by adherence group does not confirm concern raised by the literature relating to GP apathy towards PARS (Hardcastle and Taylor, 2001; Seefeldt *et al.,* 2002). None of the groups exceed the -1 level (see Table 1).

**Table 1: GP1 (GP Enthusiasm) Mean Score by Adherence Group**

| *Group* | *B* | *C* | *D* | *E* | *Totals/Means* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **GP1 Mean** | -0.87 | -0.56 | -0.74 | -0.78 | -0.75 |
| **N** | 225 | 174 | 143 | 288 | 830 |
| **SD** | 1.85 | 1.57 | 1.60 | 1.57 | 1.66 |

An ANOVA conducted by adherence group on GP1 demonstrated no significant differences ($F = 1.22$, $p = 0.30$). However, significant differences ($F = 5.50$, $p < 0.05$) were evident when analysing GP1 by age. *Post-hoc* tests reveal the 30-39 group (mean = -1.82 ± 1.89 – see Table 2) to be different from the 40-49 (-0.85), 50-59 (-0.61), 60-69 (-0.65) and 70-79 (-0.45) groups.

**Table 2: GP1 Mean by Age Group**

| *Age Group* | *00-19* | *20-29* | *30-39* | *40-49* | *50-59* | *60-69* | *70-79* | *80-89* | *Totals* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **GP1 Mean** | -1.15 | -1.08 | -1.82 | -0.85 | -0.61 | -0.65 | -0.45 | -0.89 | -0.77 |
| **N** | 13 | 40 | 71 | 112 | 233 | 222 | 114 | 9 | 814 |
| **SD** | 2.15 | 1.70 | 1.89 | 1.67 | 1.69 | 1.58 | 1.45 | 1.45 | 1.68 |

Factors which are commonly attributed to this age group such as working commitments and, to a lesser extent, lack of childcare facilities, are unsatisfactory explanations as these factors could equally be applied to the age group either side of 30-39. The qualitative data concerning item GP1 offer some further understanding:

*I went and demanded it from my GP, and they sort of think 'oh, you're a bit young for it', and you tend to think it's for the … over 50s. (Participant 0202)*

Patients perceiving that GPs consider PARSs largely for the older age groups may go some way to explaining these differences. However, the failure of *post-hoc* tests to demonstrate a significant difference between the 20-29 age group and any of the others casts doubt on this conclusion. However, the strongly phrased nature of the request for a referral from Participant 0202 ('demanded') confirms the consensus concerning the of lack proactive treatment:

*I had to battle to get my referral … when I asked my GP, he said 'I have no idea what you're talking about, see the practice nurse or make an appointment'. So I made an appointment, I had to come back another day … she said I'll find out about it and let you know, never did, so times go by and I thought 'I'll ring up and find out what's happening', 'Oh, you've got to come in and have an interview to find out whether you're ill enough to be referred to this programme of 12 weeks' or whatever. It was just their attitude was you're wasting our time. (Participant 0503)*

The overwhelming majority of participants revealed having to initiate discussion relating to exercise referral, although very few mirrored Participant 0503's struggle, reinforcing Hardcastle and Taylor's (2001) findings that knowledge of the existence of PARSs often comes from word of mouth. Such findings suggest NICE's (2006a) review, highlighting the lack of demonstrable long-term health benefits to be linked to underwhelming GP enthusiasm receives some support here.

Discussion above outlined GPs feeling insufficiently qualified to offer advice about the uptake of exercise, as a potential factor in this lack of a proactive approach (Seefeldt *et al.,* 2002; Spetch and Kolt, 2001). Item GP2 reveals the extent to which clients' expectations were met concerning perceived physical activity-related knowledge displayed by GPs. Analysis of GP2 by adherence group showed no significant differences ($F = 0.39$, $p = 0.76$). Neither the

overall mean (-0.49 ± 1.80) nor any of individual groups approached or exceeded the -1 level suggesting this issue does not have a major impact on adherence.

### 3.2 EP knowledge

Comparing the analysis of item A1 (EP knowledge of the benefits of physical activity) and GP2 by individual adherence groups allows comparison between the perception-expectation gap relating to GP and EP knowledge, of the benefits to health of physical activity. The importance of the professional training of those EPs directly involved in the referral process is well established (NHS, 2001). Examination of the overall scheme scores, whilst offering significant differences, ($F = 2.89$, $p < 0.05$) fails to determine any distinctions between the groups following *post-hoc* analysis. Schemes 3 (-0.78 ± 1.59) and 5 (-0.86 ± 1.43) are the poorest performing; however, even these do not drop below -1. Analysis by adherence group does reveal significant differences ($F = 6.88$, $p < 0.05$), *post-hoc* tests demonstrating Group E (mean = -0.37 ± 1.33) to be different from Groups B (-0.85 ± 1.59) and D (-0.90 ± 1.43). These differences, particularly that between Groups D and E, support Buckley *et al.*'s (1999) findings relating to the importance of EP knowledge and training on adherence and, furthermore, that overall service quality can be, at least in part, attributed to perceived instructor competence (Riddoch, Puig-Ribera and Cooper, 1998).

The qualitative data link this issue of EP competence with client self confidence:

*I don't think they inspire confidence … you go and obviously you feel a little bit vulnerable … or you're a bit concerned and these people don't seem to be able to answer the questions … I wouldn't trust them, one of those people that I met anyway, I wouldn't trust them to tell me what to do and know that I wasn't damaging my body. (Participant 0503)*

The majority of participants attributed this lack of confidence to the inability of EPs to differentiate between the various medical conditions from which clients' suffered. Furthermore, clients drew comfort from medical-related procedures such as blood pressure readings and the noting of medication usage. Participants were largely unsure of the level and extent of qualifications held by the instructors; however, a number of clients revealed the hierarchical perception that EP were:

*Not a member of a medical profession. (Participant 0506)*

Scheme Organisers were, on the whole, well aware of these difficulties

*The people who sit down and do the initial consultation … have the recognised qualification levels to do the induction process. I feel that the potential weakness … is the ones that they actually go and exercise side by side with, whether it's in the gym facility or whether it's in an over 50s class or a chair-based mobility work or in the pool for an Aquability session … and yes, I could possibly agree with the lack of specific knowledge. On the flip-side of that, there has to be a balance between the medical model and the non-medical community. This is a management, it's not treatment … it's definitely a non-medical model that we're going down.*
*(Scheme Organiser 3)*

This discussion reinforces Taylor's (2003) work regarding the status of the medical community exceeding that of the health and fitness industry and the impact of this on the participants' perceptions of the knowledge and competence of the instructors. Scheme Organiser 3's statement regarding the deliberate withdrawal from the 'medical model' towards behavioural management is inevitably due to the personnel available, but does not appear to represent the kind of shift desired or valued by clients.

The majority of Scheme Organisers and EPs believed the medical community had a responsibility to be involved in this dissemination

to give credence to the message of staff competence:

*The clients that come to me, I expect the hospital to have explained who they're coming to next and where they're going. Either from that or from the GP they should trust that they're being referred to somebody who knows what they're talking about. (Scheme Organiser 4)*

However, as demonstrated above, the message is clearly not being disseminated to clients. The responsibility of the medical community, especially the GP, is discussed below; however, other channels of dissemination and the improving of training and competence perceptions of participants' were also expressed by Scheme Organisers:

*In terms of their [EPs] ability to do the job, it shouldn't be a question. But that's something that needs to be broadcast by the industry really and that will be coming as well hopefully, people are starting to recognise that these are barriers, that everyone's hitting these brick walls, so they are starting to come down I think, with REPS and things like that. (Scheme Organiser 2)*

REPS is the Register for Exercise Professionals, established in 2000 in attempt to address the issue highlighted here, relating to competence within the industry (Register of Exercise Professionals, 2010). However, other Scheme Organisers were sceptical that registration with REPS represented value for money in terms of the professional standing it awarded the scheme. Furthermore, anecdotal evidence within the focus groups revealed none of the participants could name an industry organisation that would offer assurance of competence: none had heard of 'REPS'. Clearly, much further research is required into the credence of the EP community and the role of industry bodies in improving the status of the profession within client groups. Therefore, although these findings support Buckley *et al.*'s (1999) and Riddoch *et al.*'s (1998) findings regarding the link between training, competence and adherence; the effective dissemination of such information also requires much further research.

These results underline the importance of client perceptions of EP knowledge and also support NICE's (2006a) review, highlighting the importance of physical activity-related counselling. Items A1 and GP2 may help to account for the greater longitudinal impact such counselling can have compared with similar advice from EPs (NICE, 2006b). No significant differences were evident when analysing GP2 by age group ($F = 1.78$, $p = 0.09$).

### *3.3 Other GP-related issues*

Item GP3 concerned the relative influence a physically active GP could have on clients' decision to uptake and adhere to exercise and relates to guidance within the NQAF (NHS, 2001) proposing the two concepts to be linked. However, analysis of GP3 by adherence group revealed no significant differences ($F = 1.66$, $p = 0.17$). Furthermore, neither the overall mean ($-0.37 \pm 2.19$) or any of the adherence group's scores approached or exceeded the -1 level, suggesting clients are unconcerned whether the referring GP is active or not. No significant differences were evident when analysing GP3 by age group ($F = 1.58$, $p = 0.14$).

Item GP4 related to whether clients perceived GPs to be persistently reinforcing the physically active message relating to findings from Dutton *et al.,* (2007) that, without such constant prompting, consultation is ineffective. However, analysis by adherence group again failed to show significant differences ($F = 0.60$, $p = 0.62$), or demonstrate overall or individual mean scores approaching or exceeding the -1 level. Despite the majority of participants initiating discussion relating to the referral process, the failure to demonstrate significant differences is not merely due to low expectations, as evidenced by the high overall expectation mean for this item (6.09 ± 1.25). No significant differences were demonstrated when analysing any of the GP items by living status or gender. Analysis of the four items within the GP dimension demonstrates no significant differences between schemes (see Table 3).

**Table 3: GP Dimension Item ANOVAs analysed by Scheme**

| | *GP1* | *GP2* | *GP3* | *GP4* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **F** | 0.58 | 1.20 | 1.77 | 0.13 |
| **P** | 0.68 | 0.31 | 0.13 | 0.97 |

## Conclusions

Research outlining the importance of the GP within the exercise referral setting (Eakin *et al.,* 2007) is unquestionable, although the effect on adherence is less evident, as demonstrated by the lack of differences apparent between adherence groups. Patients did not perceive GPs to be apathetic towards PARS, although the schemes do not appear to be a priority. The previously reported benefits on uptake from physically active GPs, (McKenna *et al.,* 1998) is not supported and client satisfaction with regard to exercise-related knowledge and consistency of message is shown not to be merely the result of low expectation.

Clients' confidence was affected by perceptions of EP knowledge concerning the benefits of physical activity to health. This knowledge was confirmed to be of vital importance to adherence, illustrated by the stark contrasts between high and low adherers, as previously described by Riddoch *et al.,* (1998). Clients' conformance with Taylor's (2003) proposal of a hierarchy of perceived competence between medical and exercise communities underlines an inherent problem for PARS. Clients draw confidence from the procedures and knowledge of the medical community, and, whilst Scheme Organisers' focus on behaviour management is enforced, it does not appear to begin to bridge this perception gap. The revered status held by many family GPs (Hardcastle and Taylor, 2001), appears to be hindering, rather than aiding the pathway to a more active lifestyle. Exercise, particularly for older people, continues to demonstrate substantial negative associations, such as threat, vulnerability and harm (Hardcastle and Taylor, 2001). The future roles of both medical and exercise referral communities in establishing client confidence in relation to this aspect of service quality is assured, although the nature and function of both parties again requires substantial further research

### 4.1 Practice Implications

These findings reinforce the importance of the GP within the referral process, whilst also underlining the value of EPs' role. The roles of these two crucial players relate to Phase 4 and 6 respectively of Taylor's (2003) 'Framework for Promoting Physical Activity in Primary Care'. GPs' impact as 'reinforcing factors' is limited by numerous factors including time during consultation, attitude toward the referral process (Lawlor *et al.,* 2000) and lack of exercise-related knowledge. Taylor (2003) suggests consideration of all these factors requires those involved in the referral process to be actively involved in further training, the development of appropriate materials and feedback mechanisms. However, the lack of significant differences identified between the adherence groups and the relatively rare occurrences of particularly groups falling below the -1 level suggest the solution to the PARS adherence puzzle lies predominantly elsewhere. Future research investigating retention and adherence in PARSs should investigate the potential de-medicising of the PARS in addition to focussing within the networks of social support which also reveal insight into enhancing retention and adherence in the future.

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# An Evaluation of the Potential Use and Impact of Prezi, the Zooming Editor Software, as a Tool to Facilitate Learning in Higher Education.

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## Abstract

This research is a preliminary investigation into the effectiveness of the use of Prezi as a tool to facilitate learning. Prezi the zooming editor tool was officially launched in April 2009 (Prezi.com) and since then there has been limited research conducted in order to gain critical understandings of its effectiveness in the promotion of learning in the classroom in the context of Higher Education. Focus groups were conducted with second year undergraduate students who had experienced Prezi in the learning environment both as used by the lecturer and by students themselves in assessed presentations. A series of staff interviews were also carried out to investigate the potential of its use from the perspective of facilitators of learning. This publication also includes 3 supporting student accounts detailing initial thoughts and experiences of Prezi in Higher Education. The research incorporates both student and staff perspectives to assess the effectiveness and potential of Prezi as a learning tool and offers a preliminary insight into how to take the use of Prezi forward to better facilitate learning in the classroom

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## Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank all those who made this research possible. First and foremost, the students who volunteered their time and expertise to share their higher education experiences in the context of Prezi and beyond. Students are always at the centre of any research in Higher Education and it is hoped that this research has had a positive impact upon their Higher Education learning experience, as was the intention at the outset and throughout. A huge thank you is also extended to all the staff who took the time to offer their thoughts and experiences in relation to a number of Higher Education issues, by no means limited to their experience of Prezi.

Finally, extreme gratitude is extended to the unending and invaluable support and advice offered by peer learning group, peer learning group tutor and what can only be described as a plethora of work based support colleagues. There were many outcomes from this research and the creation of this learning community, composed of all those thanked above, was one of them. The formulation of this set of relationships is one that will continue to be a constant support and venue for knowledge exchange far beyond the 'end' of this project.

## Introduction

This research is a preliminary investigation into the effectiveness of the use of Prezi as a tool to facilitate learning. Prezi, the zooming editor tool, was officially launched in April 2009 (Prezi.com) and since then there has been limited research conducted to gain critical understandings of its effectiveness in the promotion of learning in the classroom in the context of Higher Education. A focus group was conducted with 6 second year undergraduate students in Humanities and Social Science who had experienced Prezi in the learning environment, both as used by the lecturer and by students themselves in assessed presentations. Furthermore, 3 staff interviews were carried out to investigate the potential of its use from the perspective of facilitators of learning. The research incorporates both student and staff perspectives to assess the effectiveness and potential of Prezi as a learning tool and offers a preliminary insight into how to take the use of Prezi forward to better facilitate learning in the classroom. This was done by the incorporation of literature and already established critical knowledge in Higher Education.

The relevance of this research lies in the current literature regarding the use of technology in Higher Education (HE). The omnipresent discussion of the role of technology in HE is evidenced by countless empirical research, whole journals dedicated to the subject (such as Journal of Computer Assisted learning or JCAL) and the investment of huge sums of money into Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in universities annually (Selwyn, 2007). No matter where you lie amongst the spectrum of feeling towards the role of ICT in HE; from being a stark critic to the other extreme belief that HE sectors must *'transform or die'* (Bates, 2004 cited in: Selwyn, 2007: 83), undoubtedly understanding the role of ICT in the HE context is essential for any modern day HE facilitators of learning. This research seeks to address the use of one such emerging technology, Prezi.

The aim of this research was to evaluate the potential use and impact of Prezi, the zooming editor software, as a tool to facilitate learning. The ultimate aim is to transform research into educational practice as well as meeting Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) and Higher Education Academy (HEA) values making this *design research* (Reeve *et al*, 2005) as opposed to doing research 'for the sake of doing research' as it is the belief of the authors that relevance in research is imperative (Gallo, 2011).

## Methodology

Methodological considerations are of the upmost importance as *'the choice of research methods affects the veracity of the findings'* (Butt, 2010:103). In this instance the approach chosen was a basic interpretative qualitative case study as the goal was a modest attempt to *'arrive at a detailed description and understanding of an entity'* (Ary *et al*, 2009: 29) whilst ensuring that the entity was set in the context of broader already established HE knowledge to provoke thought in other educational research ambassadors. A qualitative approach such as this one was appropriate in choice as the author sought to understand *'the world or experience of another'* (Ary *et al*, 2009: 29) in this case both students and staff. The preliminary and small scale case study approach was also applicable in terms of the resources available to the authors and the teaching experience of one of the authors who teaches a small cohort of around 40 students per year group. Furthermore, the specific technology of Prezi is an emerging one and only used by a relatively small amount of staff at the institution at the time of conducting research.

Criteria selection for participants is an important consideration (McQueen & Knussen, 2002; Ary *et al*, 2009). Students who had experienced Prezi used both by the lecturer and themselves in assessed presentations were invited to take part

in the research as the authors wished to gain an understanding of the impact value of Prezi from various viewpoints. Staff invited to interview were those who had either used Prezi or were deeply involved in learning technology implementation across the institution. Focus groups and interviews were chosen as the main data collection strategies. One focus group of 6 students (3 male and 3 female) and 3 staff interviews were conducted. Peer learning group feedback meant that the original higher numbers of intended focus groups and interviews were lowered to these numbers as, although the original intention was to carry out more, it was agreed that this was beyond the scope of the authors given resources available. Finally, this publication also includes 3 supporting insightful and personal student accounts detailing initial thoughts and experiences of Prezi in Higher Education.

There is dividing opinion over the focus group as to whether it is an informant to a project before the 'real' data collection takes place or whether it is the data collection method itself (McQueen & Knussen, 2002). The focus group was chosen as the actual data collection method in this instance (albeit the research itself was preliminary overall) for 2 reasons. Firstly, discussion in focus groups *'can be free-flowing or controlled, but usually under the guidance of a moderator or facilitator'* '(McQueen & Knussen, 2002: 90) this allowed the researcher to apply a semi-structured approach and ask a simple set of questions allowing discussion to free-flow so that participants could talk about the issues important to them. This also allowed the researcher to bring the discussion back to the issue at hand when necessary. Furthermore, *'as an exploratory instrument focus groups are superb sources of information, allowing a skilled researcher excellent insight to the values, beliefs, fears and aspirations that comprise most attitudes'* (McQueen & Knussen, 2002: 90) this allowed the researcher to gain valuable insight into the key and relevant issues. Focus groups were also chosen because it allowed the students to have a peer discussion about their own learning experiences, which was appreciated by the participants and was something the students expressed they *'would like more of'*. Both focus groups and interviews were recorded to avoid unsystematic collection of data as is a potential unwanted outcome of focus groups with so many speakers at once (McQueen & Knussen, 2002).

Interviews in qualitative research tend to be conducted in a semi-structured format (McQueen & Knussen, 2002) so there was movement to diversify into areas important to the interviewee but so the interviewer could also ensure the relevant focal points for discussion were covered. In both focus groups and interviews consideration has to be given to the power relations in those situations. Emphasis on equality is important (McQueen & Knussen, 2002) and a semi-structured format allowed for an atmosphere conducive to allowing the participants to feel comfortable asking the interviewer questions and in all cases the interviewer explicitly asked if there were any questions the participants would like to ask of the researcher.

Ethical considerations are of the utmost importance and researchers must avoid becoming 'technicians' by solely focussing on successful methodological choices and analysis with a disregard for those involved (Silverman, 2006). Whilst this research did not deal with what might be 'classically' considered as a highly sensitive issue, compared to say other social science research involving crime or violence as an example, nevertheless the student population is a vulnerable one and poorly ethically executed research can have a *'direct impact on students schooling experiences and educational opportunities'* (Howe & Moses, 1999: 56). The researcher always has an obligation to protect participants and similarly the lecturer has an obligation to protect the student cohort and to *'avoid actions such as exploitation and discrimination that detract from student development'* (Beaty, 1997:34). Informed consent for all participants is an integral part of all research (Howe & Moses, 1999) regardless of the discipline in which the study is conducted. Informed consent was obtained in all instances of

data collection. This was done by advanced dissemination of an information for participants document and consent form. The consent form for both staff and students included; declaration of the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered, declaration that all the information about the study had been read and understood, that participation was voluntary and participants had the right to withdraw at any time and assurance of anonymity for all participants. Peer learning group feedback was taken onboard and an extra addition was added to the original consent form for students to include assurance that the research was no way linked to or had any impact on the participants assessment or undergraduate course[1].

*It is noted that a limitation of this research is that student participants may have tended to address positive impacts of Prezi because during the data collection the researcher was also the lecturer and students may have not wished to express negatives related to the lecturers teaching directly to the lecturer. In an attempt to rectify this problem students were also made aware that they may submit anonymous comments to a third party*

## Findings

***How we learn***

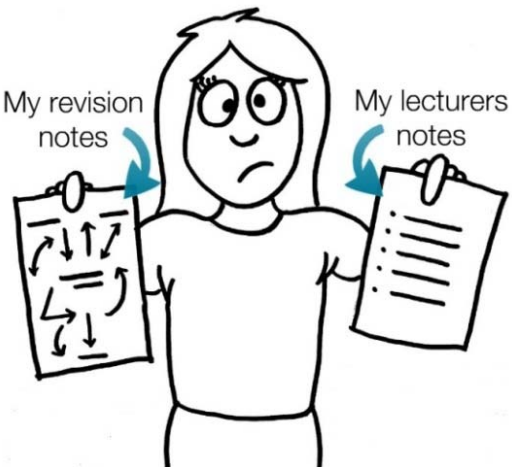


Image reference: authors own Fletcher (2011)

*'A lot of people say that bullet points are fine but people learn more from stuff like mind maps and Prezi is more like a mind map whereas PowerPoint can often be more like a list of bullet points, people learn easier when they can see the whole thing.'*

(Extract from student focus group)

*"Very few ways in which we think and speak in general daily discourse are in that very tight linear structure that PowerPoint follows. I'm struck by the fact that about 90% of students are bringing in notes in forms that are precisely not in a PowerPoint kind of format instead they are bringing in spider diagrams and mind maps."*

(Extract from a staff interview)

One thing that is for certain is that in the age of fast evolving technology it is now time to move beyond studies of basic explorations of learning that involve classic words Vs pictures analysis (such as Bartsch & Cobern, 2003) to new evaluations of the multidimensional possibilities of learning that technology brings. During both the focus group and interviews there was an alignment in the thinking of both students and staff where both felt the benefit of Prezis ability to represent material in a non linear format. This finding is supported by Rockinson-Szapkiw (2011: 2) who found that in Prezi, '*using the size features the instructor demonstrates how some constructs are integrated within other constructs and the hierarchy of concepts.'* Effective use of Prezi has the ability to combat the way PowerPoint, *'locks presenters into a linear, slide-by-slide format that discourages free association and creative thinking'* (Simons, 2005: 5 cited in: Craig & Amernic, 2006: 154). Similar thoughts can be found in Gabriel (2008). The limited literature that can be found with regards to Prezi all express similar findings to this research such as Adams (2006: 389) who tells us, *'it is suggested PowerPoint supports a cognitive and pedagogical style inconsistent with both the development of higher analytical thinking skills and the acquisition of rich narrative and interpretive understanding'*. One member of staff expressed that not only did

they themselves feel like Prezi gave them the tools to be able to transmit their lecture material effectively but that the feedback from their students was that they felt they were *'actually getting a lecture'* (Staff interview, anon). Furthermore, one member of staff felt that, *'there's a sense of students being aware that there's something I've got to go into class for - to make sense of the Prezi presentation'* (Staff interview, anon) and that in this sense Prezi helped combat the idea of students *'looking upon slides as lecture notes and as an alternative to attending'* (Staff interview, anon).

## Boredom in the classroom and attendance


Image reference: authors own Fletcher (2011)

*'You tend to get bored with PowerPoint. At school they use PowerPoint whereas Prezi because it is more interactive it engages your attention, you kind of focus more and you want to look at it and you want to learn from it.'*

(Extract from student focus group)

*'The sense that one gets from speaking to a lot of students is that many of them look upon slides as lecture notes and as an alternative to attending. You get students not attending and saying I don't need to attend because I have got the PowerPoint slides or I'm not going to attend the next 4 weeks because I'm going to be in Magaluf but it's quite alright because I'll get the PowerPoint slides off BlackBoard.'*

(Extract from a staff interview)

It is well documented that boredom in the classroom environment is a huge issue in higher education, with serious detrimental consequences for student learning and poor use of PowerPoint has been found to be a major offender (Mann & Robinson, 2009). Boredom is arguably linked to students new role as consumers resulting in systems of *'perpetual consumption and continuous development'* (Fisher, 2009: 23) but no matter the larger structural societal issues that can be attributed to it, it nonetheless remains a very real and present issue. Prezi does in some way combat this largely for the reasons outlined in the section above and its ability to present material in a more accessible way. Students did however express a concern that Prezi may be of novelty value and they might feel different about Prezi if it was used constantly. With an approximate human attention span of up to 20 minutes and often less (Davies, 2003; Bunce *et al*, 2010) Prezi can play an effective role but only as part of a variety of teaching methods alongside things such as minute long breathers, interactive handouts, peer learning, division of lectures into portions, activities, quick tests and student led activities (Davies, 2003). One piece of software and technology is never going to be a one fix solution especially as some peoples experiences have been that of the removal of technology all together having a positive impact on boredom levels (Young, 2009).

## Collaboration

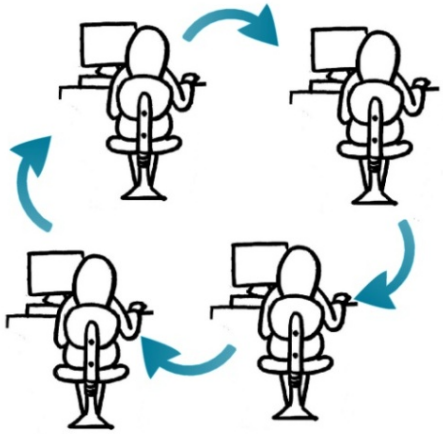

Image reference: authors own Fletcher (2011)

*"Actually I added [name removed] to it and you can add to it at the same time can't you? So one of us clicked and one of us moved it to the next slide."*

*"Actually that is quite useful you can be on Facebook chat can't you? and both of you on the presentation at the same time so you don't have to be together to edit it."*

*"You get little figures as we were all doing it at the same time it was like [name removed] is here and [name removed] is here."*

(Extract from student focus group)

The importance of online student collaboration for learning (e.g. wikis as an example) has been documented as an advantageous activity that can foster learning communities when executed effectively (Swan, 2002; Kelly *et al*, 2010; Biasutti, 2011; Scherling, 2011). Prezis ability for online collaboration and distance learning was a feature that the students showed particular appreciation for, particularly for group assessment where it was often difficult for students to find time to *physically* meet together due to their own work life balance. This is reflected in Perron & Stearns (2010) who found this to be one of Prezis most valuable features too. The potential use of this feature is extensive as *'it also presents a unique opportunity for students in different classrooms, schools, cities, or countries to collaborate on a Prezi.'* (Gallo, 2011: 23).

## 'Prezi sickness'

Image reference: authors own Fletcher (2011)

*'It does get a bit dizzy.'*

(Extract from student focus group)

*'There have been reports over the past 2 years of Prezi sickness, have you heard of it? There are a lot of people going 'you know what I need to try this Prezi' and in playing about with it, it just ends up being zoom, zoom, zoom, zoom, zoom and as a viewer you're not getting the impact of the presentation.'*

(Extract from a staff interview)

Depending on the functionalities used in Prezi such as speed, timing, zoom options and so on feelings of sickness have been expressed. The main concern with this is with regards to disability particularly visual impairment and disabilities such as epilepsy. At the time of writing Prezi.com held no readily available disability guidelines or equal opportunities statement and the authors has not received a response from the Prezi team after submitting a written request for disability guidance. There were no disclosed disabilities in the student group who participated.

The authors sought to interview a disability advisor in their place of work but they were unavailable at the time at which this research was conducted. The authors expresses regret that this part of the research was not fulfilled due to unavoidable circumstances but the authors are committed to investigating Prezi in the future in terms of its compliance with QAA (1999) section 3 disability guidelines. However, an ethical application and research proposal to focus specifically on Prezi and disability is now currently in progress.

## *Students' reflections on their own learning*


Image reference: authors own Fletcher (2011)

*'I never thought I was that type of learner really until I used Prezi, but like thinking about it now and thinking about the one that we did, I can remember it better than I remember the stuff that I write down, so maybe I am more of a visual learner and I just never really realised it.'*

(Extract from student focus group)

The quote taken from the student focus group above is a very powerful one and it, and other quotes like it from student participants, has implications that are twofold. Firstly, the direct effect that Prezi had on student learning in terms of getting students to think about the ways they learn, what works for them and indeed different ways of learning, perhaps even the notion of *learning to learn*. Since the focus group the participants have shown a continued interest in the notion and concept of learning, opening dialogue with fellow students and teaching staff. The author has directly observed an increased confidence in those who participated. Since the focus group participants have more often voiced their concerns, interests and what works for them in their learning environment and key qualities such as these are an *'important educational aim'* (Stables, 2003: 107) and output of the research. Secondly, in many instances the pedagogic research imagination often assesses effective teaching *'largely in terms of short term output measurements, and the theoretical'* (Stables, 2003: 107). This trend means that frequently other positive impacts of pedagogic research go unnoticed. The philosophical works of Rom Harré have helped highlight the potential for identity development in classroom activities (Stables, 2003) and the same can be said of such research projects. Research in education can and should play a role in identity development equipping students to reflect on their own learning and the subsequent gains from this in their own learning practice. There is not enough scope here in this piece to develop these thoughts to their fullest extent but the authors do wish in the future to explore the role of research and the longer term often 'unexpected' benefits of pedagogic research.

### Case Study One: Anon Student account

I was first introduced to Prezi during a lecture in the second year of my undergraduate course and found it to be a lot more engaging than the usual PowerPoint that most lecturers use. The issues raised in the presentation seemed to sink in more than issues raised in previous PowerPoint presentations. This was reaffirmed later on in the year when my best exam result was on the subject of the lecture in which Prezi was used. As a student, it can sometimes be challenging giving the lecturer your full attention during a two hour

lecture especially if it's a topic you do not necessarily agree with or have an interest in, so alternative methods of teaching such as Prezi are useful to fully engage students. In my opinion, Prezi sparks debate within the class as the snapshots are interactive and encourage more interaction amongst students.

After observing how Prezi engaged the class and encouraged debate two other students and I decided to use Prezi for a presentation to present a research idea to the rest of the course during the same module. As a student a Prezi education account is available free with most of the same benefits and features as the normal Prezi that other users have to pay for. After a quick training session, from the same tutor who delivered the Prezi presentation, on the basics of how to sign up and use Prezi we got started and after a bit of trial and error I found it relatively easy to use. It was especially useful for a group project, as we could all be editing different parts of the presentation at the same time, and see what the other group members were doing which meant that the workload was evenly distributed. Furthermore we did not have to all be in the library all the time and did not have to spend time sending work backwards and forwards to each other. In my opinion creating a Prezi is more time consuming than PowerPoint however, it meant that when it came to delivering the presentation we were all fairly well educated in our topic due to the amount of time we had spent preparing the presentation. As a result the group felt more confident in speaking to a large group of people and delivering the presentation. Prezi seemed to keep the other students' attention, and on top of getting all of the information on the Prezi that we wanted to get across, it was also interactive and something a bit different from the usual PowerPoint. I also learnt from that presentation, after watching some others, that Prezi does need a bit of care when setting up pathways and 'spins' because if rushed, things can be zoomed in on upside down or the wrong way which detracts from the knowledge a person has on the a topic and hinders the presenters ability to get their point across if the audience is distracted by a mistake in the presentation.

I have also used Prezi during revision, in two ways. Firstly, I find it is a good way of bringing your mind maps and spider diagrams to life as personally my style of revision is to get an A3 sheet of paper, lots of coloured pens and connect my points. Apart from being more practical by keeping all of my ideas in one place on Prezi, it also means I can add to it as I go along. Secondly, there are some excellent presentations available online on Prezi.com, which have been made by other people and although they have to be read with caution as they may not be academically referenced they are really interesting for researching a point.

There are a few downsides to using Prezi, the first being that I wouldn't use it all the time for presentations as it is quite time consuming and you have to be in the right frame of mind to visualize how it is going to look when it is finished. I also found that sometimes, either due to technical problems on behalf of Prezi or problems with the internet connection where I was it could run quite slow which can be frustrating when trying to finish a presentation. Unlike PowerPoint, which is not internet based, Prezi doesn't have that safety of knowing that even if the internet crashes you can still carry on with your work.

In my opinion, Prezi is a really useful tool to facilitate learning as it is something different and engages students like myself in a really interactive way. I do feel however that it should be used sparingly alongside other teaching methods such as seminars, tutorials and PowerPoint presentations otherwise it will just turn into PowerPoint, which students can find a bit monotonous. I feel that Prezi highlights the need for lecturers to use a variety of teaching methods to keep students interested and passionate about their subject, and I feel that, alongside other interesting sessions I have been to throughout my time at University, the sessions that used Prezi certainly did that.

### Case Study Two: Anon Student account

Prezi was first introduced to me during the second year of my undergraduate course in late 2010. I had no idea what Prezi was and I really wasn't expecting much from it as every other lecturer I've had uses Microsoft PowerPoint. However I instantly realised that Prezi was something to take notice of and not ignore just because I was used to PowerPoint. Prezi captured and engaged my attention more than PowerPoint does and as a result I will never forget that particular lecture.

I regularly use PowerPoint as a presentation tool and I have done since I was in secondary school. I was taught to use PowerPoint for this purpose and to my knowledge there has never been any other programme to use instead of it. Since being taught how to use Prezi I have not used PowerPoint. Not only do I enjoy watching a Prezi, I enjoy designing them. I feel that you can do a lot more with Prezi and that the audience is more engaged in what you are trying to tell them. Prezi is a zooming editor tool and has a lot more interesting features than PowerPoint has. One of my favourite features of Prezi is the way you can zoom in and out and set out pathways from one point to another. It flows better and you can go from one point to another much easier than going from slide to slide on PowerPoint. It is similar to PowerPoint in that it has frames instead of slides and you can upload pictures, videos and hyperlinks. However to me Prezi is much more engaging and seems to keep my attention longer in the classroom.

At first to me Prezi was just a new and better version of PowerPoint and I did use it on several occasions in university to present my work. I didn't really think about the potential that it has in facilitating learning until I was approached by a staff member to investigate the effectiveness and potential of Prezi as a tool to facilitate learning. It was brought to my attention that Prezi could be used by teachers in the classroom to facilitate learning and not just used as a presentation tool. From using Prezi I found that it was more interactive and engaged your attention compared to PowerPoint where you just go from one slide to the next. The advantages of Prezi are that you can design it so that you can zoom in and spin from one piece of information to the next. You can embed videos and pictures but hide them behind something else so they don't take up a lot of room. Prezi can be used in a way that will keep students attention and give them a chance to interact with what they are being taught.

One of the disadvantages of Prezi is that it is significantly more difficult to use. The design of a Prezi and mapping out the pathways took a lot of time and patience compared to designing a PowerPoint. Unless you are a Prezi expert it will take some time to perfect designing one. Also some of the features are quite limited such as the use of colour and shapes compared to PowerPoint which you are able to change text and background colour and use different shapes for text boxes. This isn't a major disadvantage but it has been noticed. Another disadvantage is that it is an internet based programme unlike PowerPoint which comes with Microsoft Office. Prezi is available to anyone for free but they must have the internet to access it.

The one thing that I have constantly kept in my mind when thinking about Prezi is that it was only developed in 2009 so it is still very new and it will take time to improve on its imperfections. I am sure that over time it will improve and it will rival PowerPoint as a presentation tool and hopefully be recognised as a tool to facilitate learning.

### Case Study Three: Anon Student account

I have approximately one year's experience of working with Prezi both as a viewer of presentations as well as a presenter. Whilst the vast majority of my university lectures are still presented via PowerPoint, Prezi is used on occasions. This puts me in an ideal position to comment on the effectiveness of both mediums as tools to facilitate my learning as an individual. The first thing that struck me about Prezi on the first occasion I saw it, was its difference to PowerPoint. The information was exactly the same as it would have been if it had been presented on PowerPoint; however I felt that I was able to retain it much more easily. I felt that Prezi with its zooming and spinning functionality was much more visual and exciting to view than PowerPoint. It held my attention and engaged me in a way that PowerPoint often fails to do. What's more, many of my classmates felt the same when we reflected on it afterwards. I also really enjoyed the fact that the viewer can see the entire content of the presentation in one view, which helps them to see where the presentation is going. Before my first experience of Prezi I had never considered myself to be a visual learner, however I did find that the information that was presented via Prezi was easy to retain. Had the lecture been presented via PowerPoint I may have found the same thing. It may well be that I just connected with the content of the presentation. Alas, I'll never know.

Since my initial experience of Prezi, I have largely found the effects to be the same, albeit at different levels. I feel that the way Prezi is used is very important in determining how well the information is retained along with other factors such as inclusion of in-class activities, discussion, style of lecturer and my interest in the topic. While Prezi can be used to produce linear PowerPoint-style presentations, I believe it works much better when a range of the functions are used as it maintains my attention much more when used in this way. The fact that I have connected so well with the visual style of Prezi has surprised me as I didn't see myself as a visual learner and as a result, I've now started to use mind maps and spider diagrams in my note taking. It has also encouraged me to try new mediums of research such as web pages and videos. I find that this overall variety in my work has led me to enjoy it much more which I believe has a positive impact on the overall quality of my work.

As well as viewing Prezi presentations in class, I have had some experience of preparing a Prezi as part of a group and presenting to a small audience. All members of our four-strong group agreed that Prezi was easy to use once the basics were grasped. An easy to follow tutorial is included on the website which we found to be extremely useful. It is easy to put plenty of information onto a Prezi presentation without drowning the viewer's with too much at a time. We also agreed that preparing a Prezi is more fun than preparing a PowerPoint presentation, although this could be a case of us enjoying the novelty of doing something slightly different to what we're used to. The only way to really answer this question effectively is to do many more Prezi presentations and then consider this question.

An interesting function that is available on Prezi is the collaboration between several authors can be done without the need to be in the same location. We worked on Prezi as a group, but we were all in different locations. Whilst one author is working, another can see them represented by a small icon on screen. Communication can be done via instant messaging or social network sites. In the 21st century, when people have busy lives and it can be difficult to arrange a convenient meeting time for all members of a group, this function is extremely welcome. When it comes to actually presenting a Prezi to an audience, I found that it was not really too dissimilar to PowerPoint. The presenter still stands and presents and expands on the information on screen. I did notice that the audience seemed to enjoy the presentation which gives the presenter more energy. The main key to presenting is to ensure that the Prezi is correctly prepared and the pathway between zooms is tested. If this is done correctly, the presenter can concentrate on speaking without having to worry about the

technology. It really is as simple as clicking a mouse!

In conclusion, Prezi has definitely added something to my learning at university. PowerPoint continues to have its merits such as usability and easy access. Prezi brings some variety and provides options for students when it comes to presenting. I firmly believe that there is a place for both of them as well as new competitors as variety is very important to learning.

## Conclusion of findings

*'It's like the way we remember everything today in today's class when we all went into town, I think you have got to have loads of different things, like all the time because you get bored sitting there listening to someone for 2 hours.'*

(Extract from student focus group)

*'I'm giving you questions now but if you are going to use Prezi and try to assess the effectiveness then you really need to go back and look at whether the lecture is actually effective at encouraging and effectively transmitting knowledge.'*

(Extract from a staff interview)

One important conclusion that can be drawn from this research is its context in what we already know in Higher Education; the importance of blended learning. Whilst Prezi has its own individual merits and goes some way to solve the linear problems associated with PowerPoint it is not a solution in its own right. It can however make a massively positive contribution to our approach to blended learning which has been shown to have many benefits (Mitchell & Forer, 2010; Ituma, 2011) and to be the most effective learning approach in one of the largest meta-analysis studies ever conducted (US Department of education, 2010).

## Dissemination of findings

Pedagogic research is often criticised for *'poor dissemination of findings'* and *'inaccessibility'* (Butt, 2010: 104). Whilst this project is not a large nationally funded project, to which most of the criticism above refers to, efforts have been made here to devise an effective strategy for the dissemination of the findings so that any potential impact value of this research is recognised.

The findings from this research were presented, by all the authors of this article, at the LJMU Learning and Teaching conference 2011. It is proposed that the authors design a format for a rigorous collection of feedback from this conference presentation to be collected from delegates, co-presenters alongside feedback from this submission from peer learning group, peer learning group tutor and personal reflections in order to inform a submission to an appropriate peer reviewed journal. A version of this submission will also be agreed with the School of Humanities and Social Sciences and made available to all staff via the learning technology community site on BlackBoard (VLE). The authors also seeks to repeat the research investigation, with changes based on the reflections outlined above, building upon the foundations of this preliminary research project, in order to obtain longitudinal data to provide a more robust set of findings. This will also allow for the continuation of working with students as partners in research (Hackett, 2009) and contribute to research led teaching which is a priority for the authors in the context of their workplace/place of study.

## Final reflections

Pedagogic research has arguably been subject to a variety of criticism, the consequence of which is that it is often ignored by important actors/stakeholders in the education system such as teachers and politicians, often due to the belief of its lack of relevance to 'real life' problems actually experienced at the 'classroom level' (Butt, 2010). The lack of time and resources available that made this project extremely modest in scale is arguably one of its strongest assets and was embedded in a real life education setting giving it a relevance and credibility that often eludes larger scale projects. The authors already established relationship with the students and staff who participated in the research was acknowledged and it is understood that notions of subjectivity when appropriately acknowledged and addressed are far from detrimental to the aim of the project and instead can contribute towards emotionally intelligent research (Becker, 1967; Bennett, 2004).

The initial enquiry was largely geared towards the investigation of practical questions however, a number of theoretical considerations emerged throughout. Empirically based research in education suggests that *'student satisfaction responses are influenced by a range of factors unrelated to the quality of teaching and effective learning'* (Maynard & Milsom, 2010: 34). In the same way that Maynard and Milsom (2010) ask *'Great teachers: how will we know them?'* it could be asked here *'Great technology: How will we know it?'* Does the student cohort evaluation of Prezi in the classroom exhibit similarities to the evaluation of the lecturer? Are the expressed feelings about the use of Prezi as an effective instrument in the facilitation of learning linked more to factors such as grades, perceived leniency of the lecturer etc. rather than the intrinsic value of the technology itself? This is further complicated by the fact that the technology is highly reliant on the lecturer who commands the technology and is ultimately responsible for its 'ability'.

The above are two examples of the infinite possible considerations and reflections that can be made of this project. Moon (2001: 1) tells us that *'we reflect on things for which there is not an obvious or immediate solution'* the authors acknowledge that whilst not all potential HE issues have been addressed here, they did not have to be and what has been accomplished here still has validity in its rigor and criticality. The authors feel a sense of success in going beyond *'working with meaning'* to *'transformative learning'* whereby not only does the project result in making connections and linking ideas but has transformed the authors current understandings via a reflective process (Moon, 2001; 2005).

The approach of the authors to 'teaching' has tended to be more that of a facilitator of learning; placing the student at the centre and the teachers role as providing help and guidance to support learning. It is the authors attempt to *'accommodate the experience, motives, personality and objectives of the learner'* (Fox, 1983: 162) which it is felt is also reflected in this research. *'The overriding responsibility of the teacher is to contribute to the intellectual development of the student'* (Beaty, 1997: 34) which the authors feel has been accomplished via the outcome of students reflecting on their own learning.

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# A multi-disciplinary approach to a case study of a University dance student.

**Leaver, F.**

## Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine one participant, introducing where appropriate intervention strategies to their training regime and lifestyle. The approach to be taken is a multi-disciplinary one, which 'allows a phenomenon to be examined from the varying perspectives of several different disciplines providing a much richer understanding of its underlying mechanisms and applications (Thomas and Nelson, 1996, p124-5). Giving some context to the dance science genre, the world in which the dancer inhabits is broadening and as Angio et al state 'dance performance depends on a large number of technical, medical, psychological, nutritional, economic, environmental and physiological elements' (2009,p475). In dance it seems that there is a lack of relationship between skill and the physical elements of training. Wyon et al state that an acknowledgement between these two is well accepted within the sports world, but is still relatively new to dance (2007,p389). They conclude that up to now "The main focus of intervention programs in dance companies has been on gentle or corrective exercise formats, such as Pilates and gyrotonics, which do not generally adhere to the overload principles characterised in sport intervention strategies…" (ibid). It is important in a multi-disciplinary approach to consider the psychological aspects of a dancer and as Hamilton, Solomon and Solomon say 'the very qualities that make them outstanding in dance can also impede their ability to acknowledge psychological problems' (2006,p44). It is necessary to consider a holistic view of the dancer, acknowledging that the physiological and psychological aspects are closely connected with often one affecting the other.

This study has a two aims; firstly to analysis a range of data from one dance student within a multi-disciplinary framework and secondly where appropriate suggest **possible** intervention strategies in relation to the data findings.

## Methodology

A mixed method approach was adopted, which is appropriate for a study of a multi-disciplinary nature. The aim was to collect both statistical facts as well as qualitative answers which allows for the words of the participant themselves. This is important as to ignore the goals of the participant involved would reduce the value of any intervention strategy. The participant is a male university dance student, eighteen years of age, height 175cm and weight 65kilogrammes.

A variety of existing data was utilised, including a series of fitness tests and a week long food diary, from which three days, including two working days and one rest day were analysed further using the website weightlossresources.co.uk.

The participant took part in the dance aerobic fitness test (DAFT) (Redding and Wyon,2003), which was conducted by the researcher Observations of technique classes were taken by the researcher using module criteria and photos were taken of both a passive and active stretch in a side extension. The participant completed a performance profile as well as the Competitive State Anxiety Inventory-2.Qualitatively the student was given a short interview in which he gave a short, medium and long term goal.

## Results

Data from the class observations included '*Flexibility in general needs some attention especially in the hip and hamstring areas* ' (2010). The photos of the participant in a side extension
showed an angle of 95 degrees in an active extension and 135degrees in a passive stretch, demonstrating a difference of 40 degrees between the active and passive stretch.
The scoring of excellent to very poor within the fitness test results were taken from the website brianmac.co.uk as chosen and used by the sports team and the following data was collected

| | |
|---|---|
| Resting heart rate | 61 (excellent) |
| BMI | 21.1 (good) |
| Body fat | 18.1 (average) |
| Waist to hip ratio | 0.91 (good) |
| Sit to reach test | 26 (excellent) |
| Grip test | 37 (very poor) |
| Peak flow lung test | 518 (average) |
| Standing board jump | 57 (excellent) |
| Ruler drop | 9cm (good) |
| Multi-stage abdominal curl | 1.3mins (very poor) |
| Press up modified | 20 (poor to very poor) |
| Cooper run test | 2117 (poor) |
| Illinois run | 18.4 (average) |

Performance Profile: As stated in the methodology the student completed a performance profile, listing the qualities or skills he felt were important, giving a mark out of ten to their importance and then a mark out of ten as to his own level currently with that quality or skill. This profile is important as it sets the framework for this multi-disciplinary analysis and gives directionality to an intervention strategy

| **Quality** | **Importance** | **Importance in relation to me** |
|---|---|---|
| Clarity or body line | 10 | 6 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Presence | 10 | 7 |
| Balance | 10 | 8 |
| Flexibility | 9 | 5 |
| Stamina | 10 | 7 |
| Musicality | 10 | 7 |
| Connection with audience | 10 | 7 |
| Group connection | 10 | 7 |
| Embodiment | 10 | 8 |
| Focus | 10 | 8 |
| Agility | 8 | 9 |
| Strength | 8 | 7 |
| Timing | 10 | 7 |
| Spatial awareness | 10 | 5 |

In relation to the food diary the three days analysed were in relation to percentage intake of carbohydrates, fats and protein

| **Recommended % for a dancer's diet (Koutedakis, 1999)** | **Monday** | **Wednesday** | **Saturday** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Carbohydrates 55% | 32% | 41.1% | 42.5% |
| Proteins 15% | 16.5% | 13.9% | 14.7% |
| Fats 30% | 51.5 | 44.9 | 42.8% |
| Recommended calorific intake for someone wishing to gain weight (weightlossresources.co.uk) | 2747 | 2747 | 2747 |
| Actual calories consumed | 2042 | 1183 | 2370 |

From the psychological tests his short term goal was to improve his appearance/physique and put on weight. The medium term goal was to get involved in projects and professional work, with the long term aim to be in a professional company or to start his own company. In the

CSAI-2 test his intensity scores were 19 for cognitive anxiety, 12 for somatic anxiety and 26 for self confidence. Intensity scores range from 9 to 36, with low scores indicating low anxiety intensity and high scores high anxiety intensity. Direction scores range from -27 indicating debilitative interpretation of the anxiety intensity scores, to +27 indicating facilitative interpretation of anxiety intensity scores. His direction scores were accordingly 23, 21 and 13 and so all in the positive range indicating a facilitative interpretation.

## Discussion

The results will now be discussed in more detail with some areas overlapping both in relation to available literature and an intervention strategy. Looking first at the performance profile and specifically flexibility in which he gave himself 5/10, strength which he gave a score of 7 although felt it only rated as an 8 in terms of importance and stamina to which he scored himself 7. These profile scores by the participant tie in with both results from the fitness tests as well as researcher observations.

### Flexibility

Although gaining an excellent score of 26 in the sit and reach test, it is acceptable that a dancer would achieve such a score, but both his performance profile and researcher observations show that flexibility could be improved. Flexibility itself is difficult to define because as Da Silva and Bonorino say '… it involves several concepts of different areas, representing conflicting situations when considered in a clinical, athletic or pedagogical extent' (2008, p49).

Clippinger adds

'*many dancers achieve a much greater range passively than they can achieve actively, especially in movements such as slow front extensions in which momentum cannot be of much help. In such cases, the hamstrings are likely not the primary limiting constraint, and focus should move to strengthening the hip flexors (illiopsoas emphasis) and optimising technique. (2007,p486).*

Deighan adds 'An important issue for dancers in terms of performance and joint stability, but which is not often assessed, is the passive-to-active ROM ration, with higher values indicating lower joint stability or deficit in muscular strength' (2005,p16). In relation to extensions to the side Clippinger suggests 'strengthening the hip flexors and developing greater articulation of the iliopsoas…' (2007,p204). For the participant an intervention strategy is recommended for his flexibility and a number of exercises have been recommended from Clippinger's book (2007,p195) that might be done in order to improve the range of passive to active flexibility specifically to the side extension. In a study by Wilmerding, that aimed to get the active range of motion closer to the passive, she also used an exercise that strengthened the hip flexors, whilst engaging the quadriceps as little as possible (2009,p6). Her reasoning behind this stemmed from:

*The hip flexor muscles are used in a high percentage of dance steps. In class, however, they are not isolated for strength training. Dancers may have adequate to above normal range of motion in their hips, but may lack the physical strength or motor control required to lift their legs to the end point of range of motion (2009,p6).*

When considering flexibility it is closely linked to strength and analysing and preparing an intervention strategy in one will invariably include the other, and is a good example of how areas are inter-related. For example, Rosser (2001,p184) includes strength amongst a number of other factors such as joint structure, age, sex, body temperature that can affect flexibility. Exercises taken from Clippinger's book are to improve flexibility combined with strength. Whilst flexibility is only one component amongst many, it is important within this study and Deighan believes that without a good degree of flexibility, a dancer is unlikely to achieve professional standards (2005,p13)and although this point might be debatable, it does relate to the participant's long term goal of working/performing professionally.

The exercises that were suggested from Clippinger, need to be within a wider intervention that maintains and improves all round flexibility, some of which should be achieved within the regular practical classes the participant undertakes. There are a number of types of stretching that the participant could use to increase flexibility. According to Powers and Howley, there are two general stretching techniques: 'static stretching (continuously holding a stretch position)' and 'dynamic stretching' (2007,p456). They give preference to static over dynamic, as there is less chance of injury and say 'there is less spindle activity in static stretching and there is less chance of muscle soreness' (ibid). However for warm-up purposes Jeffreys based on research, questions the use of static, PNF and ballistic stretching in a warm-up and he says 'based on current evidence, dynamic stretching would be the preferred option for stretching during a warm-up' (2008,p297). However, he goes on to say 'Even though it is an ideal warm-up activity, dynamic stretching may be less effective than static or PNF stretching at increasing static ROM' (2008,p301) which is in accordance with Powers and Howley. Recent research by Wyon, Felton and Galloway found in their study that in a six week training program very low intensity stretching had a greater positive effect on lower limb ROM than moderate intensity static stretching (2009,p2144). For this participant it would be recommended that he uses dynamic stretching within his warm up and at the end of sessions he considers the new modality of microstretching, which would fit in well with time restrictions that exist by the nature of the University timetable and studio availability. This concept does though require more research according to Wyon, Felton and Galloway (2009, p2147).

### Strength

This has already been mentioned in relation to improving both flexibility and turn-out and Brown et al state:

*Dancers need high levels of strength for a variety of reasons; slow controlled movements such as developpé require the dancer to support the weight of the leg through their range of motion for several seconds, but fast explosive movements such as jumps require the dancer to exert force very quickly '(2007,p42).*

As Howse states "Only when muscles controlling the joint are strong, can the range then be increased to the anatomically full range by graduated stretching" (2000,p96). According to Howse there must be a balance between strength and flexibility and this is particularly important for injury prevention (2000, p95) and Brown et al agree on this matter (2007,p24). If the participant works to improve his flexibility as suggested he must also consider that strength is maintained in conjunction with that strategy, hence Clippinger 's suggestions.

Bompa and Haff equate strength training with resistance training which can develop muscular strength and power. They give a number of suggestions as to how resistance work can be done including body weight, elastic bands, weighted objects and free weights and the progressive overload principle must be applied (2009,p269/70). These have been listed as they could be achievable for the participant without considerable expense and the use of resistance training is considered later within the nutrition section. The participant's test results indicate that he has poor upper body strength as indicated by the grip test and in terms of muscular endurance this is also low in the tests of abdominal curl and modified press-up. However, due to the nature of dance the upper body is not used to the same extent as the lower limbs which might account for these low scores. There are a number of research studies that indicate that increasing a dancer's strength is beneficial to performance and injury prevention including Kenne and Unnithan (2008), Koutedakis, Stavropoulos-Kalinoglou and Metsios (2005) and Koutedakis, Cross and Craig Sharp (1996).

## Aerobic Fitness

Looking at the aerobic fitness of this participant he gave himself a score of seven within the profile implying that there is room for improvement. Within the context of research in dance, there are findings that emphasise a levels resulting in very good economy of movement whilst dancing" (Allen & Wyon, 2008,p7). This might relate back to the actual training methods that dance has historically adopted, which is dominated by the daily dance class. This is described as '.an intermittent exercise form with the centre phase reaching high intensity levels and the work to rest ratios dependent on dancers level of training and size of class' (Wyon et al, 2002,p 45). As already noted it seems that the daily ritual of class, that dominates a dancer's day and training does not adequately prepare a dancer for all avenues of fitness, and does not adhere to the overload principle defined by Koutedakis, Metsios and Stavropoulos-Kalinoglou (Whyte,2007) which is necessary to increase fitness. Allen and Wyon go on to say: "Unlike most athletes, dancers are biased towards skill at the expense of base strength and fitness" (2008,p9). This research concurs with the participant's training background at University, where there is an emphasis on practical classes and a culture where students equate more classes with getting fitter and better. To test his aerobic capacity the participant was asked to do the Dance Aerobic Fitness Test (DAFT), which was conducted under supervision. general lack of aerobic fitness amongst dancers, although there is somewhat less research about how it might be incorporated into their training. In relation to the artistic and aesthetic side of dance, Koutedakis et al conclude that an 'increased cardio-respiratory fitness does not guarantee a successful performance, it is nevertheless an important factor in coping with long hours in the studio, and in facilitating recovery following physically demanding sessions' (1996,p108). Research has shown that "dancers generally have poor physiological conditioning compared to other sporting populations due to their high skill

A heart rate monitor was attached to the participant but unfortunately this did not work correctly in the test and it was not possible to repeat the DAFT due to the student's schedule. In his Cooper test (part of the fitness tests) he scored 2117 which rated as poor and gave him an estimated VO2 max of 36 which is again a poor score according to Brinson and Dick (1996,p64). In considering an intervention strategy Wyon sees that there is no magic answer in relation to incorporating cardio-vascular work into a dancer's training regime. He suggests that supplemental training needs to be added with care, into what is already a hectic schedule as otherwise it might lead to overtraining and injury (2005,p10). He suggests that one or two dance classes a week might be substituted for conditioning sessions and they should incorporate dance movements but reduce the resting time. Macey in her research looked at the development of a dance specific interval training programme for modern dancers, and this could support dance training methods and the intermittent nature of dance (Macey,2008; www.danceuk.org). Both Wyon and Macey's work could be taken on board by the University Dance tutors, and where this is not possible as it cannot cater for one individual, the participant could include some aerobic work into his warm up before any sessions. Koutedakis and Craig-Sharp recommend two to three sessions per week, for about half an hour at a heart-rate of approximately 150 beats per minute (1999,p104). However, to increase the validity of these suggestions the participant's results should be re-examined at the end of the year, when the participant might be at a fitter level, due to rehearsals, performances and classes. Also when discussing a hypothetical intervention programme, it is easy to forget Wyon's words that a dancer's schedule (including University students) can be at times rather hectic and to add more to that might be detrimental to the dancer.

## Nutrition:

Turning now to data on nutrition which combines information from the student's food diary combined with his short term goal which is to gain weight. The student is classed as a pescatarian, eating no meat only fish although he considers himself as a vegetarian. His fitness test shows his Body Mass Index is 21.1, which is within a good range which covers 15 – 24.9. There is much evidence and research done that suggests that a vegetarian dancer can have 'both healthy and full energy sources to support performance' (Kleiner,2000,p52). Venderley and Campbell believe that 'appropriately planned vegetarian diets can provide sufficient energy and an appropriate range of carbohydrate, fat and protein intakes to support performance and health' (2006,p293). Been a vegetarian is not in itself a reason for an intervention strategy, although it is possible that some vitamins and minerals may be deficient if care is not taken, for example B12, but Guest does not see this as a problem for those who regularly consume eggs or diary' (2001;www.powerplayweb.com/), which this participant does.

In relation to the participant's aim to put on weight it seems his first priority and a suggestion for intervention would be to reach the recommended calorie intake (2474 according to weightlossresources.com). Much of the literature acknowledges the dancer's aim and strategies for lowering body fat and weight, and so literature from sport will be investigated in relation to gaining muscle mass weight. However, before discussing this further what is a concern from the diet analysis is that on these 3 days the calories taken in from fats were in excess of the recommended 30 – 35% (Koutedakis,1999,p31). Carbohydrate intake was also lower then the recommended 55% (ibid, p25) and only the protein intake was close to the recommended 10 -15%(ibid,p33). Heyward suggests that for someone aiming to put on weight the percentages should be 60 – 65% for carbohydrates, 12 – 15% proteins and only 23 – 25% for fats (2006,p240).

In terms of an intervention strategy and Heyward's recommendations this participant needs to increase carbohydrate intake but reduced fat intake, especially of saturated fats prevalent in the pastry products, the McDonald's meal and pizza. The inclusion of this type of food is not unusual and as Brinson and Dick found in the first *Fit to Dance* report (1996) "…dancers consumed more fatty foods then other sportspeople, with percentages higher than the generally accepted UK goal of 30%" (1996,p69). Guest also says that in a poorly planned vegetarian diet, there is often too much sugar and/or fat, with low fibre and poor in nutrients (2001;www.powerplayweb.com/). Carbohydrate intake could be increased with more fruits, vegetables and grains which as Seebohar suggests would also provide fibre and are filling (2007,p36). This carbohydrate replenishment is also important because of the amount of activity undertaken and as Koutedakis says 'Given that the available stores in the body will last for about 90 minutes of strenuous physical activity, regular carbohydrate replacement should be amongst the dancer's priorities.' (1999,p23). Timing of replenishment will be discussed shortly.

Foods high in calories but unsaturated fats, such as olive oil, avocados and nuts could be used as snacks between meals to keep calorie intake up. Other simple steps could be taken such as using whole wheat pasta, using a greater variety of grains and generally reducing the amount of pastry based products. There are some positives in relation to the food plan including the use of some soy products which are 'a healthier source of protein and contain ingredients that might also protect against heart disease and cancer' (Laquale,2006,p60). Also the pasta sauces are made from ingredients rather then ready bought and water is consumed throughout the day and alcohol is avoided. One of the weaknesses of the food analysis is that the website used has as its primary concern weight loss and it does not analyse the participant's intake of vitamins and minerals which appear limited and he should increase to the recommended daily fruit and vegetable intake which in turn would make his diet richer in vitamins and minerals.

Although the participant aims to put on weight he does not want to increase body fat but rather

increase muscle mass. As Houston says 'when an athlete says he wants to increase his weight to be successful at a sport, he doesn't mean an increase in the other main body component, fat but rather an increase in muscle' (1999,p306). This assumption will also be taken for this participant, although he did not specifically say so. Houston goes on to say that in order to do this 'one needs an appropriate combination of diet, resistance exercise training and rest' (ibid). Heyward agrees with this recommendation as well as suggesting that weight gain should be gradual (2006,p220). Extra protein intake is recommended by Heyward stating that both protein powders and natural protein sources can be consumed and for a vegetarian Laquale recommends that vegetarians should consume a variety of food to obtain adequate amounts of daily protein (2006,p59). The participant should eat frequently including three meals plus two to three snacks which might be dried fruits, nuts, seeds and liquid meals according to Heyward (2006,p220). Houston suggests that feeding post-exercise is very important (1999,p312-3).

In relation to eating after exercise and assessing the right time to consume food, Koutedakis says 'The type of carbohydrate consumed…may play a significant role in maintaining optimal levels of this nutrient.' (1999,p26). For example a chocolate bar should be avoided an hour before a class but it is okay to eat foods with high GI after exercise as this ensures a swift return to pre-exercise levels. According to Fallowfield and Williams (1993), they state that glycogen is restored in the muscles at the rate of 5% per hour, so in a normal diet it could take up to 20 hours to replenish stocks (cited in Koutedakis,1999,p27) However, in the 1 – 2 hours after intense exercise glycogen restoration is faster and can be restored by almost 50%. So in relation to Houston's request to eat post-exercise this is important to the dancer not only so that levels are replenished before the next intense exercise commences, but even more so if this participant wants to gain weight. This strategy of replenishment is recommended for this participant. Heyward also recommends for a weight gain programme that body composition is regularly monitored throughout and this can be incorporated into psychological factors such as goal setting.

### Psychological Factors:

As well as physiological, skill development and nutritional considerations, one must also consider the psychological fitness of the participant as this can often effect the physical aspects and the success of any suggested intervention strategy. Wyon and Allen acknowledge that 'Psychology plays a significant role in the management of dancers' (2008,p6). In the Fit to Dance report in 1996 29% of dance students reported performance anxiety, 57% for general anxiety and 53% suffered from general low self-confidence (Brinson & Dick,1996,p55). Laws in the second Fit to Dance report found the percentages to be 34% for performance anxiety, 49% for general anxiety and 58% for low self-confidence (2005,p29). Although based on students in vocational training establishments it still shows a trend that dance students suffer from a range of psychological issues.

### Goal setting

In this study the participant gave a short, medium and long term goal. A lot of research has been done on goal setting and as Weinberg and Gould say 'Seldom are goals to lose weight or to exercise set realistically in terms of commitment, difficulty, evaluation of progress and specific strategies to achieve their goals' (2007,p346). They go on to say that 'setting goals without developing corresponding goal achievement strategies is like driving a car to a strange city without consulting a map' (2007,p354). Actual goal-setting strategies have not been discussed with this participant, but could be incorporated within the overall intervention strategy. For example in relation to nutrition, it might be discussed what specific strategies he might employ in order to maintain and gain weight, and how and how often will he measure the success of that strategy. Initially he might set a goal to achieve the correct calorific intake, followed by Houston's set of suggested steps. Weinberg and Gould (2007, p356) say that feedback on achieving goals is vital, and this could be

achieved by regular meetings with the participant to assess body weight and dietary requirements in conjunction with keeping a regular food diary. This particular goal is a performance goal as the focus is on achieving a standard or performance objective, independently of other competitors, and is usually on the basis of comparison with one's own previous performances or in this case appearance (Weinberg & Gould,2007,p346).

Weinberg et al say that goal setting works in several ways including influencing performance 'by directing an individual's attention to the task and to relevant cues within the environment' (2005,p105). Secondly, goals can mobilise effort, enhance persistence and provide a standard, by which other goals may be necessary, so short term goals can be used to achieve a long term goal. Finally, they influence performance 'through the development of relevant learning strategies', so that if a dancer wanted to increase flexibility of the hamstrings they would include a number of extra stretches into each session (ibid). According to Filby, Maynard and Graydon (1999)it is better to have a combination of all three goal types, outcome, performance and process goals (cited in Weinberg & Gould,2007,p349), but due to the nature of this study, the goals given were very much related to performance. The participant knows there is a further 3 years of training and that might account for performance goals been the most prominent. As his training comes nearer to its end the goals may change orientation. As Weinberg and Gould say (2007,p353)both long and short term goals are important and changes are difficult to make overnight, and both short and long term goals should be linked via a number of intermediate, short term goals, which for this participant they are, as by improving his physical appearance he believes he will more successful in his long term goals.

### Competitive State Anxiety Inventory - 2

Within this study the participant completed the CSAI-2 inventory, originally designed by Martens, Vealey and Burton in 1990 and as Leffingwell et al say (2005,p89) it is a popular measure of state anxiety and is perhaps one of the most research sport-specific inventories available and this 27-item tool includes three subscales: cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety and self-confidence. It was felt applicable to this study, as the participant's goals were performance related and his training currently has a degree of emphasis on performance. Also in light of the findings by the two Fit to Dance reports (1996; 2005), both self-confidence and anxiety are key issues when considering the psychological health of the dancer. For intensity scores which range from 9 – 36 a lower score is indicative of low anxiety, as for example the participant's score of 12 for somatic anxiety. Cognitive anxiety (19) and self confidence (26) fall in the middle of the scale. His direction scores were all positive indicating a facilitative interpretation.

Weinberg and Gould describe that somatic state anxiety concerns the moment-to-moment changes in perceived physiological activation (for example faster heart rate, butterflies). Somatic state anxiety is not necessarily a change in one's physical activation but rather one's perception of such a change (2007, p79). As Martens et al (1990b) have suggested somatic anxiety should affect performance in a curvilinear fashion, with both lower and higher levels of somatic anxiety being detrimental to performance (cited in Craft et al,2003,p45). Craft el al though do question whether the CSAI-2 does an adequate job of assessing the construct of somatic anxiety and feel there is a lack of valid studies (2003,p 58).

## Conclusion

Within the data collection a number of short falls can be identified, for example the DAFT test results and the non specificity to dance of the fitness tests. For future studies alternative and additional tests could be included and the timing of particular tests should also be considered, for example should aerobic fitness be measured at the beginning of the year, the end or both?

To conclude a number of intervention strategies have been identified here that the participant could employ in order to supplement his current training but it is important to keep in mind that this has not yet been pulled together as one overall programme and neither has the student been informed of these suggestions. However, with the aspects of physical training the key emphasis on intervention would need to be on the overload principle because the repetitive skill based nature of dance does not cover this aspect. In relation to the overload principle Koutedakis, Metsios and Stavropoulos-Kalinoglou say that there must be sufficient intensity and duration to the exercise in order to activate the adaptation mechanism (2006,p4). Overall this analysis has identified key elements of flexibility, cardiovascular fitness, muscular strength and nutritional choices to consider intervention for. If this participant was to undertake any or all of the suggestions, then a realistic plan in terms of both time and finances would need to be set, and relate to the goals and motivation of the participant. The plan must fit realistically into his role as a University student, in a contemporary dance context and it begs the question where the balance is between the participant and the University/tutors in any intervention strategy. Many of these measures could be taken on board by the individual but as already discussed support and feedback is necessary to make a plan achievable and evaluation is essential to any intervention strategy. A balance is also needed between the physiological and psychological elements so that one complements the other and the dancer is seen and sees themselves as a holistic whole.

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# What are the views of Key Stage 2 children with Down syndrome regarding their experience of Physical Education in a mainstream school?

**Seagraves, A., Walker, S.**

## Abstract

This study investigated the views of Key Stage 2 pupils with Down syndrome regarding their experiences of Physical Education in a mainstream school. The views of teaching assistants and teachers were used to validate and support the findings.

Vast amounts of research support the positive effects Physical Education can have on children with Special Education Needs (Biddle, Fox, Boucher, 2000). However, there is evidence that children with Down syndrome currently participate in a much narrower breadth of physical activity in and out of school (Sport England, 2000 cited in Coates and Vickerman 2010). In Britain, there is a growing inclusion agenda to try and combat this issue. Despite this, children with disabilities in mainstream schools are still being restricted (Armstrong, 2004). To date, this researcher has discovered no research has been uncovered by the researcher that solely focuses on the perspectives of pupils with Down syndrome and their experiences of or views about Physical Education (Blinde and McCallister, 1998; Goodwin and Watkinson, 2000). Such research could point to improvements in PE practice and more positive experiences. The sample consisted of 3 pupils in KS2 with Down syndrome, 2 females and 1 male. All pupils attended the same mainstream primary school. A sample of 3 teaching assistants and 2 teachers who worked alongside the pupils was also included. All participants completed either an interview with the researcher or a questionnaire, both techniques used pre-determined questions. Interviews using interactive techniques were used to question the pupils, an informal interview was conducted with the teaching assistant and the two teachers completed questionnaires.

The results from the study indicate that peers have the biggest positive impact on pupil experiences in physical education. Strong patterns emerged suggesting pupils prefer peer support, which leads to positive experiences, rather than adult intervention. Perceived capabilities and parental influence were seen as barriers to the pupil's enjoyment, with these topics often prompting negative responses

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# Introduction

## Children with DS and Physical Activity

DS is caused by the presence of an extra chromosome, whereby they have 47 chromosomes instead of the usual 46. All children with DS have some degree of learning difficulty ranging from mild to severe (Alton, 2008). It is the most common genetic cause of intellectual disability and is associated with congenital heart defects, joint mobility, low cardiovascular fitness, and decreased muscle strength (Croce, Pitetti, Horvat, & Miller, 1996; Fernhall et al.,1996; Horvat, Pitetti, & Croce, 1997; Roizen & Patterson, 2003). This can affect pupil participation, as research conducted by Cavaliere and Watkinson (2010) found, pupils are aware that they are different from their non-disabled peers and this knowledge can make them withdraw from PA and PE.

These impairments may contribute to a delay in the acquisition of fine and gross motor skills and also to the development of atypical motor patterns (Shields, Dodd and Abblitt, 2009, Whitt-Glover, O'Neill, & Stettler, 2006, Alton, 2008). Although children with DS do develop skills in a typical sequence, it is often slower than their non-disabled peers. The delay of skill acquisition becomes more noticeable as pupils become older and the gap between disabled and non-disabled peers widens (Shields, Dodd and Abblitt, 2009).

This could contribute to why many parents decide that mainstream education may not be the best way forward after primary school. It is estimated that approximately 70% to 80% of such pupils in the UK begin their education in mainstream primary schools but only 20% to 25% pupils complete their schooling in the mainstream secondary sector (Cunningham et al, 1998).

PA has the capacity to enhance body composition (LeMura & Maziekas, 2002), skeletal health (Naughton, Gibbs, Carlson, & Wark, 1997), and aspects of psychological health, including self-esteem (Trost, 2005). With the increase of pupils with DS attending mainstream primary schools, there is a window of opportunity for them to establish good activity habits early in life. Activity levels in adolescence have been found to be a significant predictor of PA during adulthood (Glenmark, Hedberg, & Jansson, 1994; Stephens, Jacobs, & White, 1985), and there is some evidence that children with intellectual disability become less active as they get older (Stephens, Jacobs & White, 1985). Given this, implementing enjoyable and accessible activities in schools will ensure pupils are less inclined to lead the sedentary lifestyles which are so common in people with DS (Lotan, 2007).

This information is important for parents, caregivers, teachers, and health professionals who work with children with DS. They are in a position to implement changes in the children's PA behaviour through inclusion strategies both in and out of school (Shields, Dodd and Casey 2009). Findings indicate that children with SEN enjoy PE when they are fully included; however participation is restricted by teacher training, discrimination and barriers surrounding inclusion such as the health issues mentioned (Vickerman & Coates, 2008).

## Barriers

"Children with special educational needs are still encountering a number of barriers that restrict or hinder their participation in PE and PA outside of school" (Coates and Vickerman, 2008, Pg 173) Research, conducted by Goodwin and Watkinson (2000) found that pupils with SEN had "good days and bad days". Positive perceptions of PE or "good days" emerge from feelings of acceptance gained when the pupil participates fully in activities.

"Bad days" or barriers are met when pupils feel socially isolated, restricted in their participation or have their competency questioned (Goodwin and Watkinson, 2000). Lavallee et al. (2004) cited in Coates and Vickerman (2008 pg. 1720) indicate that low self-efficacy, which is the belief of capability when performing in a certain activity or skill (competency), can result in the withdrawal from sport and PE. This is particularly detrimental to pupils with DS considering the association of low levels of activity with obesity and other health implications (Rowlands, Ingledew, & Eston, 2000).

Furthermore, literature has identified that parents play an important role as mediators, by giving information and resolving problems when teachers or peers do not understand their child's needs (Lightfoot et al, 1999). However, Watson et al (2000) state that adult surveillance can cause problems. Disabled children in schools are under closer surveillance than non-disabled children. The extra support coming from adults sometimes has the effect of control and makes children feel excluded from their peers.

This exclusion is disadvantageous to the pupils as it has been found that friendship matters to children. It provides them with the opportunity to develop important skills and attitudes, which they often mimic from their peers (Meyer et al, 1998). Feeling included or not included depends on the children's views of their interactions with others (Place & Hodge, 2001).

It is evident that many parents of children with disabilities fear that their children will become socially isolated in mainstream schools (Guralnick, Connor and Hammond, 1995; Sale and Carey, 1995). This anxiety is particularly understandable where children with DS are concerned (Guralnick 1999). However research has shown a connection between parental support and the child's participation in PA (Davison, 2004, Biddle & Goudas, 1996, Menear, 2007). According to Prochaska, Rodgers & Sallis (2002), parental support is evidenced by motivation and encouragement.Parents in a study conducted by Menear, (2007) believe that participation in PA has immediate long term benefits for their child's health. Pupils with DS are especially dependent on the opportunities created by their families and on support in school. Parental anxiety about their children "fitting in" can often have a negative effect and pupils can become withdrawn as a result (Sloper et al. 1990; Wenz-Gross and Siperstein 1996).

Literature indicates that barriers are still being met by pupils with disabilities; therefore inclusion is more important than ever (The White Paper, 2010).

### Inclusion: Why is it so important?

In the last 10-15 years, increased numbers of children with Down's syndrome have attended local mainstream schools. This is a result of the introduction of legislation which aims to promote inclusion and eliminate discrimination; by improving practice, addressing assessment and removing barriers to inclusion (DfES, 2001b, 2004, Vickerman & Coates 2009 and Alton, 2008).

Legislation that aims to meet the needs of SEN pupils has been implemented over the past three decades, through documents like the SEN and Disability Rights Act (SENDA), Every Child Matters Agenda (ECM), The National Curriculum for Physical Education (NCPE), National Curriculum Inclusion Statement, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES)/Qualification Curriculum Authority (QCA, 1999), SEN and Disability Rights Act (Department for Education and Employment (DfEE,2000) and the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) in The Equality Act 2010).

Although Morley, Bailey, Tan and Cooke (cited in Vickerman and Coates 2009), state that the UK government has made 'explicit its commitment to developing an inclusive education system' (p85), teachers feel apprehensive and not fully equipped to deliver new agendas (Vickerman & Coates 2009 and Alton, 2008). This reservation amongst teachers is perhaps reflected in Sport England research (2001) which highlights that young children with disabilities take part in a narrower range of PE activities compared with their non-disabled peers, and that 10% of their sample of children with disabilities had not taken part in any sport as part of the school curriculum that previous year, indicating that inclusion legislation is not so inclusive for some pupils.

It is vital for all children, including those with SEN, to access the entirety of the curriculum, thereby increasing their knowledge and developing new skills. In order to ensure that pupils with Down's syndrome can have unfettered access, activities and outcomes may need to be adapted to the pupil's level of understanding and development (Alton, 2008). It has been found that an effective

way of ensuring pupils enjoy the curriculum is not through following legislation slavishly but by facilitating peer interaction. Hutzler et al (2002) indicate that some children are often encouraged by peers to take part. Peers know their friends' competences and what to expect of a pupil with DS and this means they are equipped to modify activities to include the pupil (Dolva et al, 2010).
For some pupils with DS, development and the learning of skills is a slow process. Each pupil has different needs and, no matter how limited the potential of the pupil with DS may seem or how limited school resources and training in PE are, to be 'physically educated' is essential (Jobling, 1999). Everything should be done by teachers and other educational bodies to include these pupils and give them equal opportunities (Jobling, 1999). Research is needed into how pupils with DS feel best included in PE Research regarding inclusion and whether or not it is successful requires us to gain an understanding of whether pupil themselves feel included in PE. We need to listen to what the children themselves have to say regarding inclusion (Coates and Vickerman, 2008).

## Current research regarding pupil experience.

Blinde & McCallister, (1998) note that there is little research conducted on the experiences of students with disabilities. What pupils' think and feel about their participation in PE has received little attention conceptually or in the empirical research (Graham, 1995, Blinde & McCallister, 1998; Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000, Cavaliere & Watkinson, 2010). Block and Obrusnikova (2007) reviewed and analysed ten years (1995–2005) of PE inclusion research. Of the 38 studies reviewed, only five placed significant importance on the perspectives of children with disabilities (Blinde & McCallister, 1998; Goodwin, 2001; Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000; Hutzler, Fliess, Chacham, & Van den Auweele, 2002; Place & Hodge, 2001).They found that, when we listen to pupils, we receive a much more in depth opinion of what pupils' experiences and views are relating to inclusion. Coates and Vickerman, 2008 support this research and suggest that conducting research from the perspectives of children with disabilities helps in understanding pupils positive and negative experiences in PE, and can impact on the enhancement of inclusion policies in education (Coates and Vickerman 2008).

Research examining inclusion has been mainly reliant on the perspectives of teachers and not the children themselves (Coates and Vickerman, 2008). Many teachers believe that their view of the world is the pupil's view of the world (Goodwin and Watkinson, 2000). However, according to Reid (cited in Goodwin and Watkinson, 2000), including the voice of students with disabilities in our research agendas will deepen our understanding of disability and assist us in identifying barriers that are most meaningful to students. Government policy (Dfes 2001a) states that children "with a special education need should have the opportunity to air their views with regard to their education". Nevertheless, it must be noted that studies involving teacher opinion are important and often form a starting point for understanding the perspectives of children with SEN (Coates and Vickerman, 2008). Despite a growing awareness of the importance of engaging directly with children in research, disabled children remain a neglected group (Lightfoot, Wright & Sloper, 1999). Through research material, a lot is learnt from the perspective of disabled children. The material shows that it is important to converse with children and find out their views about education. They have a different perspective from that of parents, teachers and other professionals (Lincoln, 1995).If the views of children with SEN regarding their experiences in PE have been relatively muted because of limited research, the voices of the pupils within this group who have DS have gone unheard. There has been no research to date into the experience of PE from the perspective of pupils with DS. This research could be illuminating, and perhaps counter health issues in early life through designing and delivering purposeful interventions using *all* relevant perspectives

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### Research Question

What are the views of KS2 children with DS regarding their experiences of Physical Education within a mainstream school?

### Delimitations of this study

- A small sample case of 3 pupils and 3 TAs used
- All pupils were selected from the same primary school.
- Pupils where all in KS2 and have DS

## Methodology

### Participant selection

In case studies, the choice of 'case' should rarely be random; it should be purposive, and meet pre-determined criteria set by the researcher (Gratton & Jones, 2004). The criteria set in this study are fundamental: pupils all have DS; they attend mainstream school and are studying the KS2 National Curriculum. A sample of 3 pupils matching these criteria was purposively selected (Robson, 2002). Although the sample size small the study provides detailed analysis of what these pupils have experienced during their PE lessons. It also allows for comparison between cases (Gratton & Jones, 2004).

This purposive sampling approach (Robson, 2002) ensures that information is obtained about pupils prior to the study. An anonymous pupil profile is set out below. Anonymity has been promised and is maintained throughout the study (Gratton and Jones, 2004).

**Figure 1: Anonymous Pupil Profile**

| | **Sex** | **Age** | **Academic Year** | **SEN needs** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pupil X | Female | 9 | Year 5 | Down Syndrome |
| Pupil Y | Female | 12 | Year 6 (Kept behind one year by parents) | Down Syndrome |
| Pupil Z | Male | 8 | Year 4 | Down Syndrome and Autism |

Ethical approval was required for this study with written consent obligatory at all stages. To begin with, verbal consent was sought from the SENCO officer of the school. This was followed by written consent from parents and children. This was needed in order to protect the rights and well-being of participants (Thomas, Nelson, and Silverman, 2005). Letters were also sent out to the children's parents including an information pack for both parent and child to read and understand together. It was necessary to gain parental consent because of the age and vulnerability of the children involved.

## Instruments

The majority of studies which relate to this paper used qualitative methodologies (Coates & Vickerman, 2010, Coates and Vickerman, 2008, Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000, Schauwer, Hove & Loots, 2009). Qualitative research methods aim to

capture qualities that are not quantifiable, such as feelings, thoughts and experiences (Gratton & Jones, 2004). The method uses smaller case samples and data is usually rich and subjective. Although the findings of qualitative research do not generalize, the information can be illuminating to other groups and settings with similar participant variants (Patton, 1990; Schofield, 1990).

Children with DS often lack the ability to articulate information and this made video-recorded interviews a purposive choice. Video-recording enabled body language and expression to be captured. The face-to-face interview has other advantages. The researcher can rephrase questions and ask additional ones to clarify responses and secure more valid results (Thomas, Nelson & Silverman, 2005). The interviews in this study were semi-structured; predetermined questions were designed but were altered or omitted depending on the interviewee's responses. This less structured approach allowed much more flexibility in responses (Robson, 2002).

The research questions were reviewed by an expert in the field of PE and disability to ensure they were pertinent to the study and appropriate for the pupils and TAs. The design of this study required the use of more creative methods of communication to help the pupils understand the questions and aid their responses (Morris, 2003). The use of visual aids during the interview was a key component (See appendix C for visual interview cards).

Children with DS have much better receptive skills as opposed to expressive skills. This means they understand language better than they are able to speak it. As a result, their cognitive skills are often underestimated. Adults tend to ask closed questions or finish a sentence for the child (Alton, 2008). To avoid this, the interview was informal and visual, encouraging the pupils to respond in ways that were comfortable for them. To reduce any anxiety that may have be present during the interview, a member of staff, who the child was familiar and comfortable with, was present throughout. The pupil's right to withdraw at any time was explained in clear terms to the TA and pupil (Davis, 2002).

Each question was initiated as a game. A number of picture cards were developed relating to each activity the child may have covered in their PE lessons. The image cards acted as a prompt to what each activity was. Pupils were asked at different points in the interview to make a decision regarding an activity by putting the image card in a red post box which corresponded to a question, for example; 'Do you like football?' If the response was yes, the pupil would post the image card in the smiley-face post box. The responses from the "games," formed the basis of open-ended questions for example, 'why do you like football?' Open-ended questions removed any restrictions and allowed better assessment of detailed responses, rather than yes or no answers (Gratton & Jones, 2004).

TAs were interviewed using a more formal structure of pre-determined questions about the experiences they have shared with the pupils they work alongside during PE lessons. These were conducted after the pupil interviews so appropriate questions could be designed to delve deeper into the pupils' experiences. The reason for using the technique of a semi-structured interview again is to encourage a conversation and avoid interrogation. Body language and voice tone were again picked up by video-recording (Thomas, Nelson, and Silverman, 2005).

Teachers involved with the children taking part in the research study where given a questionnaire to complete (See appendix D for questionnaire). This facilitated an insight into their views of the experience of pupils with DS in their PE lessons. The questionnaire consists of open-ended

questions which allow the respondent considerable latitude to express feelings and expand on their own ideas (Thomas, Nelson and Silverman, 2005).

### Data Analysis

Reflective field notes were made immediately following each interview so as not to detract from the interview process and the focus of both the participant and the researcher (Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2003). These notes were in-depth, descriptive and contained quotations from pupils. This information served as a reminder of the interview during later analysis, and a method of verification (Creswell, 1998).

Interviews were then transcribed and data coded (See appendix E for transcripts). Coding is the organisation of raw data into conceptual categories (Gratton & Jones, 2004). This process involved finding relevant quotations from the interview transcripts and then identifying key themes that arose from these quotations.

Once key themes had been established and the transcripts fully analysed and coded, the findings were put into a table. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that a good display of data in the form of tables or networks is essential in helping the researcher access information with ease and analyse in the context of the research question and literature.

## Results and Discussion

The study identified a number of themes (Appendix F). Due to the size and scope of this paper, two themes have been too chosen: Peers and Barriers; these themes link to the research question best and are most prominent to the study.

### Peers

A pupil's sense of belonging and self-esteem are affected by participating in activities alongside their peers (Williams and Downing, 1998). During the interviews, all pupils made comments about how peers positively affect their PE experiences; Pupils X, Y and Z mentioned a peer's name in their positive views of their experience of activities in PE.

*Pupil X: "Running fast, with Meg my friend in running"*

*Pupil Y: "I love dancing with Lydia my friend in school"*

*Pupil Z: Likes playing football with Jack, they do high five when they "kick a goal"*

This demonstrates that the pupils enjoy activities where there is peer involvement as they link positive experiences to the peers they participate with. Children with DS find it hard to retain and remember information (Alcott, 2004), so the fact they can remember the activity or skill and the peer they did it with, demonstrates the impact of the experience. If teachers are aware that pupils with DS gain enjoyment from the positive features of PE; such as social enjoyment, they should start to ensure that opportunities for peer interaction are available and planned for in most lessons.
For all children, it is much harder to make progress in any educational area until they are able to respond and interact with others in an appropriate way (Dolva et al 2009). One of the main aims for any child with DS entering mainstream school is social inclusion. All children with DS benefit from mixing with typically developing peers. They are often very keen to do the same as their peers and generally look to them as role models for appropriate behaviour during lessons and play times (Alcott, 2004).

Pupil Y supports this finding with her response. Being positively included in creating dance routines during lunch times with her peers prompted this comment.

*Pupil Y: **"We** make routine up in lunches in wet weather"*

Fox, Farrell and Davis, (2004) in their study observed a connection between the quality of play at break and lunchtimes involving the child with Down's syndrome and his or her peers and the

nature of the working relationships in the classroom. When a pupil with DS was able to play with other children on the playground on an equal basis as opposed to being 'played with'; the general quality of the within-class inclusion seemed to be better. It is likely that pupils with DS as a result of lunch-time inclusion have better perceived competency in that particular activity. Research from this study echoes these findings, as pupil Y responded positively during her interview to dance within her PE lessons.

*Pupil Y: "I love dancing with Lydia my friend in school"*

This may be an effect of inclusive play with peers during lunchtime's and wet weather breaks.

Findings from this study indicate that pupils X and Z enjoy participating in team sports, with all three pupils expressing some kind of positive response when discussing a game activity during their interview.

*Pupil X: "Basketball is my favourite because I am with the girls and boys"*

*Pupil Z: Football was picked using the image cards, as his "favourite activity"*

Teaching assistants X and Z support this:

*Teaching assistant X: "She enjoys working as part of a team, basketball is her favourite activity"*

*Teaching assistant Z: "He enjoys being with his friends playing sports like football"*

Research regarding team sports is ambiguous; on the one hand, individual activities such as dance and gymnastics are deemed to be more conducive to inclusion, whereas games activities which focus on competitiveness and team morale serve to exclude rather than include (Penney, 2002). However, research examining the perspective of the child in mainstream schools suggests otherwise. Fitzgerald et al (2003) cited in Coates and Vickerman (2010 pg. 1521) suggest that children with SEN were enthused by team games. 47.4% of participants preferred participating in game activities and 57% of their sample enjoyed basketball, a highly competitive activity.

This study supports the latter view:

*Pupil Y: "Likes playing 'baskets" with her friends*

*Pupil Z: Likes to bounce the ball and score in the hoop with his friend Jack.*

Children are often excluded from these more competitive activities by teachers and peers out of concern for their ability and capabilities (Goodwin and Watkinson, 2000) and it is evident from this study and past research that this is not necessary (Coates and Vickerman, 2010). TA Y states that pupil Y likes to participate in team activities with her friends without the close presence of the TA.

*Teaching Assistant Y: "She likes to be on her OWN during football lessons with her friends"*

Independence and the desire to be with their peers without TA involvement is a recurring theme in this study. Hutzler et al (2002) indicates that some children in their study were often encouraged by peers to take part, by providing support and adapting game rules to suit the child. Peers know their friends' competences and what to expect of a pupil with DS and this means they are equipped to modify activities to include the pupil (Dolva et al, 2010). Data collected from teacher questionnaires in this study indicates that peers can be just as effective as TAs during PE lessons.

*Teacher A: "Other children, as long as they are supportive and sensitive to the individuals needs, are just as effective"*

Although data from the pupils, TAs and teachers supports the benefits of encouraging independence to enhance enjoyment and learning in PE for children with DS, a difficulty is encountered in striking and fielding activities like rounders or tennis. Here it is evident that independence is an issue for pupils Y and Z.

*Pupil X: "Plays tennis with teaching assistant when hitting the ball with a racket"*

*Pupil Y: "Teaching assistant Y helps me hold the blue bat in cricket (looks over at teaching assistant)"* Many children with Down's syndrome

g the information they receive from their senses and then co-coordinating their movements (Shields, Dodd and Casey, 2009).

As a result, although the muscles can perform the movements, they are often performed in a slower, more uncoordinated manner. This makes it difficult for pupils with DS to react to a travelling ball and then strike it (Alcott, 2004).

Pupils X and Y expressed negative feelings when discussing striking and fielding activities because the activity was performed with their TA and they had little independence.

*Pupil X:"I don't like cricket" (does the action of batting, points at the stumps and bats on the image).*

*Pupil Y: Pupils tongue out and shakes head in response to the rounders visual card*

If the two conditions mentioned previously – shared understanding and matching task demands to performance capability – could be implemented when planning for striking and fielding activities then perhaps the experiences of these sports would be more positive as this research strongly indicates that pupils enjoy being with and working alongside their peers during PE.

Pupil X and Y favoured "individual" activities like dance, gymnastics and swimming when their peers participated with them.

*Pupil X: "With all my friends we move to the music and play robot, everyone does the robot dance"*

*Pupil Y: Favourite sport is swimming, "Lydia said I was a good swimmer."*

Penny (2002) suggested that it is much easier to include pupils with SEN in gymnastics and dance, have low muscle tone (hypotonia) and loose ligaments allowing a wider than normal range of movement and flexibility. They have low tone in their fingers and wrist and this can hinder the acquisition of skills such as striking a ball. In addition, many children have difficulties processi yet dance activities were shown to be disliked by the majority of children with SEN in the study by Coates and Vickerman (2010). Nevertheless, findings in this study suggest that pupils liked these activities *when they were with peers*. TAs X and Y stated:

*Teaching Assistant X: "Doing gym, pupil X likes to be with her circle of friends"*

*Teaching Assistant Y: "(Pupil Y) Loves dance and being with her friends"*

To contrast this, teaching assistant Z stated that;

*Teaching assistant Z:"When pupil Z is having a 'bad day' he likes to practice sports on his own, often just me and him. Sports like gymnastics suit him more when he is being anti-social."*

Research indicates that bad days tend to be caused by feelings of social isolation and restricted participation. The negative experiences result from either bullying in the lesson or from the child's inability to take part fully due to different variables (Goodwin and Watkinson, 2000). However, pupil Z was the only participant in this study to experience "bad days". This could be due to his autism which makes him anxious and resistant to change (Lawson, 2001). Conversely, neither TA Z nor pupil Z mentioned anything about bullying or social isolation during their interviews. TA Z does make a distinction based on interaction with peers:

*Teaching assistant Z: "Pupil Z deters away from most activities if his friends are not in the lesson or not giving him the full attention he usually receives in a classroom environment"*

This indicates that although pupil Z, prefers to have time alone on "bad days", when he is in PE having a "good day" he wants to be involved with his peers and feel a sense of belonging.

According to Schauwer et al, (2000) pupils tend to not fully enjoy or participate in the lessons if there are no peers present or if they are working only with pupils who have disabilities. However, teachers must be careful not to make these friendships into a relationship dependent on support. When relationships are dominated by the assumption of need and care, peers will behave not as equals but more like guides or helpers (Watson et al, 2000).

### Barriers

"Children with special educational needs are still encountering a number of barriers that restrict or hinder their participation in PE and PA outside of school" (Coates and Vickerman, 2008, Pg 173) This section has been broken down into two sub categories which convey best the views of pupils X, Y and Z as evidenced by this research: The Parent Barrier and The Perceived Confidence Barrier.

### The Parent Barrier

Many parents of children with disabilities expect that inclusive education will lead to increased social interaction, but some also fear that their children will become socially isolated in mainstream schools (Guralnick, Connor and Hammond, 1995; Sale and Carey, 1995). This parental fear can be justified as it has been identified that children with DS are at considerable risk of becoming socially isolated (Guralnick 1999). However, pupils with DS in KS2 are as popular as their peers when being chosen as a partner (Laws et al, 1996). Findings of this study suggest that pupil Z is being "wrapped in cotton wool" and his sense that his parents are anxious about his welfare at school may be restricting his enjoyment of PE: .

*Teaching Assistant Z: "Pupil Z is being put in a bubble of protection by his family; they worry greatly about his success and happiness in mainstream school. Being put in this bubble makes him quite reserved, especially in situations like PE."*

Support and encouragement from his parents would perhaps make his experience of PA and education, more positive. Research has shown a connection between parental support and the child's participation in PA (Davison, 2004, Biddle & Goudas, 1996-25-27, Menear, 2007).

We have seen that parents believe that participation in PA benefits their child and that pupils with DS are especially dependent on the opportunities for social activity created by their families. This study introduces the notion that pupils with DS also depend highly on the support from peers and enjoy PE much more as a result. Pupil Z depends on others for support and actually performs sufficiently with peers on "good days"

*Pupil Z: Enjoys being with Jack on his own in basketball.*

The feeling of dependency comes from the parents not the pupils and this highlights the importance of investigating the views of pupils with DS and their experience of mainstream PE.

Bearing in mind the health implications of DS and the social benefits pupils can gain from PA (Biddle, Fox, Boutcher, 2000 and Meanear, 2007), pupil Z's parents and others like them should see the advantages of participating in physical activities together or taking their children to clubs which provide opportunities for PA. Evidence from this study suggests that, when a parent is supportive and provides opportunities for pupils to do activities outside of school, their child's enjoyment and experience of similar activities within school and PE is more positive.

*Pupil Y: "I can do 5 lengths in JJB with my mum"*

Swimming is pupil Y's favourite activity in school. This may be due to a positive parental influence outside of school.

### The Perceived Competence Barrier

If pupils do not think that they are particularly good at an activity, they tend not to give positive views relating to their experiences.

*Pupil X:" I can't do that (scrunches up face and points to the image on the card" (Cricket)*

*Pupil Y: "Bit hard, with the red thing" (stick in hockey)*

Lavallee et al. (2004) cited in Coates and Vickerman (2008 pg. 1720) indicate that low self-efficacy, which is the belief of capability when performing in a certain activity or skill; can result in the withdrawal from sport and PE. This would be particularly detrimental to pupils with DS considering the association of low levels of activity with obesity and other health implications (Rowlands, Ingledew, & Eston, 2000).

Skilful participation gives pupils intrinsic rewards. Being good at something, and somebody recognising it, often contributes to a positive PE experience (Goodwin and Watkinson, 2000).

*Pupil Y: "Lydia said I was a good swimmer"*

*Teaching Assistant Y: "She tends to like things she is good at"*

If teachers, TAs and peers are aware that pupils with DS do not like a certain activity due to their perceived competencies, then effective goal-setting and differentiation should be implemented. According to Cabral and Crisfield (1996), effective goal-setting can assist in improving confidence and helps reduce negative feelings surrounding an activity. In order for this to be implemented effectively, teachers must consult with pupils to find out why they express negative views relating to certain activities and what can be done to combat them.

## Conclusion

This study has set out to investigate the views of KS2 pupils with DS regarding their experiences of PE, in a mainstream school. By conversing with pupils much information has been uncovered about how they feel during their PE lessons. Empowerment of and consultation with the children are key components of the successful planning and delivering of an inclusive education (Vickerman, 2002). Consultation and engagement with DS pupils regarding their views and experiences, in PE and in all subjects, should result in barriers to their inclusion being removed. Government strategies that aim to remove barriers to achievement such as The SEN and Disability Rights Act (SENDA), The Every Child Matters Agenda (ECM) and The National Curriculum for Physical Education (NCPE) provide a good foundation for teachers to plan their lessons involving pupils with DS.

However, it is evident that not all pupils with SEN are being included consistently. Sport England (2001) highlights that young children with disabilities take part in a narrower range of PE activities and some had not taken part in any sport as part of the school curriculum in the previous year.

Much research has been conducted into the need for TAs and teachers to work together to find the best ways to include pupils with disabilities (Vickerman and Coates). However findings in this study suggest that pupils do not like to be restricted by adult interventions and they enjoy PE much more when they are engaged and supported by their peers.

It also emerged that non-disabled peers are often just as effective as TAs when supporting pupils with DS during PE lessons. Non-disabled peers often have the knowledge about their friends' competences and what to expect of a pupil with DS which makes them ready to modify activities to assist inclusion (Dolva et al, 2010).

This research indicates that when the pupil with DS finds their ability to interact with peers is hindered and independence is taken away, positive experiences of PE quickly turn negative. This is most evident when pupils participate in striking and fielding activities. This is due to specific physical impairments such as slow reaction times and low muscle tone (Alcott, 2004). These impairments force pupils to perform these activities assisted by their TAs unless the activity is sufficiently modified.

It was surprising to discover that pupils with DS tend to enjoy team sports due to their social nature, as literature suggests that children are often excluded from these more competitive activities by teachers and peers out of concern for their ability and capabilities (Goodwin and Watkinson, 2000). However, if pupils receive positive feedback from non-disabled peers or feel completely included, they regard team sports positively. Furthermore, pupil Y and Z favour individual sports if they participate with peers. These findings support the importance of peer interaction to a positive PE lesson experience.

It is apparent that parental influence also plays a big part into the attitudes pupils have to PE. Pupil Z's parent may fear that their child will become socially isolated in mainstream schools (Guralnick, Connor and Hammond, 1995; Sale and Carey, 1995). However, through talking to pupil Z and TA Z, it is clear that the anxiety he senses in his parents and their need to keep him protected, make pupil Z withdrawn and hesitant. This restricts his participation and enjoyment.

In contrast, pupils X and Y are involved in physical activities outside school with their parents or siblings and this gives them the confidence and ability to enjoy and fully participate in the school PE classes. Parents have the ability to give their child confidence, and increase the perceived capabilities. If a pupil practices or participates in an activity outside of school they are much more likely to have increased perceived competency. Parental negativity is seen to be another barrier to a pupil with DS enjoying PE.

On reflection, the primary and past research indicates that peers play a defining role in the experience of students with disabilities in PE (Block, Obenveiser, & Bain, 1995; Tripp et al., 1995 cited in Coates and Vickerman, 2010 pg.) Classmates in this study contribute to active involvement in PE. A sense of belonging is reinforced when classmates provide physical support such as helping with equipment and providing encouragement.

If teachers are made aware of this they will be encouraged to facilitate a purposeful environment which lets pupils with DS and their non-disabled peers interact and learn from each other in almost every lesson. Pupil independence should be encouraged, and more education or training should be provided to teachers, parents and TAs to highlight the benefits of PE and PA for pupils with DS.

In order for these interventions to occur, teachers must work collaboratively with TAs, parents and most importantly the pupils themselves, to ensure that inclusion is consistently assessed from the perspective of the pupils; they hold the key to vital information which can determine the success or otherwise of their experience of inclusion (BAALPE 1989).

## Recommendations

*For this study*

Further insight into the pupils' experiences involving peers during their PE lessons could be obtained by observing their behaviour in PE lessons. This would reinforce or support any information given in the interviews, enriching the study and taking its findings further.

Lesson observation is a relatively unobtrusive method of qualitative data collection and does not require the cooperation of the subjects (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). This could be beneficial for enriching research from the perspectives of pupils who have limited speech, as observing them in their PE lessons interacting with peers prior to conducting the interview may give the interviewer additional insights into limited answers given by the subject.

**For other studies**

Making the participant sample larger in future studies would be beneficial. The sample must still be purposeful (Gratton and Jones, 2004). But using a larger sample size would allow for more experiences to be shared, and more points for comparison to be made. Using samples from different geographical areas would also be useful, to examine whether area and school

characteristics, such as teaching quality, have an effect on the view a pupil with DS has regarding their PE experiences.

Furthermore, to gain an even better understanding of what inclusion is and why barriers are formed from the perspective of the child, it would be beneficial to explore their experiences in a broader context that includes peers, community and parents (Bronfenbrenner 1979 cited in Cavaliere & Watkinson 2010 pg. 291) However care must be taken not to take the focus away from what the pupil has to say, and what their experiences are. Other sources should enrich, support or contrast what pupils with DS think and feel.

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# JUMP IN(tegrated) Dance: a learning community and model of practice in Higher Education

**Carr, D.**

*I feel the only disability in life is an apparent disregard for the possibilities we can achieve as a collective, evident (sometimes) in the dance industry, a school or even a community who can be ignorant towards the differences which make us human beings. For me, JUMP IN Dance Project is making steps towards breaking boundaries and building the confidence of people with disabilities and as importantly (us) their able-bodied peers, in an often intangible area of the dance industry."*
Level 6 undergraduate, (extract unpublished dissertation).

## Abstract

JUMP IN(tegrated) Dance (JUMP IN) investigated whether a learning community had a valid role to play in a Higher Education environment. The project integrated undergraduate dance degree students, community participants, support workers and family members across three distinctive institutional domains. The constructs for the action research intersects three elements of direct influence both on the research area and its paradigmatic framework: Disability; contexts and issues, Learning; teaching and pedagogy and Integration; as a form of inclusion. Each distinct element was influential to model; its modes of representation, and social constructs in both practice and theory. These influenced the use of language and syntax, research interventions and identifiable connections made to individuals, groups and their environment. The primary capacity of a project of this nature was to ascertain *what* extraordinary things learners could do in this 'model' environment and *how* achievements are accomplished as a result of its shift from tiered learning towards a cooperative paradigm.

## Introduction

Work related learning theories and practices are important features within undergraduate modules of the dance programme. During annual reviews of the curriculum, changes are usually made to address discreet 'gaps' within the students' skill and knowledge base. Sometimes this is done through project based activity. Mostly this is driven from the feedback of student cohorts coming back from placement activity. On one occasion, students identified through a work based learning seminar (May 2006) that they were anxious in relation to the rising number of participants in their placements with disabilities. Although they felt comfortable with the subject knowledge they felt less well equipped with the strategies to be inclusive and diverse in their delivery of the subject across integrated cohorts. Motivational factors for creating a learning community were tan gentle in both their concept and values. Firstly, there are the issues surrounding

disability, learning and integration, identified by other writers, in most instances define boundaries so great that it is initially difficult to create such a diverse and successful environment for learning and for most educational institutions would seem to greater hurdle to attempt, without potential detriment to some aspect of the syllabus, curriculum or assessment procedure. This project explores the opinions and experiences of a number of undergraduate dance students at Liverpool John Moores University who were participants and involved in the research aspects of the project to see if it the project would create a viable learning construct in Higher Education. In its design there were three constructs within the early part of the enquiry. These were to gauge if there were sufficient industrial or theoretical tensions to motivate a need for change in a model of delivery. To understand if undergraduate students could find enough value in the project in order to engage fully in its processes, without any adverse effect on their other aspects of study and if it would actively engage community participants in the same way as our undergraduates, without the feeling that they were becoming "lab rats".

Photograph by Ken Travis

## Aims of the project

As a piece of action research it was always hoped that the project would:

1. Create an integrated dance learning environment within a Higher Education context for undergraduate dance students and members of the community who are able-bodied and those who have disabilities.
2. Investigate the impact on learning for dance degree students who integrate with a group of peers in a real world situation
3. Challenge prejudice and ignorance and dispel fear or anxiety through training and knowledge in 'real' environments that facilitate social development.
4. Understand whether the experience of being part of JUMP IN would in time, create graduate artists and community mentors who have ability to empower others, develop practices which engage others and involve a greater interactive sense of "community building". (Jasper 1995:187).

**Initial enquiry and contextual baseline Information.**

To validate the need for the research and the project I was keen to identify exactly why students 'feared' engaging with disability groups and 'mixed' cohorts. I was intrigued to see how much interaction they presently had with disabled people, and whether there was any connection between lack of understanding and experience and/or poor service provision at a local level for dance experiences with disability. A mixed methods questionnaire was constructed and given to the following sample groups (September 2006) in order to contextualise experience and awareness of disability: (ŋ=267)

| | LJMU Dance Undergraduates (September 2006) ŋ= 105 | | Tertiary College students (December 2006)ŋ=167 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Q1. Do you have any regular contact or are related to a person who has a named disability? | **Yes 35%** | **No 65%** | **Yes 22%** | **No 78%** |
| Q2. For those that answered 'yes to Q1 was this in a work related capacity? | **Yes 49%** | **No 51%** | **Yes 62%** | **No 38%** |
| Q3. You identified in Q2 that you have worked with someone with a disability? (if answer to Q2 was No then answer No again) was this work connection made in a dance context or dance industry environment? | **Yes 1%** | **No 99%** | **Yes 0%** | **No 100%** |
| Q4. Have you seen any dance work by a company who has disabled performers as part of their cast? | **Yes 78%** | **No 22%** | **Yes 25%** | **No 75%** |
| Q5. Did your school or college do anything with you that supported your awareness of the issues surrounding disability? | **Yes 32%** | **No 68%** | **Yes 28%** | **No 72%** |

Sadly, a significant number of dance students from the region are entering Higher education with little disability awareness. Many have little or no contact with anyone on a personal, social level with anyone who has a disability and this is even less likely to happen through an arts based event or employment. It was noted that a higher percentage of students on A level, Btec courses in dance had not been shown work by disabled artists (despite it being encouraged by the syllabus and having regular tours in the regions by companies such as Cando Co and Stop Gap integrated dance companies). It was also noted that the percentage of LJMU responses to no in Q4 came from Level 4 entrants (again reflecting that further education are reluctant to build work by artists with disabilities into the curriculum.)

It was the qualitative responses which enabled us to baseline the actual 'fear and prejudices' still among dancers in training. There is also a great lack of confidence in the student's ability to connect with these participants and their support agencies in order to develop lasting and good practices

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| | **LJMU Dance Undergraduates (November 20007) ŋ= 105** | | | | **Tertiary College students (December 2007)ŋ=167** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Q6 Do you know anything about disability and the legislation/laws which surrounds it? Indicate those you have awareness of. | DDA | SENDA | Duty Of care | Don't know | DDA | SENDA | Duty Of care | Don't know |
| | 26% | 12% | 47% | 15% | 4% | 3% | 17% | 76% |
| Q7 using the short descriptors of disability 'models' see handout – which one do you believe defines disability? | Medical Model | Social Model | Both | Don't know | Medical Model | Social Model | Both | Don't know |
| | 18% | 32% | 39% | 11% | 21% | 3% | 0% | 76% |
| Q8 What is it that most makes dance teachers/artists afraid of disability or lacking confidence to work with people with disabilities? | "Not having the knowledge of what disability actually is or how to react or deal with it." X3<br>"Being scared of the unknown. If they don't understand something they shy away from it. It is also the feeling of insecurity in relation to what they don't know."<br>"Not having a greater knowledge of understanding of those with disabilities"<br>"Not wanting to seem as though we are looking down on them or feeling that we could offend."<br>"The uncertainty of not knowing anything about disabled people."<br>"It is the unknown that makes people ignorant."<br>"Most people are afraid of people with disabilities because they do not understand it fully and have not had enough contact with people with disabilities to know how to handle it."<br>"The severity of the condition and the effects of it."<br>"Not knowing how to behave.. What to do if something happened. Need training."<br>"People's way of reacting, feeling awkward"<br>"How to approach or interact"<br>"Worry that my action may trigger a negative reaction or situation."<br>"Feel that disabled people are segregated and institutionalised. In school we did get to 'mingle' but this enhanced fear."<br>"Fear of judging and being judging".<br>"Ignorance – don't have contact with anyone with a disability"<br>"Prejudice based on ignorance." | | | | "A disabled person cannot do things for themselves"<br>"My view of them physically"<br>"Afraid of asking them to do something that they can't"<br>"The abnormality of it (as in physical appearance and behaviour) of the disabled person. I don't really call mentally ill people as disabled."<br>"People are afraid to ask a person with disabilities what their needs are."<br>"Not being able to do things they did when they weren't different. Being treated differently."<br>"Being different from others, looked at or felt sorry for."<br>"Trying to understand the unknown, trying to accept the difference and to learn how to except that people live differently."<br>"Learning to live with the fact of not being fully moveable with the physical side of disability."<br>"Not understanding the differences between people"<br>"The difference in appearance and behaviour."<br>Coping with people who are different to them mentally or physically"<br>"Disability is sometimes connected a lot to violence and that can scare people."<br>"We forget that they are human beings like us".<br>"Because people with disabilities are 'different' to people without disabilities.<br>"Because this person does not have the normal body, hearing or sight." | | | |

Students acknowledged that training, knowledge and practical solutions to cope with situations which may (or may not) arise would encourage more working practice and as a result of "not wanting to offend" as a key reason why they segregate. It would seem that for students to engage more in integrative practice there was a need to challenge prejudice and ignorance and dispel fear or anxiety through training and experiences in 'real' environments that facilitate social development.

For a Higher Education establishment, Work based learning facilitates a direct link to the industry, enabling students and lecturers insight into local and national agendas; identifying need for curriculum design (Bolam et al, 2005) influencing practice based research that combines academic research (in this case action research) and practical application (Nolan and Van der Putten, 2007: 403). It isn't always possible to embed, deviate or even make radical changes to the curriculum (as a result of an initial research idea) in time to address immediate needs. To explore effectively the issues, truths and impact on both subject and practice informed by student feedback and baseline data; it was important to recognise that the students would need appropriate access to a number of participants with disabilities with whom they could build a comfortable, stable and professional working relationship with. There is also the consideration of an environment which could be managed positively and constructively for all. Agreeing that the project should be on-site in the dance studio (fit for purpose both in terms of activity and access) made sense, as students and participants could be supported more easily by one professional host and engage in a standardised approach within the mentoring as opposed to multiple 'sites' where only negotiated mentoring could take place. We created a pilot project outside of the curriculum; with a rationale to identify if such a learning community (Wenger, 2007) could be created, without the worry of negative impact on modular delivery and assessment. This project was consistent in its approach with other academic ethos' of the dance degree; where students' would not learn strategies related to integration and disability awareness purely from textbook scenarios but would find their own experiences upon which they could draw comparison with those of others for debate. Supported by CETL (Centre of Excellence for Teaching and Learning) through a staff sabbatical, JUMP IN went through a whole series of promotion and recruitment strategies to gather its first intake for the project to begin. Part of the recruitment process was to underpin the value of the project from the student perspective buy identifying aspects of the project where students (from all levels of the degree programme) could gain credit and assessment for module outcomes, through an individually negotiated learner contract, to ensure that the project had industrial and academic currency from the beginning. We were supported by officers in numerous centres, colleges and the local authority who liaised with individuals, families and support networks to recruit participants from the wider community with disabilities, whilst undergraduate degree students applied through a detailed letter of application or video application. Students were recruited in November 2006. In tutorials we used the time to review applications (with personal data removed) of the community participants, whilst using lectures and seminars to strategise and contextualise access needs and gather related awareness and classifications of the forms of disability joining the project. Contextualisation of the individual clients became useful case studies for seminars. On the 16th January 2007 undergraduate students, community participants and the professional host mentor came together for the first time.

## Considerations when designing an integrated learning environment: Inclusion versus Integration

In 1997, the National Committee for Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE) clarifies a need for all Higher Education programmes to focus on broadly three forms of inclusion: *physical, cultural* and *cognitive*. However, NCIHE noted that these tended to be considered separately and not as a unified whole by many institutions; defining a less than purposeful inclusive learning environment. The report makes few suggestions as to how these should / could be considered uniquely when dealing with a cohort of disabled and a mixture of disabled and non-disabled learners, within the spectrum of Higher Education cohorts or subject areas specific. Scott *et al.* (2003) demands that in all education, firstly nobody is disadvantaged by the arrangements in the learning establishment, and that everybody should be helped to learn as a result of the design and delivery of the curriculum, though not suggesting *how* this could be achieved. The debate surrounding inclusive learning environments, integrated practice and special educational needs (collective approaches) is interpreted by writers such as Farrell, 2001; Ainscow *et al.*, 2000; Ainscow *et al.*, 2005; Dyson, 2001; Westwood, 1997, to mean access to the environment or participation in curriculum or activity. There is much less literature within specific dance teaching and pedagogy which offers practical examples of how integration (on a practical level dealing with the physical, cognitive, social, and cultural integration into the class) or where the content and delivery is where integration can take place. The community dance texts of (Amans, 2008; Fogg, 2008; Benjamin, 2007; Eringa, 2006 and Thomson, 2006) debate experiences and theories associated with predominantly disabled only cohorts and not always those environments where there are a balanced proportion of disabled and non-disabled participants. Vickerman *et al. (2007)* identifies a rationale for some of the limitations of integrating "pupils" with different learning needs into one environment, offering some explanation as to why segregation may happen in arts based contexts. Also contradictions and personal coinage across literary sources has meant that there is little standardisation of a concise definition of inclusion and integration, and even greater variants are applied to their application. We had to look at this from the opposite perspective, source a greater understanding of what is meant to *exclude* and be absolute by what it means to create a collective sense of 'wholeness' to a learning community. Adam Benjamin asks that we clarify our uniqueness; question "who is excluded by our actions and prejudices", and consider our relationship with others if we are to become a "collective whole". He parallels integration's closeness to integrity particularly as a goal for integration, in that "every individual has an essential and unique contribution to make." (Benjamin, 2002:14) This is a sentiment mirrored earlier by Dyson (2001) who offers that inclusion and integration comes from activities which denote equality of opportunity and celebrate difference. We drew upon two definitions of 'integrated' to clarify the project and its work's true identity (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989:1065):

1. The combining of diverse parts into a complex whole; a complex state, the parts of which are distinguishable; the harmonious combination of the different elements in a personality.
2. The bringing into equal membership of a common society whose groups or persons previously discriminated against on racial or cultural grounds.

In practice JUMP IN became instantly a "diff-ability" group, on the grounds that the label lacks any reference to a person's 'inability' to carry out either a duty or function (from the medical model) but also a consideration and respect for participants who didn't display the obvious signs associated to the "seen or heard" disabilities (Goffman, 1963) and also based on the fact that ideas would grow from the individuals in a stable accessible environment (social construct). Although Initial descriptions of what we were trying to be, such as integral whole; harmonious and equal in membership proved problematic.

Integration is a struggle; it requires tension and demands an element of questioning and not least a commitment to change. It is from his enquiry that we can draw a greater sense of actual purpose to our construct for the learning community. We learnt that it was important not always to 'play safe' but to be open to the constructs that were evolving. Farrell's work (2001:81) encouraged us to "be prepared to move beyond policy structures, teaching approaches, pupil grouping and use of support".

Early practices through the pilot project led us to focus upon integration via *learning relationships* within the whole cohort, a recognisable shift in infrastructural and environmental design. Macdonald & Stratta (2001) note that changing the infrastructure of a learning environment to engage a new set of learners, means that "diversity is nor a collection of distinct conditions or circumstances that can be dealt with as they arise." (Scott *et.al. 2003:256)* In a number of studies on widening access to learning environments (particularly Higher Education), we can look at the writing by Macrae & Maguire, 2002; Reay, 2002; Reay et al., 2001, who all reflect Bourdieu's (1989) work and opinions. However research by Chapman, 2006 and Chapman & Carlisle, 2006 has identified that mentors still have concerns about appropriately supporting traditionally disadvantaged learners, especially those with disabilities. This is an identical reflection of the students 'fears' identified through the work based learning seminar and baseline questionnaire. A key consideration in the dispelling of fears was to encourage participants in JUMP IN to identify in the early stages their actual approach to the work. An all-inclusive approach is far better than an each-inclusive approach. (see Scott *et al.* 2003 and Macdonald & Stratta, 2001) especially in practical courses such as dance. Constructing the learning community was one thing, but delivering activities which engage all and do not exclude is another. Particularly in the early stages of the project we looked to Dyson (1999:2), who argues that socially inclusive practices are at present based on "predicted equality" not necessarily "outcome based" from actual noted examples. Only truly developed practices have infrastructures which recognise Dyson's (2001:27) *Entitlement – accessibility – integration – integrity* model for inclusive practice. A consideration brought to the fore in both the environment and activities across all of the cycles of JUMP IN's development as a learning community.

**Transitions from text book scenarios:**
**Listening to the one voice that matters.**

Paramount to the fulfilment of the project's aims was to enable the students to learn from having their *own* experiences and engage with the real experiences of the disabled person encountered during creative projects. The only interpretative accounts can only be found within the reflective and somewhat integrative papers of community practitioners previously mentioned. Their writings lead us with some trepidation towards the divided nature of community and professional dance status, often writing in a mixed focus manner from the practitioners' point of view or from observations of the participants. In terms of personal reflection on the experiences of physical activity and education one had to look initially to autobiographical recollections of disabled people such as Jackson, (2002) and Grey-Thomson (2001) who focus on their experiences of physical education, where one can draw comparisons with dance in education. Other authors (Davis & Watson, 2002; Swain & Cameron, 1999 & Viscardi, 2001) and the Disability Rights Commission(DRC) (2002 :www.DRC/Archive/NC%20speech%20NUS1.pdf) relate to the much broader life experiences, where again parallels could be sought. There is still little which endeavours to recollect those undertaking dance practices. Benjamin (2007) suggests that this is hindered because of the dance profession's focus being on their classification "as an art form" instead that we should remind ourselves what it is exactly that the arts offers today's society and "what it is that differentiates them from physical education". (Benjamin, 2007:45-46). Even though Barton (1997) identified an urgency that we explore experiences (with reference again to sport) from

the perspective of disability and DePauw (1997) reiterated Barton's request, with the addition that we focus on participation issues; there is still, more than ten years later, an apathy to support research, based on the actual experiences of those who 'live' them. A priority, that was to become a 'golden thread' learning agenda for JUMP IN as a community of practice.

*"Reading, another's experiences is ok and you could probably relate to it or project yourself onto that scenario. But knowing how you are actually going to respond to a situation needs you to live it so to speak. It's alright to say this will 'probably be this and probably that' but there are so many unexpected experiences that you can't get from a textbook. Textbooks don't develop an instant reaction. You might not even think about it if you are not living it." (level 5 participant, recorded focus group)*

*"If it was reading material from a lecture I would be more prone to think. I have to do this because the books say so, whereas JUMP IN is all about self discovery, you do things because you find appropriate ways of developing (and it works) or you maybe have to do something again (differently) to make it better." (Level 4 participant, recorded focus group)*

*"There is a definite difference between the theory and the practice. Theory informs but it is the practice which makes you feel accomplished. JUMP IN has allowed me to explore similarities between what is written and what can actually be applied." (Level 6 reflective diary entry)*

**A community: through design and practice.**

As with any 'community' it was important to recognise what aspects of its nature or construct give it definition. The first few weeks of the project went very well and consisted mainly of host led creative activities designed primarily to engage the participants in social interactions and allow time for simple working partnerships to emerge. With the students less concerned that this was a lecture and community participants enthralled with the welcoming embrace of the university environment, all participants were beginning to show signs of positive engagement (recorded on video and echoed through student diary entries), both in terms of motivated responses to the creativity and interaction with each other. Anderson and Wood (2003) observe that a key critical element of learning community is about "the people and the purpose and not structures". JUMP IN quickly became a learning community that has an infrastructure of learners who "bring resources, ideas, knowledge and experience" (Wenger, 1999), a reflection of any true learner and learning environment, with participants volunteering their time to be with each other, doing activities in which they found common goals and purpose. To construct the project in relation to its ability to inform curriculum design and delivery meant that it was important to define the driving forces and not be suffocated by the experiences associated to the practices of the meetings. However in order to place value on this community of practice's ability to develop as a model of pedagogical practice, the project had to allow for three aspects of its practice and delivery to develop as a construct; time for the whole cohort to meet and engage creatively, time for the cohort to reflect during activities and after (without any feeling like they were 'under the microscope') and time for the students to access more traditional learning environments to research, analyse and reflect upon the processes. We validated the initial aims and objectives for the project's activities making references to (the radical and ameliorative) categorisations of community practice (Chris Thompson, 2006:25) as a baseline for the students' debate and analysis of the work. Paramount to the early success of the project was derivative of our need to empathise empowerment and participation through the range of practical and learning activities

## Methodology:

It was always intended that the undergraduate students would have a shared responsibility for the research methods. Authors such as Parrish & Bresler (2007); Risner *et al.* (2006); Stock (2004) identify with this approach in that it gives students "the tools for creating their own lifelong environment for exploration, discovery, reflection and learning". (Parrish & Bresler, 2007:1381) developing a collaborative effort "between student and faculty" (Risner *et al.* 2006:51). Over the period of its evolvement the project has stayed true to four discernable driving forces, upon which its practical and artistic foundation was secured:

**Create – Investigate – Understand – Challenge.**

JUMP IN operates in an interpretivist paradigm, with strategies in both grounded theory method and social theory deliveries. It borrowed principles from ethnographic study in order to exam (during the participation in an integrated environment) cultural traits (institutional) for the members of JUMP IN who are disabled (from day care centres) and non-disabled students. (University).

As the project consisted of students, all of whom carried out individually negotiated research as part of dissertations, work based learning and/or performance based modules, it seemed appropriate that the research method also shares commonalities with a hermeneutic enquiry:

*The hermeneut does not attempt to reproduce or objectively represent reality but, rather builds an interpretation via a blueprint of his or her own design and through logical argumentation. Unrestrained by rigid methodological underpinning, the interpreter has the freedom to make numerous choices during every loop of the interpretive process. (Zuber-Skerrit, 1996, p.94)*

Initially it was important to engage the participants in a few 'pilot' workshops before asking them to commit to the research activity. Having Sudley theatre as its base through the research cycle ensured we a consistency of environment which was familiar and created better opportunities for routine behaviour patterns to be observed. Analysing the impact on undergraduates learning and development and measuring the project's successes as a learning community, was a small part of a much larger continuous cycle of development and progression, as opposed to it being representative of a one-off project, where hermeneutic enquiry within an interpretivist paradigm supports a strategy to search for patterns of meanings; looking for responses to the initial baseline enquiry. The initial contact time and the observations that were made during this time enabled the research aims to be clarified and be of purpose to the enquiry. The project ran for ten weeks initially where a cycle of activities (or schema) was designed and tested then developed with one group (over another ten weeks), whilst the first was repeated with a second cohort simultaneously for comparison. The LJMU participants repeated tasks in other environments (simultaneously) leading the task based activities with other cohorts (provided by Daisy UK) in order to ensure that the data gathered through JUMP IN participants wasn't affected by any volunteer or referral bias. As a piece of action research JUMP IN has four defining characteristics which clearly supported the methodological reasoning:

- The work was essentially practical driven by real-world issues within education and training for dancers with and without disabilities;
- The nature of it activity enabled changes to support problems as they arose, giving greater insight into the phenomena;
- There was possibility to create a series of 'feedback loops' to reflect and insight change, where findings opened up new possibilities which can be implemented and evaluated as an important prelude to further investigation;
- The model itself has no fewer than nine active parties and three institutions as participants, where all of the JUMP IN participants take on an active not passive role in participation.

(Denscombe, 2008)

The practical nature of the work encouraged the participants "creative traits" (Rogers & Fasciato, 2005:387) to flourish. As a model (this learning community) was highly-student centred within the concept of its design, the phenomenological experience for the individual in the 'doing' provided expansive variants. This is particularly true as the nature of the creative work prescribed to a social construction of reality where learners found ways to engage with one another, adapting knowledge and language in order that all (participants) were learning respectively. Each week as a collective the participants build upon a 'unified' response to the previous week's activities, completing tasks for which they collectively agree upon to ensure that there was no misleading memory bias from any one particular participant.

*"I think it's experiential. Maybe consciously or sub-consciously, you turn up to rehearsals, having learnt from the experiences of the previous week. You don't want to repeat things that didn't work, so you come prepared with new ideas and methods. You become aware when you are not going in the right direction, so you may try sometime new, like stepping back. I think each session is like trial and error, like doing experiments, not trying to forecast." (Level 5, Student diary entry)*

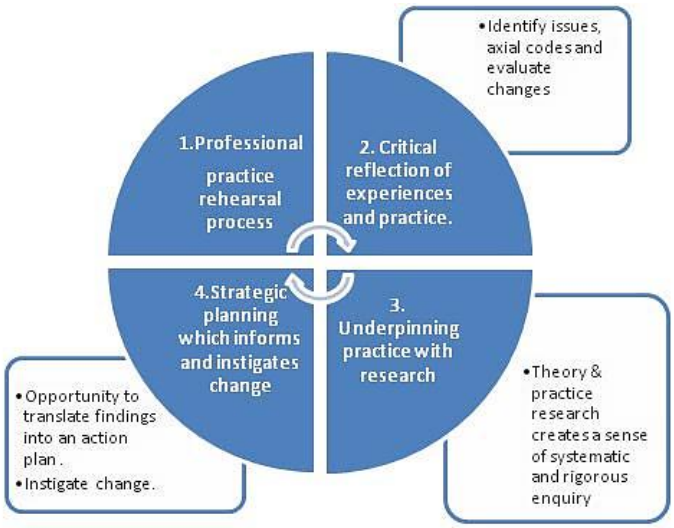
Rogers & Fasciato (2005) suggest people who think and behave creatively have traits which show them as curious, independent thinkers, people who challenge conventions and often make connections which aren't apparent, speculating about possibilities, exploring alternative approaches, playing with ideas, keeping an open mind to critically evaluate what they do and offering constructive ideas. As a result of an authentic but true rehearsal (creative) process and the influence of a trustworthy observational settings (because of the cooperative paradigm) it meant that definitions produced as a result of this natural context, examined how objective reality can be sought against a that with is socially constructed. Important to the concept of this methodological reasoning was the creation of a deliverable structure that is based on key fields identified by Hargreaves (2001, 2003) one that adapts a consistent triangulation of the interpretative data and was supportive of:

- The practitioners knowledge and expertise (in this case the host as facilitator, the LJMU students as applicators / developers and community participants as client based applicators / developers);
- Public knowledge and theory (advised from the literature review) contextualises and facilitates the creative paradigm and learning;
- Knowledge creation through collaborative enquiry (measured and maintained with a co-operative paradigm, where each participant engages in some aspect of responsibility for the 'whole', driven by their individual learner enquires)

Throughout we adopted a cyclical approach to the research activities (finding a common thread which connected workshops, lectures, seminars and the students own private research practices through the project in order to capture data and reflect upon the practical processes:

Photograph by Ken Travis

**Figure 1: The Cyclical Process of JUMP IN's action research**




The group met weekly for practical activity with the students engaging in the research as participant observers. The professional host (myself) took on dual roles carrying out both direct and participant observations. Support workers for individuals and family members carried out direct observations and supported video recording / archiving of activities. Students completed personal diaries, helped to catalogue evidence in the video archive, participated in focus groups and supported their peers, keeping both written diaries and video diaries. Parents and family members supported the work by recording reflective practices at home and noting outcomes of these in their own journal entries and scores. All of this qualitative data was made available during key milestones in the project's history and became an invaluable resource for comparison. This data was also supplemented by data gathered by the students own dissertation research using JUMP IN to analyse such things as use of language and application of teaching strategies. Its mixed method approach attempted to improve accuracy, through the triangulation of its findings from one series of code (axial) data against another. As Greene *et al.* (1989:259) justifies this approach "seeks convergence, corroboration, correspondence of results."

The research was not focused on the development of technical or creative dance skills but did (in the seminar groups) become highlighted as a 'deeper' understanding of these skills as a result of transferring them to another context. Observations done by the researcher and participants (field notes) within the creative process, as well as focus groups and the work itself (three versions) was used for triangulation and validity of the resultant qualitative data, in particular to see if students were responding to issues which were identified in the baseline survey (Table 1 & 2) but also to see if they identify any practical approach to pedagogy, which was identified as a gap in the market by the review of literature within their own research areas.

Over the whole period of research we evidenced dance works created for the theatre and for camera, witnessing work performed in front of a live audience and filmed in the rehearsal process. The first cycle of the project lasted from January 2007 until December 2008, with the process being repeated from September 2008 until May 2010. The research processes and model of practice has been repeated September to May 2009/10 & 2010/11. The final stage enables us to gather observational data and reflective data from undergraduates who had entered the project as level 4 students and had now completed the project through levels 5 & 6 respectfully.

## Findings & Discussion

Previously teaching and learning in relation to disability on the dance programme relied heavily on the use of textbook scenarios. The creation of a real learning community has enabled me in this research process to observe how learners develop in comparison to other traditional platforms that focus on introducing skills in an isolated and often depersonalised manner.

*"I realise how much this project builds an internalised experience, one which is lived and felt. That can be really moving. Yes I know we perform to connect to an audience but the motivation for sharing our journey to get there is much more fulfilling." (Level 6 participant, recorded focus group)*

*"I was aware that in the beginning I researched different aspects of Down's syndrome to help me to understand this condition. It was great for me to know certain facts, but texts books really to put everyone under one umbrella. We have four company members with Down's syndrome and everyone of them is different and there is no way you could just apply what the test book says. Without JUMP IN I wouldn't have known this. The project has allowed me the opportunity to be selective of theory and apply what I need to a real life situation." (Level 4 participant, recorded focus group)*

What made JUMP IN as a concept unique (or potentially problematic) is its infrastructure towards including not only members from all levels of the dance degree programmes but also with those from a community context (of different ages from 9 years to 50 years old) and those who have disabilities and those who do not. In the pilot project (January 2007), the participants as a collective initially relied greatly on the host as the facilitator, also placing those in a higher level as someone who will lead. It was not unusual therefore for a level 4 & level 5 student to display habitual patterns and to 'look up to' a level 6 student and both of these in-turn towards the professional practitioner (or teacher) to 'tell them what to do..'This was very much a Tiered approach (lending itself more readily to traditional formats of the educational environment.

*"I think sometimes we tried to make leaders, and it is part of our habits in groups to need somebody in charge (laughs). For a few weeks this was important for us all to realise that we are responsible (for each other.)" (Level 4 participant, recorded focus group)*

*"I noticed when my peers came into the project they needed someone to 'tell' them what to do. It shows peoples' true colours, allowing leaders and followers' early on until everyone was confident to lead. I learnt not to jump in all the time and 'do' but to step back and allow others the room to lead, find solutions & discover their own knowledge and experiences."(Level 6 participant, recorded focus group)*

*"I think in a traditional setting there is a traditional hierarchy, between the spectrum of abilities in the class and in terms of your relationship as students to the tutor. In JUMP IN I was very much aware the 'tutor' was at the heart of the learning process but we as learners were on all sides with everything coming together in the centre." (Level 6, extract from dissertation)*

Photograph by Ken Travis

In order to create a co-operative the first stage of the work was reliant on routine and structures (in order to avoid disinterest and chaos) and generated a tier-learning approach:

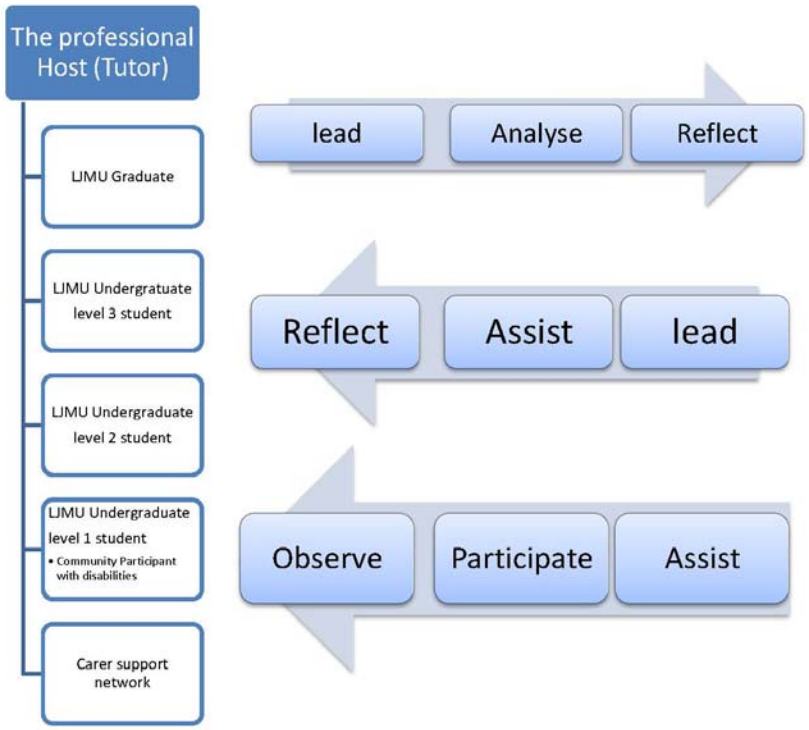



**Figure 2: 'Tiered hierachy' and infrastructure of Stage 1 of the research.**

In the early observations we noted things related to infrastructure and delivery. Where students expected 'a traditional method of organisation and delivery' bias, as students are used to the formality of being in an educational environment only according to level (year groupings) and who only work with their peers. We noted these then find it difficult to adjust to the demands of the real world and their "real life peers". (Yorke & Knight, 2004:40)

With regard to academic scrutiny, individual learning contracts designed at the beginning of the project identified many individually focused (student centred) learning priorities. This placed this project in new territory within Higher Education as it suggests that there is no requirement for everyone to learn the same information and it suggests that every learner may identify a level upon which they will deem as appropriate to their stage of development. The learner contract enables the student to individually identify aspects of knowledge they have, do not have or would like to develop as the project takes place (in relation to module outcomes). Anderson & Wood (2003) clarify that this model has a much greater critical element for the people and the purpose rather than traditional academic structures, lending itself more purposefully to action research (and social research).

*"Can I say something as an outsider observing this discussion? What becomes prominent is how well you understand traditional hierarchy in education, and society. And all the criticisms people mentioned here, you have a real understanding of how we use status in life to judge who is better or greater. Your language is fascinating! How you have broken through these barriers, and really are observant of others using this type of language. I think it is amazing that you acknowledge how different we can become." (Critical staff member, recorded focus group)*

In the early stages of the research all participants (including the host) displayed socio-cultural habitual patterns, some of which will be passive others active, all nurtured by previous experiences (in teaching and learning environments). Early observations of the creative work underpinned clear preferences of the LJMU participants towards their initial diagnostic assessment of Honey & Mumford's (1992) learning styles and Mosston's (1992) spectrum of teaching styles (particularly command style). The usefulness of this to the creative process was when the observations and field notes recorded, a shift happening from a learning environment which is symbolically complex (a traditional culture of learning in Higher Education, full of habitual patterns) towards the formation of the co-operative paradigm (the delivery infrastructure). All participants had a shared interest and commitment to the project as a whole, particularly of the environment (still structured and student centred) but the interactions become fuller and learning was no longer driven by any means (or cultural need of the student) to be superficial.

*"I think part of your leadership role from the beginning was to step back, it was interesting how you did this too, in a smooth way, so that participants didn't wonder what was happening, none of us felt that when you were task setting we were missing our leader and what was going to happen now?"*
*(*Level 5 participant, recorded focus group)

*"It is difficult not to want to re-create a hierarchy, but what was brilliant was that people assumed that it was the integration of able-bodied with disabled dancers but it was more than that, it was integrating students with non-students, three very different institutions, and degree students from different levels... the project environment really helped."* (Level 6 participant, extract from dissertation)

*"I felt very strange and yet comfortable with the task setting of the last couple of weeks. It seemed that we were free to explore, yet I naturally felt that you (the host) kind of knew what the outcome would be. You didn't? Blimey your voice really fooled me then (laughs) you must have so much faith in us? It could have all been so different? Do many teachers really not predict the outcome? This is brilliant, as a dancer I get so focused on movement and artistic challenges but this really helps me to focus on being a learner and understand learning. This is helping me to not make assumptions but to understand the components more of what I (and my partner) <u>are doing</u> and less of what has to be done."* (Level 5 participant, recorded focus group)

To promote a shift from the 'tier' towards the collective was relatively easy; the host introduced devising strategies (through tasks) influenced by the theory of Stella Cottrell (1999) over a number of weeks, offering participants alternatives in their natural bias (to their learning preference) in order participants could engage in their own learning goals. The tutor became the facilitator, often just the 'whispering in the ear' to stimulate the pace of the activity, and the observer to the unfolding events.

*"In a traditional setting there is a traditional hierarchy, between the spectrum of abilities in the class and in terms of your relationship as student to the tutor. In JUMP IN I was very much aware the 'tutor' was at the heart of the learning process but we as learners were on all sides with everything coming together in the centre." (Level 6 Participant, extract from dissertation)*

Evidenced through direct observations and diary entries, students had begun to display opposing shifts from their original learning preferences:

- Developed creative thinking and planning, offering depth to listening skills in order to prolong interest in tasks (particularly noted within those who were activist bias)
- Developed active participation with another being (and open worked with others readily changing partners) making decisions and setting priorities, opening up boundaries to accept risk, whilst taking responsibility for their own learning and development (particularly noted within those who were reflectors)
- Developed a sense of creative and logical thinking, whist being sensitive to others needs and opinions, reflecting on the value of alternative views and ideas presented by their peers. (particularly noted within those who were theorist bias)
- Developed further analytical and critical thinking, remember detail and select information from a range of possibilities (within the pragmatists)

The 'let us find, explore, discover and decide' is conceptually exciting within the dynamic process of pedagogy and essential within the working methodology. For this to truly happen it was important to create a feasible platform which at least stood a chance of facilitating these ideals in a manner that was as honest and true to its failings as to its probable successes. We were reflective of criticisms throughout the three stages of the project, particularly in relation to if it seemed the "process is more important than the actual content." (Hargreaves, 2003:50).

Most remarkable in the observational process was the transition from that which began at 'echoic' to that driven by mindfulness and independence. Through the initial 'tiered model' creative movement responses were often defined by 'the echo' or 'compliment' to what had been offered by a higher peer. As the weeks went by responses became much more individual, dynamic and 'unique'.

In many ways it responded to the issue of graduates' reservations towards creating opportunities in the community, which generates an integrated approach to dance practices. Its true value as a piece of action research for the subject and curriculum is its ability to manage and create new platforms of learning, which encourages the learner to actively engage in enquiries and exploration that will inform practice. In order to shape the practice, as the host I had to be just as embracing of the obstacles which stood in the learners' way as I was celebratory of the solutions they found. Keir Elam (2002:28) attributes this to the fact that a student may reflect on times of "feeling useless, others of control and daring." It is understandable to see why this type of model could be interpreted as a 'high risk' venture as a model for curriculum delivery in Higher Education. To support the application of this model. JUMP IN draws its foundations from the quality aspects of placement learning. It encourages the student to take knowledge (from a variety of curriculum modules) and transfer it into new contexts and to reflect on the experience of doing this and to adapt and create a deeper breadth of knowledge to apply at a later stage. Starko (2001:18) interprets this as a dance teacher's right to use creativity as an "interaction between the individual and the world outside", a framework previously suggested by Feldman, Csikszentmihalyi & Gardner (1994: 89) and Bloom (1997:76-102) which recognises where a 'model of educational practice' such as this compels us to look towards the society in which we live "to help us see how we can grow". All of these authors confer that as a result of transferring what has been learned and applying it with critical analysis of a situation or indeed the characteristics of the situation, enabled something more to be learned, underpinning the more positive aspects of both Biggs (1999) & Elam's (2002) observations. To acknowledge and reflect upon this was important if JUMP IN was to develop as a new model for educational practice or indeed create "an active learning community." The key ingredients for creating a learning community such as this were the cross-referencing of both the conceptual framework of

interacting strands identified by Craft (2000) (standards, professionalism and reflection, diversity, connection to teaching experiences, collaboration) and placed in context of practice by Weinger (2007). Plus the understanding of influences and skills which motivate the individual, against the theories and research which inform and re-model the research as it goes along. What is special about the impact of a cooperative paradigm is the affirmation that "any conscious activity by one person can enhance the learning in another." (Watkins & Mortimore, 1999:3).

*" By the later stage of the project we were learning to solve problems and make useful reflections together, collectively making decisions and provide outcomes. With the cooperative, everyone has the responsibility for something and that not only generates a sense of ownership, but also a uniqueness for all of us to want to get something done. This approach really motivated us all for our own learning and development. We all planned and brought something to the sessions and we all took something away with us that was learned as a result of something brought by our peers."*
*(Level 5 participant, journal entry)*

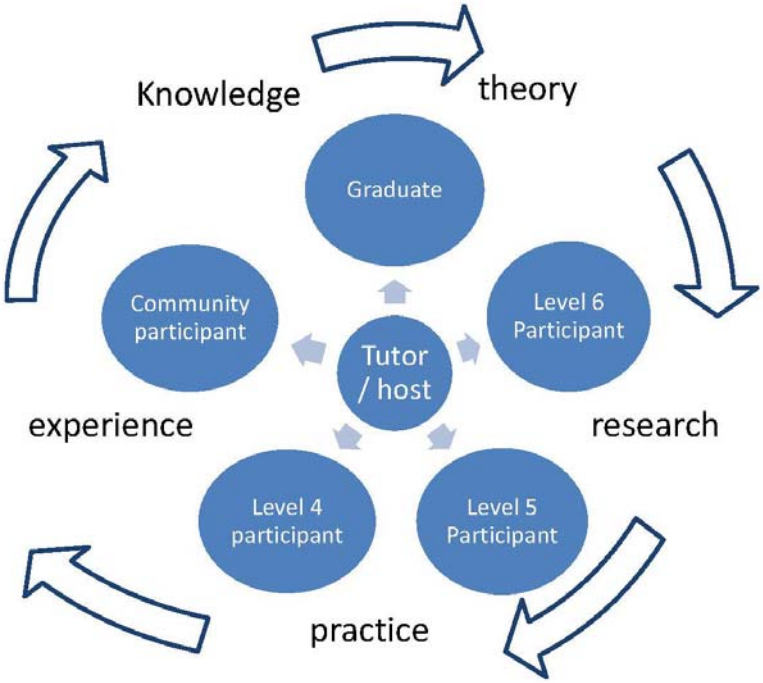



**Figure 3: The Creative Paradigm was born**

## Conclusion

There is no doubt that JUMP IN has created a successful and integrated learning community. On a surface level it engages participants with disabilities and those who are non-disabled, to find a platform of shared values, to work together creatively and in a cooperative manner. For the curriculum it address the need for learners to have access to real experiences (not text book scenarios) and make connections across modules to formulate a focus of experience for assessment which has a voice and an identify not predetermined by fixed objectives, but one which offers a different flexibility than traditional modes of expression for assessment. The assessment too becomes an integration of several assessment components. As a model of practice it became a 'goblet' to mix the theory and practices in a unique whole.

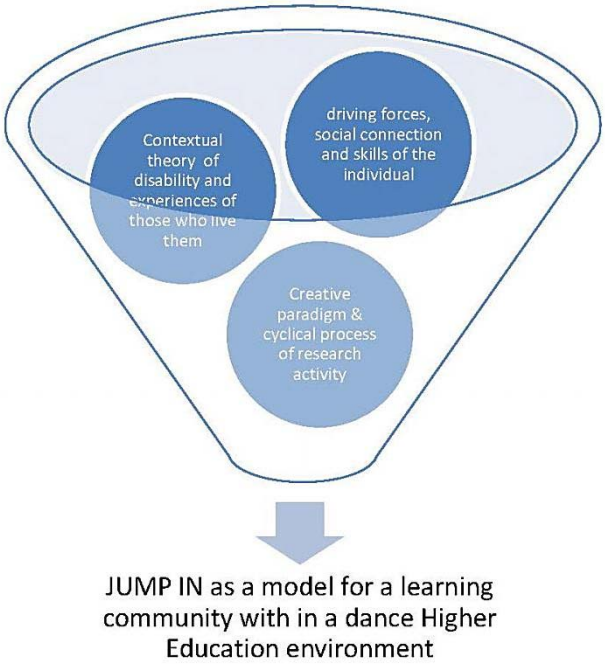



**Figure 4: The structural learning community of JUMP IN, as a 'goblet' that identifies and informs practice as a melting pot of three essential ingredients.**

There were noticeable benefits in the outcomes of participants learning and development: Language is cleaner and appropriate as a result of being with an actual client group and working with them in a cooperative paradigm. There is a greater mutual respect for the individual and a passion for celebrating the differences we have a human beings as opposed to the labels which identify us. The undergraduate students identified a different agenda in relation to finding strategies for integrated creative practice and finding solutions useful in an educational and community setting which is inclusive. There is evidence within the delivery and its associated responses that learning is encouraging a deeper transformation of the individual through its task based activity. Elements of the project have certainly been problem centred; allowing room for the individuals to reflect and this has often resulted in self actualisation and in turn greater confidence, active practice and sharing or verbalising ideas which in turn bring alternative perspectives to the work.

*"I have actually learned to be patient, wait for my partner to decide on what, how and where they will move and not in any way make these decisions for them. I have realised that I can learn a lot, from watching them calculate information and develop physical solutions for themselves. In the process I realised that to support them I began to break the language of the task down. I tried using imagery to convey information. Sometimes my partner responds to something visual this time it was aural (the music for the task), and yes ok we could have done the task in five minutes instead of twenty-five minutes, but this way I have learned to clean up my language to adapt to my partner's needs and they have taken ownership for the work we (not I) have produced." (Level 5 participant Journal entry)*

The shaping of the three stages and their 'accumulation' of activities engages or introduces the participants with/to a range of multiple intelligences. This learning community embraced visual, logical, spatial intelligence and connected on a personal level to bodily and kinaesthetic awareness, as well as musicality (in mood and phrasing). Interpersonal and intrapersonal connections made within the social frameworks and practical nature of the work. Dance naturally does this on many levels but it has been the exploration of the subject through a cooperative paradigm which uniquely approaches learning with a degree of innovation.

JUMP IN creates a model of learning which exemplifies pedagogy blending aspects of learning which are uniquely distinctive to adults. This project provided us with a practical model for teaching and learning, based on a non traditional format as a method for realising the "professional language of practice" (Winter, 1996:14). There is no doubt that participants have become responsible for their own learning and as a result of the peer interactions have felt confident in their approach to self-direction. The experiences, for which they have engaged in, have developed individuals with a readiness to learn, creating a learner who is more internal and intrinsic, with a confidence and self-esteem for the diversity of inclusive practices across both educational and theatre industries

Photograph by Ken Travis

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# “Knock, Knock: Whose there? Opportunity…..”

**Williamson, P.**

## Abstract

The paper examines the role of work related opportunities and level 4 events management student’s engagement or not with such. It focuses on the student voice. Key findings refer to enablers and inhibitors to engagement, the role of the student small group, learning within a crowed academic curriculum, linkages to part time employment and “conflicting student pressures”. The power base is shifting to the student and employer with the academic performing a facilitator role. A mixed, inconsistent and uneven student stakeholder buy in regarding opportunity uptake is found, but this is still an encouraging and positive reality.

## Introduction

Within Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU), the BA (Hons) Events Management undergraduate programme commenced in 2008-09 with a focus on a work – related curriculum which aims to chime with the University’s strategic focus and its drive to engage with industry and employers. Work related learning is “that which is intended to enhance students’ grasp of working life or their employability” (Little et al, 2006: p. 2). This work centred vision is encouraged by the creation of a set of “learning affordances” (Knight, 2007). Such are referred to in this article as “opportunities”.

The programme includes a compulsory work – based learning period of 4 weeks in industry within both levels 5 and 6, an optional placement year, and a core level 5 module “Staging the Live Event” – students engaging with a professional “live” client and working with them to produce a range of applied events within real world environments. The recognition that learning occurs both internal and external to the university is crucial. The main thrust of these optional opportunities is that students take independent and personal responsibility for engaging with such in order to enhance their own self development and learning. This research will comment on both the enabling and inhibiting factors regarding engagement with these opportunities from two perspectives. The primary focus will be from that of a level 4 event management student’s “voice”, but points will also be discussed from an academic facilitator perspective.

### Employability and skills within a Higher Education context

The employability debate is not a new one for higher education (Lees, 2002), but has entered a period when stakeholder complexity has increased. The employability and skills agenda is being driven by employers, Sector Skills Councils and professional bodies, but is also being driven by government policy (Skinner et al, 2011). A contemporary flavour is portrayed by The

Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and National Union of Students (NUS) Report (2011) (Working towards your future), who found that four out of five students say that improving their career opportunities is one of their reasons for going to university and that 66% of them wanted more support from their university to become employable. Mroz (2009) refers to the then Labour government in the UK who called for a new generation of "business – facing" universities; some of whom have declared "employer engagement" as their core mission.

Ramsden comments on the student experience being created by students in their contact with higher education. "They are integral to the formation of the experience. Students are not passive consumers, searching for satisfaction. They are active partners in a relationship", (Ramsden, 2009: p 2). The (CBI) and (NUS) Report (2011) (op cit), comments on the challenge to students in that "developing employability won't be achieved by passively hoping someone will deliver it to them". The emphasis is clearly that students need to be proactive and engage; which is of relevance to this paper.

## The event management context

There has been a substantive growth in higher education programmes dedicated to the subject of events management in the last decade within the UK (Beaven and Wright 2006, Bowdin, McPherson and Flinn, 2006) This is combined with a raise in employers expectations, as they expect their potential employees to have both relevant qualifications and industry experience (ibid). However, employers have mixed views regarding the growth in event management programmes in higher education. Research within The Labour Market Review (2010) found employers pleased to see such popularity in the growth of programme numbers but were concerned over the lack of perceived practical / industry experience among students and the indeed their lecturers (People First and the University of Derby, 2010). The events industry is extremely diverse, difficult to define and measure (People 1st 2010). However, UK national statistics suggest that it has a workforce of approximately 530,000 (People First 2010).

## LJMU strategy

LJMU historically has always provided successful vocational programmes and places an emphasis on skills and strong industry relationships. A recent University based initiative is the World of Work (WoW) (LJMU, 2008). In 2008, it was optional and open to all. Such focuses on higher level world of work skills which are divided into three themes: self – awareness, organisational awareness, and making things happen. Event management students are encouraged to engage with such at the commencement of their studies. The initiative is being continually refined, and measured.

The new BA (Hons) Events Management programme aims to put student engagement at the heart of the programme and to create learning opportunities which are both flexible, rich, varied and numerous. Such needed to engage and indeed immerse the student in a culture of work related learning opportunities from their initial commencement within the programme. The role of the independent learner and a focus on opportunities for all but underpinned by an individual focus on taking responsibility for their own learning and self development was key.

Embedding such within an interdisciplinary curriculum was by no means easy. At the commencement of the study, the BA (Hons) events management programme was located within and the Centre for Tourism, Consumer and Food Studies (TCF) within LJMU. A programme review completed in 2010 has now led to the re branding of the Centre to the Centre for Tourism, Events and Food Studies (TEF), recognising the numbers and profile of events management students and colleagues to the centre.

The development of these opportunities within the initial first year were offered to all students

through engagements with a variety of differing external sector industry players, and internal (LJMU) clients, within varying geographical locations and time scales. The majority were un-paid. Initial contacts were either made with internal university contacts (recruitment and admissions department, students union, etc) or from direct employer approaches to the author or followed up referred contacts from other university contacts. The processes via which students could engage with these opportunities were negotiated with the employer by the author who acted as academic co-ordinator and facilitator. Such involved a choice of methods including employer presentations and pitches to the students, e mail correspondence, telephone communications re interest levels, interviews etc or combinations of such processes.

After initial contact, it was the employers' responsibility to run the process. The author acted as a support mechanism. The relationship was to be clearly between potential employer and the student(s), both taking responsibility for progress or not.

Initially maximising key employers / venues within a localised geographical framework who shared a positive vision re opportunities was seen as a strategic strength. For example with The Trinity Mirror Group North West, where from an initial opportunity to work and attend one event such has grown into the opportunity to work on a series of events (business award ceremonies, sports personality awards, fashion shows etc in addition to placements, guest speakers and workshops) and the Liverpool's Arena and Convention Centre (ACC) which attracts many external geographical employers. A few of the overall opportunities are external to the geographical location of Liverpool or the Merseyside region. There are some relationships which have not flourished and some of the reasons for such will be touched upon within the findings section.

### Academic and employer linkages

From an academic perspective, arranging and preparing for these opportunities is both time consuming and does require a degree of stakeholder flexibility. Some employers need much "handholding" and support while others do not. It is also important that the academic co-ordinator, in this case myself, emphasises the reality of both academia and "student world" to employers, who perhaps are unaware or unfamiliar with the pressures on students, for example, assessment deadlines, research time, examination periods, lecture timetables, part time work etc.

It is also paramount at a very early stage to set out clear lines of responsibilities within the opportunity process pre, live and post opportunity learning affordance. The process can involve discussions (mainly telephone an e mail) re timings, dates, venue, location, type of experience involved, student numbers required, dress codes, training, logistics, supply of feedback and or references for student and payment / reimbursement issues.

On some occasions the employer would contact the academic as to changes within the opportunity, such as number of event days: number of students required and job roles etc. It is also of note that there is a need to react quickly to these as such represent the real world of event management were organisers and venues are faced with tighter and shorter timeframes and ever changing client demands.

## Study Methodology

A discursive presentation method is used here to give feeling and resonance to the student "voices"; the student is no longer perceived as a "shadowy figure" (Tribe, 2002), but is involved as an active partner from whom educators can learn. Such methods of enquiry may well reveal a richer vain of data about the students' experiences (Eames, 2006) and can add value to understanding the process of learning.

The sample for this research, were level 4 undergraduate students on the BA (Hons) Events Management programme. This cohort was the inaugural group (September 2008) .The CETL funded research involved a mixed methods approach in order to gain data. An on line questionnaire was developed which comprised of seventeen questions over a number of sections.

The first section focused upon demographic profile replies. The second section related to the depth of involvement in these opportunities, that is the student engagement or not within the varied processes pre, live and post opportunity.

A total of sixteen opportunities were offered from a variety of event sectors, typologies, and organisations. Five of these opportunities were internal to the University itself, (University Open days, campus tour guides, Student Union related) the remainder (eleven) were external. Of these, seven were commercial operators (Event PR organisations, media organisations, event production companies, sporting organisations, event venues), four were charity based.

The opportunities themselves commenced in September 2008, a couple of weeks after the cohort had commenced their academic studies and were completed by April, 2009. It was important that students were introduced to this relationship with industry very early within their studies in order to develop a work related culture. The majority, ten, of the opportunities were pre Christmas and in the first semester of academic study with the remaining six in the second semester, January- April, 2009. The duration of the opportunity in the main was one day contact time though conferences in the main had variable time lengths. The majority of opportunities were unpaid.

The third section related to skills engagement and development within a five point likert scale in order to gauge students' respondents strength of feeling towards eighteen specific skills (see Table 1). Respondents could also provide qualitative comments and expand and elaborate on such points. The third section also relates to respondent expectations of the opportunity pre commencement with such and the differences which they experienced once they reflected upon such post event. This section also allowed the respondents to comment on linkages with opportunities to academic studies and the key factors involved in respondents not taking up such opportunities.

The on line questionnaire was administered to all first year event management students, cohort (n = 80) and communicated via a compulsory module e -mail address to which all had access. The research completion timeframe for all respondents of the on - line survey was within a four week timeframe, from 2nd April, 2009 to 30 th April, 2009.A total of 20 respondents replied, a response rate of 25 per cent.

The on - line questionnaire requested students to volunteer for a follow up individual interview. Such required a 20 – 30 minute timeframe and focussed more deeply on the individuals' experiences and points of view. All interviews were completed by a university researcher, who had no relationship to the students, and they were transcribed externally. Content analysis allowed the "rich data" to be coded which identified themes. A total of seven respondents expressed an interest in attending the interviews, but due to a range of individual circumstances, only four were finally interviewed (Respondents 1-4). The interviews occurred post the summer vacation as the author did not wish to dilute the respondents focus on their assessment and examination period in the month of May, 2009.

## Findings and discussion

### How students took up these initial opportunities

The majority applied individually, a small proportion (10%) applied with an individual friend and 15% applied with a group of friends.

Obviously the nature of the opportunity, its context and how such was "pitched", sold to or related to the students varied. Students clearly warmed to some employers who actually met with them face to face. They appreciated their presentation style mixed with an academic perspective and the opportunity and its relevance to both their studies and the real world of events management. They did not respond as positively in some circumstances to requests which did not engage in a face to face meeting and engagement. For example, requests which were transmitted via e mail correspondence with the academic tutor acting as conduit. However, there is no clear evidence as to one form of communication being more advantageous than another regarding students' engagement with an application to the opportunity or indeed their comments within the process.

The impressions students develop, as small clusters / groupings, is interesting as they tend to form an opinion which is based around such small group perspectives and do not seek clarification for themselves as individuals. These smaller groups are usually made of like minded individuals who have bonded over the semester and so the tendency to follow the groups' opinions and decisions are highly evident. The speed of instant decision making and power of the small group for or against taking up an opportunity or exploring it further is quite marked. In many cases decisions are reached prior to completing any on - line secondary research, e mailing the employers with additional questions, other than those they asked in the presentation.

Section 1 indicated that of the engaged sample (n= 20), 85% were female and 15% male. There was no gender pattern regarding engaging or not engaging with specific opportunities. 35 % of the on – line questionnaire sample were over the age of 21 years (mature students) with 65% between the ages of 18 – 21 years.

During the period of the study, over both semesters 1 and 2, 70% of the sample was in part- time work and 30% had voluntary work commitments. The majority of these part time jobs were within the service sector (retail sales assistants, bar work, restaurant / fast food (hospitality and food sectors), sports stadium and hotel work, all with strong linkages and associations to the events industry. Some were within organisations which are clearly within the events industry (conference /banqueting posts).

### Student expectations pre - opportunity:

90% assumed they would enjoy working within the industry, with 90 % suggesting it would assist them in making new contacts for future use. 85% believing it would lead to future opportunities and to individual profile elevation within the industry as well as give them a chance to measure themselves against a variety of event professionals.

75% thought it would assist them in being treated as an organisational team member rather than as a student, with 70% stating it would challenge them mentally. Regarding linkages between theory and practice, 50% assumed practice would be different than theory and 45 % perceived that there would be linkages between the two. Regarding other challenges, 55% thought they would learn something about themselves, 35% agreed it would challenge them socially, with 30% agreeing it would challenge them physically.

Very few students once they were fully engaged in the process wished to disengage from such, and the few that did where for reasons out of their control, for example either illness to themselves or family members or moments of family crisis. It was the individual student responsibility to inform their employer of any changes as by that stage in the process each had detailed contact information.

The reasons for not taking up the offer of individual opportunities varied. In the main 55% of students commented that they were "not appealing" to them as individuals and 40% of commented on clashes with paid part time work commitments. As expressed by one student:

"*I took up as many opportunities as I felt necessary that related to me as an individual. I based it around commitments and work load*"(university and part time work (student 1)

Here students are prioritising between various activities, which is an appropriate skill to develop and places themselves at the centre of the decision making process. Indeed a study in the United Kingdom by Watts and Pickering (2000) found that working part time while studying full time was an increasing reality and necessity for students. However, such work has many positives as it introduces students to the reality of real world environments and may well influence their personal, social and career developments.

Social engagements are significance and academics perhaps need to remind themselves that a varied social life, meeting new and old friends and family is a key part to being both a fully rounded individual and student. Real life commitments are also seen as being a key factor and the finding that 20% were inhibited from taking up such opportunities due to "home pressures" was a surprise but actually identifies that students have some significant responsibilities within their home environments relating to their immediate family, for example:

*"I have a 2 year old child and am a single parent". (student 2)*

It is evident that students' who are new to university study, but not necessarily academic study, will have varying levels of doubt or unease as to balancing study, assessment and workload commitments against that of grasping opportunities. One comments:

*"A lot of the opportunities clash with lectures, which can be managed. But it is an added hassle to weigh up which would be more beneficial to attend" (student 4).*

It is clear that the timings of employer opportunities will not fit 'hand in glove' with academic timetables. Indeed those students who did prioritise the taking up of opportunities over academic attendance in the main e mailed colleagues to explain their non attendance in advance and developed strategies to 'catch up on' the work they missed. They did, in the main, demonstrate a level of professionalism, maturity and planning in balancing these competing needs.

Respondent 1 below refers to levels of group motivation and support with like minded others and to the advantageous of such but does make an individual decision as to not taking up an opportunity due to home commitments.

*"Obviously I made friends with the people from my course, if I didn't know them already, and then from that (the opportunity). We've developed quite a good little relationship, where if we hear something we pass it on. We've got that little loyalty, between like there's a few of us who like if we hear something well pass on e messages. Also we get offered … x got in touch (a former opportunity employer) with us all afterwards and offered us another event, but I couldn't do it, 'cos I'd booked train tickets to go home. But I know that one was a really good one…they have kept in contact, so it's really good, 'cos I think they were quite impressed with us as well".* (Respondent1).

When asked did working on an opportunity lead to any further opportunities with this organisation or an associated organisation at that event, 45 % said they were offered further opportunities. One comments on the opportunity leading to paid part time work and the other to future learning and practice:

*"I have got a part time job at x through these opportunities" (hotel based opportunity (student 6)*

It is also evident that employers do recognise very quickly the potential and indeed the actual benefits of what individual students bring to the live opportunity. As such they do offer,

contextualised learning resources, personalised feedback and references and future work. Indeed, Respondent 2 refers to the ongoing communication relationship with a former event opportunity organisation by means of facebook.

"*x (Employer contact) has added me to her facebook page and keeps in touch if there's any event coming up*" (Respondent 2)

All students (100%) in the sample wished to see opportunities being offered al levels 5 and 6. 75% of the sample agreed that taking up such opportunities may well assist with their academic studies. Indeed the linkages between theory and practice were evident in a number of student comments:

"*The client showed us floor plans ...and the risk assessment (referring to a commercial Award Dinner event) which was really good 'cos that's what we'd done in lectures… with marketing we could understand why marketing material was done in differing ways (referring to an in-house event compared to a business to consumer event-B2C)*" (Respondent 1)

### Reflection external to themselves

Many experiences encountered by students were related external to themselves that is, related to the employer and their organisation or their job role. Mainly comments were favourable, but there were a few which were critical.

Students also commented on the scale, budgets and resources involved with events and their insights into the real industry, both referring to a commercial organisation award event.

*"What shocked me is a lot of these people on these events were subcontracted in or were freelance, which I didn't expect…the stage design person was from Barcelona". (Respondent 3)*

Another student refers to charity work, assessment pressures and longer term commitments.

"*When I realised that (x Employer) only wanted our help to meet her target for the end of the tax year this was a bit off putting. Also when we had lots of work to do over Christmas and New Year (referring to university assessments) she was quite rude… it has not put me off helping a charity but I found that I didn't agree with this way of working*" (student 8).

This comment refers to working culture and personality clashes and perhaps a lack of appreciation of commitment over a length of time combined with business realism from this novice practitioner.

Eames (2006) refers to the situatedness of learning and comments on both the technical and perhaps the overlooked social side of learning. Clearly there were some sensitive and negative social dynamics in the above example, whereas another students comments on the caring nature of the organisation.

*"They treated you like a person and not like a number they don't consider afterwards… as I was catching the train home (student lives outside the Merseyside region) they (her organisation colleagues) all texted me to make sure I got home, you know like which I think is really nice" (Respondent 2).*

### Reflecting on themselves

Many students commented on the array of skills they had developed and enhanced or indeed had engaged with for the first time. Commenting on work experience within the tourism and hospitality literature, Walmsley et al (2006) refers to this concentration on skills acquisition. Table 1 refers to the mean values from 18 skill areas within section 3 of the on line questionnaire. It is perhaps of little surprise that team working skills (3.85), verbal skills (3.70), passion / enthusiasm, leadership skills (3.65) and social skills (3.55) were relatively prominent. Mean values shown in brackets on a likert scale of 1- low to 5 high.

Students in the main are novice practitioners and were offered specific roles by their employer organisations which were reflected in more front of house, consumer facing positions with engagement with delegates, guests, artists and clients. A range of positions included, greeters, conference registration desk operators, tour guides, production operators, artist liaison runners). The majority of opportunities were at live events and hence the skill sets were related to such rather than pre or post event activities and processes.

The student below, Respondent 1, refers to an array of skills regarding one specific event. They range from technical skills such as radio operation, a new skill for themselves, which also links to related skill bases of listening and verbal skills within and external to this radio communication medium. Teamwork and time management were also heightened. This can perhaps be explained as the nature of the event which was indeed a highly professional production with the client being a Manchester - based event - production company, working at a Liverpool venue for a commercial client.

*"For most of us it was the first time we had used radios and communication skills (referring to the commercial retailer gala diner awards) …We did a lot of verbal and listening skills...the producer would relay information to us, or from someone else, and we had to work as a team to do something….Time management, everything was planned to the last second and stuck to it. Which was like what… that was really impressive". (Respondent 1)*

It is therefore of no surprise that at the lower end of Table 1 the students refer to written and ICT skills (2.25), problem solving skills (2.95) and creativity( 3.05). Certainly many of these skills require both a degree of experience to engage with such successfully and indeed it could be argued the capacity to engage with such given to the student by their employer was perhaps limited.

Looking to future employability prospects, Respondent 4 comments:

*"I'm not one of those people who comes out with high grades at the end of my degree, but if I've got the experience, then maybe I've still got like an opportunity to get…into the job I want to do….He also comments on "…having all this experience, but I'm rubbish at interview". (Respondent 4)*

An interesting point and one which relates to personal, professional development (PPD) initiatives and LJMU's WoW programme where students, in order to achieve such, must undertake and pass an interview with an events employer. Again the emphasis is in the student recognising an area for development and then taking individual responsibility to act upon such and self develop.

## Conclusions

Linkages with industry have been developed and have flourished in many circumstances but such growth is reliant to a large degree on the students' themselves and by their participation in and eagerness to engage and devour opportunities which are presented to them and which they ultimately decide to take up or decline. Hence the power base has shifted to the student, both as a cohort and more importantly perhaps, to the individual student and to the employer. The roles of the student and employer are both heightened here with the role of the academic being lessened to a more facilitator role in the process. However, the academic role is still time consuming and as involvement with industry grows and employers engage with each other then the potential of the number of opportunities is likely to expand and the need for academic administrative support become expedite.

Universities also need to review how flexible they really are when both they and students are confronted with opportunities to learn from real world events which clash with academic timetabled lectures and workshops. Surely, if event educators wish students to immerse themselves in industry and develop a passion for lifelong learning and events then the notion of work related learning needs to be expanded upon to include much more that just periods of varying time on compulsory placement periods in industry. A more flexible approach to industry needs is required by HEI's as it is the diverse events which will employ current and future event management students.

Another key area is that of paid employment and how such is both valued and managed by universities, employers and students. If students, as in this study, engage in part time employment in areas associated with the events industry or indeed clearly within it and therefore have many transferable skills which can be accredited to their studies; then this opportunity should be taken up. Though some universities may value and accredit such learning, it is an ad hoc process and one that it could be claimed is letting down our students and the real experiences and skills they are developing. The building of further linkages and bridges between academia and industry is therefore to be encouraged and continually reviewed.

It is likely that the situation will be fluid and relationships with all key stakeholders will require continuous monitoring. It will also be interesting to see how students continue or not to engage with opportunities in level 5 and 6 of study when perhaps they are under more academic pressures and when grade contributions to final degree classifications impact. Engagement with WoW is also an area for further research as such has strong linkages with opportunities and the positive attributes within such. The opportunity to engage students as potential positive role models and indeed marketers of the benefits and draw backs of such opportunities is an area to be developed and monitored. The views of employers are another possibility for additional and related research as indeed the role of the Student Union and the input and resources they can offer in this area.

table 1

Student mean value skill development scores within work related opportunities

| skill | mean value | | skill | | mean value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| team working | 3.85 | | self belief | | 3.3 |
| verbal | 3.7 | | pro activity | | 3.25 |
| passion enthusiasm | 3.65 | | independent | | 3.25 |
| prioritising tasks | 3.65 | | reflective | | 3.1 |
| leadership tasks | 3.65 | | Decision making | | 3.05 |
| social | 3.55 | | networking | | 3.05 |
| initiative | 3.5 | | creative ideas | | 3 |
| personal planning | 3.3 | | problem solving | | 2.95 |
| time management | 3.3 | | written ICT | | 2.25 |

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# “How can Socrates teach the sports coaches?

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## Abstract

Despite reported increases in Higher Education (HE) sports coach education provision, there are very few studies which have investigated student self-learning curricula as a mechanism to prepare sports coaches with the complexities of learning how to coach. Using an action research methodology, this article examines how Case-Method Teaching (CMT) was introduced into an undergraduate sports coach education module in the faculty of Education, Community and Leisure. Drawing on data gathered via student focus group interviews, course tutor reflections, and in-class observations, our initial findings indicate that CMT offers valuable opportunities for students to engage in real-life coaching scenarios, and thus provides a more contextualised view of the complexities of the coaching process. Although we are conscious not to eulogise over the merits of a particular pedagogy after only adopting it for one year, and in one core sports coaching module, our preliminary experiences suggest there is much potential for CMT within formal sports coaching programmes. Finally, despite our positive experiences of adopting CMT within sports coach education, we urge more research and discussion into the merits of CMT, to verify our initial claims

## Introduction

Despite research and informed practice suggesting that the role of the sports coach is multi-dimensional, and interrelated to complex social processes (Jones, Armour and Potrac, 2003). There still remain issues associated with the notion of self-directed learning, and the role of formal learning programmes, tasked with preparing sports coaches with learning how to coach (Côté, 2006; Lemyre, Trudel & Durand-Bush, 2006; Werthner & Trudel, 2006 Wright, Trudel & Culver, 2007). Moreover, there remains a paucity of available literature indicating how self-directed learning has been incorporated into formal coach learning programmes; this includes HE who are becoming increasingly involved with the delivery and training of sports coaches (Taylor & Garratt, 2008). To date the preferred learning theories which have dominated the coach education landscape are reported to originate from the epistemology of behaviourism, cognitivism and constructivism (Boghossion, 2006). However, Socratic teaching and coaching methods do not appear to have received attention in the sports coaching and pedagogy literature. The purpose of this particular paper is therefore to address this issue. Firstly, an overview of coach education within HE is presented. Secondly, Socratic CMT will be offered as a possible alternative to more traditionally accepted modes of instruction. Thirdly, the paper will present our observations, reflections and student experiences from a recently validated final year CMT sports coaching undergraduate module. The paper will conclude by offering some further considerations for adopting CMT in formal coach learning programmes. This will include both the benefits and limitations of CMT in preparing sports coaches with the necessary skills required to coach.

## Sports Coaching and Higher Education

The recent explosion in the number of universities in the United Kingdom (UK) providing undergraduate sports coach education courses (Taylor & Garratt, 2008) has largely been accredited to the emergence and recognition of sports coaching as a profession (For a more in-depth review see Taylor & Garratt, 2008). Within the UK the legitimacy of sports coaching as a *bona-fide* profession (Chesterfield, Potrac, & Jones, 2010) has increased since the introduction of a national coach education program (e.g., the United Kingdom Coaching Certificate) and the emergence of a profession led endorsement scheme for sports coach education (e.g., the Active Endorsement Scheme for Higher Education). The Active Endorsement Scheme for Higher Education was initially developed by the UK Coaching Centre for Coaching Excellence (UKCCE) for sports coach UK, and attempts to provide students and employers with assurances that HE coach education provision is recognised by the industry's Sector Skills Council, professional body and national coaching agency (i.e., sports coach UK) (SkillsActive 2010). Despite the recent proliferation of HE sports coach education courses (Nelson, Cushion & Potrac, 2006) and attempts by coaching scholars to 'intellectualise' sports coaching through professional education (Jones, Armour & Potrac, 2003) there are only a small number of studies which have investigated student learning and engagement within undergraduate coach education courses (Jones & Turner, 2006; Knowles, Gilbourne, Borrie & Nevill, 2001; Knowles, Tyler, Gilbourne & Eubank, 2006).

For instance, the study of Jones & Turner (2006) examined how a constructivist Problem Based Learning (PBL) approach was incorporated into a university Coach Education and Sports Development undergraduate course. Drawing upon data collected via continuous observations, tutor reflections and semi-structured interviews with eleven students, Jones and Turner (2006) reported that PBL provided the students with the opportunity to: (a) apply theoretical knowledge in a practical situation; (b) think about coaching from a different perspective; and (c) engage in a deeper understanding of the complexities associated with the coaching process. In conclusion the authors commented on how PBL "possessed the potential to help coaches towards the higher goals of transferable knowledge, considered flexibility, critical reflection and lifelong learning qualities" (Jones & Turner, 2006, p. 199). The findings of Jones and Turner (2006) are consistent with previous PBL studies conducted within professional education, who also reported that PBL pedagogy raises an awareness of contextualised issues, establishes connections between inter-related academic disciplines, provides a bridge between theory and practice as well as providing opportunities for students to learn effectively within their own 'lived' experiences (Barrows, 2004; Colliver, 2000). However, despite such positive outcomes, there is no objective evidence to support PBL as a means of improving the problem-solving skills of students (Colliver, 2000; Norman, 1992). Furthermore, medical education studies have concluded that PBL is no more advantageous in developing knowledge and performance than other pedagogic approaches (Smits et al., 2002). The study of Knowles et al. (2001) investigated the effectiveness of a Coaching Science undergraduate curriculum in supporting sports coaches reflective practice through a work based learning module. The results revealed the difficulties and complexities associated with the reflective process. These results were confirmed in later study (Knowles et al. 2006) with six post-graduates, and although the graduates continued to engage in the reflective process, it was reported to be less structured, with a tendency to only engage in technical reflection.

**Socratic case-method teaching.**

In the narrative writings of *Plato*, there are numerous descriptions of how *Socrates* encourages a meticulous self-examination of oneself, as the predominant way in which to achieve overall health and happiness. The Socratic philosophy of gaining knowledge and happiness through a rigorous process of

answering difficult personal questions about oneself is perhaps, at first glance, incongruous to the personal philosophical orientations adopted by many sports coaches. Indeed, with the ever increasing demands placed upon sports coaches to deliver immediate and sustain improvements in performance, it is perhaps not surprising that Socratic teaching orientations have evaded the attention of the sports coaching community. As Boghossian, (2006, pg. 716) explains.

*The presupposition of the Socratic Method is that there is a truth of the matter and that truth can be known through discourse, or, more specifically, through the elenetic process. The elenchus is a systematised question and answer process that is directed by the teacher and depends upon student involvement. Its purpose is to help those engaged in a dialogue discover true propositions through a sustained inquiry.*

One can only imagine the reaction and responses of an audience of sports coaches if a modern day Socrates were invited to address a coach education conference. For example, based on the writings of Corlett (1996) and the Platonic writings in the *Republic*, a Socratic keynote address may sound something like the following:

*In book VII of the Republic I describe the virtues of the dialectical process. I describe the teaching of geometry to a small boy and how it is possible to arrive at the truth and knowledge. There is only one good that is knowledge, and only one evil, that is, ignorance. How does this help me as a sports coach I hear you cry? Surely Socrates you're not expecting me [emphasis added], the coach [emphasis added], to ask my players to pursue knowledge? What, of themselves? Yes coach, that is exactly what I am suggesting. I thought Corlett (1996) summed me up quite succinctly, when he stated, for Socrates, the essence of human nature is to seek happiness, and that happiness is achieved when we live a good life (including sport).*

The challenge put forth by *Socrates*, therefore, is to know what life's (and.sport's) real goods are, to recognise them as distinct from illusionary ones. When we know what real goods are, we will pursue them, and in doing so, be happy. In the philosophical world of Socrates, this process of achieving knowledge, and the endless pursuit of happiness, relies on individuals asking often difficult personal questions. This pedagogy contrasts with more traditional instructional epistemologies typically employed in formal coach learning such as behaviourism. For example, on a coach education course, the tutor is largely responsible for directing the learning process, often ignoring the active role of the respondent coaches, and perceiving coaches as empty vessels, waiting to be filled with information (Chesterfield, Potrac & Jones, 2010; Nelson, Cushion & Potrac, 2006). In contrast, CMT is a discussion based teaching methodology, which is mostly associated with the teaching of business and medical studies (Bowe, Voss & Aretz, 2009) and is not widely reported as an instructional pedagogy supporting sports coaches' conceptual learning and professional development. Evidence of the effectiveness of CMT within the sports coaching literature is therefore problematic, as no-one has studied this specifically. However, positive findings have been reported in other professional disciplines adopting CMT (Diamantes & Ovington, 2003; Noblitt, Vance, & Depoy Smith, 2010; Tärnvik, 2007). These include improvements in critical-thinking and communication skills (Noblitt, Vance, & Depoy Smith, 2010), decision-making (Brauer et al., 2009) and improving overall module assessment scores (Charters, Gunz, and Schoner, 2009). In contrast to corresponding constructivist and behaviourist pedagogies, CMT requires students to solve real-life problems. The knowledge required to solve these problems is drawn from various academic domains and students are often required to make connections between differing disciplines (Tärnvik, 2007). Although it has been argued in the clinical sciences that CMT holds many advantageous over more traditional direct lecture based approaches, its effectiveness in formal sports coach education programmes has yet to be established.

Case-method teaching requires the tutor to be directive in lectures, and responsible for allowing the students to learn complex theory as well as deepen their understanding of specific concepts and skills. However, CMT maintains its level of student-centeredness and its ontological orientations within social constructivism (Rovegno & Dolly, 2006). Student engagement is facilitated by the course tutor, who draws upon students to lead discussions, present creative and imaginative solutions to problems and to express criticisms of others. An example of a typical CMT lecture would involve students selecting or presenting problems which originated from their particular case. Details of the responses from the group are then recorded verbatim and displayed so they are visible to the audience. This is a central characteristic of CMT as it acts as a reminder to the students that the ideas were generated by them and not the course tutor. More in-depth discussions of the problem are then orchestrated by the tutor using accepted facilitation techniques. For example, in order to demonstrate inter-relationships between various principles and topics mind-maps or concept-maps can be introduced to elucidate a deeper understanding of a particular case. Despite evidence indicating group mind-mapping is less productive than individual mind-mapping (Pinsonneault et al., 1999) the collection and creation of ideas via groups is a distinctive feature of CMT. During the discussion of cases, the tutor adopts a questioning strategy and prompts students to consider solutions, alternative actions as well as the potential consequences for ill-informed judgments. Throughout the discussion the tutor is constantly observing the group for signs of [dis]approval, in particular, those students demonstrating signs of [dis] approval via their facial expression or body language are prompted to convey their ideas with supporting evidence (Tärnvik, 2007).

## Methodology

### Action Research

Action research (AR) is described as 'a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which these practices are carried out '(Carr & Kemmis, 1988, pg. 162). The rationale to adopt an AR form of enquiry was based on a desire to improve the existing provision for our sports coaching students by adopting an alternative form of instruction and presenting them with real-life problems. The present study therefore followed the guidelines of McKenna and Dunstan-Lewis (2004) and adopted an iterative cycle of planning, acting, monitoring, reflecting and evaluating. The purpose of which was to focus on the personal insights of our participants whilst attempting to promote their professional self-development.

### Planning

Specifically, the CMT module was designed to incorporate Bransford's (2000) model of anchored instruction and was guided by the following principles: (1) use of a 'generative learning' format that enabled students to devise solutions to open-ended or guided problems (2) use of a 'discussion based format' that provided a sense of legitimacy for the student (3) inclusion of specifically designed 'problem complexity' that called for integrated responses to problems (4) use of embedded 'opportunities for transfer' of similar theories or concepts, within different, but related fields, allowing students the opportunity to increase their problem-solving skills. The rationale to incorporate Bransford's work into the curriculum design was based on a desire to present the students with the opportunity to work with 'real-life' coaching scenarios, and to devise authentic and credible solutions. We wanted to create contextualized problems, and to provide the student with an insight into the complexities of the coaching process. In essence, we were intending to avoid what Jones and Turner (2006, p. 184) referred to as the 'reality shock' of

coaching and provide the students with a sense of the skills required for the 'real world' of coaching and work.

In order to adhere to prior supported CMT methodologies (Charters, Gunz, and Schoner, 2009) and incorporate real-life scenarios, the University Brokerage[1] employer enhancement department contacted NGBs, professional sports teams, performance sports coaches and local education authority sport development managers requesting support and involvement in the formulation, presentation and assessment of the sports coaching module. Following extensive discussions and dialogue with external agencies the following NGB's agreed to participate in the production of real-life *'cases'* (England Athletics, Badminton England, GB Boxing, British Cycling, England Hockey, English Lacrosse, GB Wheelchair Association, Amateur Swimming Association, England and Wales Cricket Board, Lawn Tennis Association and the Rugby Football Union). The cases provided by the NGB's included a mixture of organisational (e.g., organising a training camp) and practical (e.g., improving player performance) sport coaching scenarios. The cases were firstly categorised into academic sub-disciplines by the module team and then embellished with supporting theory, resources, text and relevant data. A total of eight cases were eventually agreed upon, drawn from a number of sporting academic sub-disciplines which included; sports psychology, sports nutrition, sports physiology and the socio-cultural aspects of sports coaching. The number of pages per case varied between the highest (12-pages) to the lowest (7-pages). Finally, each case was forwarded to the NGB's for member checking and to confirm the details of the problem was accurate.

***Acting***

The Socratic, CMT module was presented to a cohort of final year (BA) undergraduate sports coaching students enrolled at a university in the north-west of England. The 'coaching process' module was delivered to a total of 41 final year undergraduate students (male = 22; female = 19). The module was timetabled weekly during both semester one and semester two of the university academic year and included the following aims: (a) to develop the capacity for critical analysis of the key factors which influence the development of sports coaching as a profession, and (b) to provide a conceptual understanding for further developments in performance coaching. Prior to the presentation of the 'live' cases the students were provided with practice cases and the opportunity to decide on the formation of their 'learning teams' (i.e., four or five students). The practice cases enabled both the tutors and the students the opportunity to become familiar with the discussion based format of CMT. This process involved the students analysing data, critically reviewing texts, searching for literature and engaging in discussion based lectures.

***Monitoring***

Following a review of the existing CMT literature, the practice CMT presentations acted as a conduit for installing a number of skills and behaviours which we consciously wanted to promote amongst out student population (Bowe, Voss & Aretz, 2009). The first behaviour was 'active listening' (Bowe, Voss & Aretz, 2009, p. 835). A key component of CMT is that students actively reflect on the ideas, thoughts and solutions presented to them by fellow learners. Furthermore, active listening is reported as key determinant of interpersonal skills, is associated with leadership qualities, and crucially, is a requirement for effective coaching (Bowe, Voss & Aretz, 2009; Martens, 1996). Secondly, we wanted to develop and improve the students critical-thinking and communication skills. Recent studies adopting CMT have reported some positive associations in developing these attributes; however, these were conducted typically in the clinical sciences (Noblitt, Vance, & Depoy Smith, 2010).

### Reflecting and evaluating

In order to gather the thoughts and perceptions of our students regarding CMT, a focus group interview with eight students was conducted. The purpose of the focus group interview was to canvass thoughts and opinions of CMT and in particular to gain a wide variety of responses regarding the relevance of CMT as pedagogy to support the formal learning structures of sports coaches. The focus group interview was conducted in a University seminar room and recorded using a digital voice recorder and video camera in order to aid accuracy in the final transcription. In order to generate a more meaningful discussion the students were provided with the key questions beforehand and were permitted to introduce any on-going issues or themes. The authors were conscious of the managerial responsibilities of conducting a focus group interview and the problems associated with lack of participation and individuals wandering off task. A review of the video footage revealed that each participant had an equal opportunity to contribute and the focus group had enabled a range of issues to be discussed in depth. The duration of the interview was recorded at just over 90 minutes and following completion was transcribed in full and subjected to inductive analysis procedures (Patton, 1990). In order to generate an accurate description of the data, topic coding (Morse & Richards, 2002) was applied to emerging labels and categories. These initial findings and supporting narratives will be included in the discussion of results section. In addition to the interviews the tutors who taught on the module were requested to systematically record their thoughts and perceptions and in particular to consider the strengths and weaknesses of CMT. Periodically, these thoughts were discussed by the module team and integrated into the modular planning and evaluation process.

## Discussion of Results

### Suitability of real-life cases

One of the issues concerning our initial experiences of CMT was the suitability of real-life coaching scenarios. The University Brokerage department was engaged in dialogue with external agencies for approximately five months before a final commitment to take part was agreed. Although a number of NGBs provided assistance with the module, it was only a small proportion from the external agencies contacted initially. The issue surrounding case suitability, interest, complexity and legitimacy has also been cited in other academic disciplines adopting CMT; however, this was mainly from the clinical sciences (Barnes et al., 1994). In order to maintain a level of congruency with CMT, it was important the cases not only originated from real sports coaching backgrounds, but also fulfilled the learning outcomes of the module. In addition, it was imperative the core module team were comfortable with the nature of the cases and capable of acting as a 'more capable other' in facilitating the in-class discussions (Potrac & Cassidy, 2006). In some instances this prompted additional preparation, increased levels of background reading and a complete familiarisation of the available cases. Although, we didn't consciously quantify the number of preparation hours required for CMT, we can confirm that CMT requires substantially more preparation time than a more traditional direct lecture based instructional approach.

### Teaching a new pedagogy in a world of 'consumerist levers'

Despite calls from educators in a variety of fields to consider their curricula and educational outcomes (Bowe, Voss & Aretz, 2009), HE currently operates within an environment described by Sparkes (2007) as an 'audit culture'. In relation to teaching and learning Naidoo & Jamieson (2005, p. 268) suggest HE in the United Kingdom (UK) is currently governed by 'consumerist levers'. Examples of these levers include the publication of student satisfaction scores, the availability of institutional performance

indicators, league tables and the strengthening of consumer rights for complaints (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005). In the context of 'consumerist levers' and an uncertain future for HE provision in the UK, the decision to employ CMT into a final year undergraduate sports coaching programme was clearly a risk. A shift towards CMT was not taken lightly, and in view of the consumerist levels described previously we considered it to be a critical judgment, especially with the potential for negatively impacting on the tutor and student relationship (Lambert, 2009). Therefore, the dilemma we faced was whether student consumerism on the one-hand (measured in student satisfaction scores), a shared constructivist philosophy surrounding learning and teaching (amongst the core module team) and a congruency with the real world of sports coaching would be compatible. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's work of critical concepts here is useful. Bourdieu (1988) refers to society in a number of various 'fields' which operate freely in respect to other fields. The University according to Bourdieu (1996) operates within its own unique structure and should therefore be separated from other fields such as economics and politics. Our initial apprehension that the pedagogic relationship between the consumer (i.e. the student) and the 'commodity producer' (i.e. the lecturer) would change and the value of the 'commercial transaction' would be overlooked, however, did not materialise (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005, p.271). Similar concerns surrounding the student perspective of alternative forms of instruction were also echoed in Jones and Turner (2006). To this extent we consciously followed the guidelines of Jones and Turner (2006) and made a determined effort to explain to the students the nature of CMT and how it would be different from traditional lecture based formats. This small, but important step enabled dialogue to take place between the students and core module team in our attempts to reduce any confusion or tension between the student and the course tutors.

## Consumerist thoughts and perceptions of CMT

### Student satisfaction with CMT

The opening question of the focus group interview required the students to reflect and comment on their level of satisfaction with CMT and the module overall. The consensus of the students we spoke to were generally positive; the students commented on the value of the practice cases, which in their opinion provided a 'precious' opportunity to experience CMT and to become familiar with its structure, the students also appreciated the contextualised nature of the cases, and were appreciative of the variety of case material supplied by the NGB's. For example Robbie stated;

*I liked the way you got the NGB's to provide us with real problems. That made it really scary in a way. It was as though we were actually in a proper job working for them. When you mentioned they would be involved in the assessment I really wanted to do a good job and impress.*

Similarly, Sandy stated;

*For me I liked how this module brought together all the other modules we have covered. I had to go back and look at my sports science notes from last year. At the beginning I was a little worried as it was a bit vague, and I was not sure how it would work, but I really enjoyed this module. As a group we worked on bits we either enjoyed or felt we were good at and then brought them to the meeting.*

However, Derek, a mature student expressed some initial concerns over the structure of CMT and in particular the amount of work that was involved. The following extract is used to illustrate his point.

*When you first introduced this module, I thought here we go more trendy teaching techniques. You sit back, while we [emphasis in the original] do all the work. To begin with I was really sceptical, but over the weeks I have appreciated*

*the flexibility of the module, and I have enjoyed the group arguments...sorry discussion.*

**CMT structure and organization**

The CMT timetable was designed to allow each group the time to prepare and work on their individual cases. The University time allocation for this module enabled each group the opportunity to present their particular case to their peers on three separate occasions. Each group was allocated 45 minutes per presentation and this included answering questions from fellow students and the course tutor. When the group was prompted to comment on the structure of and organization of CMT the responses were mixed. For instance Jim noted;

*For me the group presentations were a great help. This was how we were to be assessed and it made sense we got to practice in front of a real audience. The feedback wasn't always great, especially if you were last. I got the impression people were ready to go home when it was our turn in our week.*

The length of some of the presentations, the quality of the feedback from fellow students and the long periods of listening were clearly a cause of irritation for some students. The following statement from Natalie is a good example;

*I found some of the presentations were too long and people just read their notes off the screen, they didn't really understand the stuff in my opinion. I think that is why some people were reluctant to ask too many questions in case they embarrassed them.*

Similar comments were echoed by Andy and James who suggested that

*'presentation' and 'understanding' were not always in harmony and when some of the groups were required to expand on the theory it was obvious 'they did not know their stuff' (James). In particular, 'the dodgy silences were bit of a give away, do you remember Axels' group, that was embarrassing (Andy).*

On the other hand Jim explained how the structure of the CMT helped to unify the group. For instance;

*I think we were really trying to help each other. To begin with we were too quiet and reluctant to speak out, but I think we started to develop a squad mentality. We tried to help each other. Even though I know some of us took it as a criticism, it was really there to help us towards the final presentation. Some of us started to get really competitive and we tried to make sure we had all the parts of the case covered.*

**Links the real world of sports coaching**

When the students were asked to reflect on whether CMT would adequately prepare them for the real world of coaching the responses were very positive. The following comments from Steve, Mike and Jenny are examples of some of the recorded statements to support this point;

*This has really opened my eyes to some of the difficult decisions coaches have to make. I was speaking to my placement about this at the academy and he has to make these decisions all the time. For the first time I have really noticed how coaching is more than just bibs, domes and drills. The practical stuff is, important, but I have often wondered how the theory sessions link to proper coaching. I think this will make me a better coach.*

*I had an interview the other day for a coaching job working with elite under 16 handball players. One of the questions asked how in theory I would deal with a player who was losing confidence due to unforeseen media attention. I was able to mention the case-study we have been working on and the media training stuff. They thought it was great. I could really go into specific detail and give them some ideas. When they gave me the job they reckoned it was they way I answered that question that clinched it for me.*

*The case we were given has helped me with my placement. I actually feel as though I know more than my mentor. The swimming club have asked me to go and speak to their coaches about what*

*we've been doing in uni which would be, you know, a bit weird.*

The recognised congruency with CMT and sports coaching reality was a pleasing outcome. Specifically, a number of the students made references to their final year placement and the world of work. The supposition that CMT therefore has the potential to establish a marriage between theory and practice can partially at least, and with some caution be supported.

***Assessment efficacy***

Assessment efficacy (Hay & Penney, 2009, p. 391) is reported to include the following conditions; assessment for learning, authentic assessment, assessment validity and socially just approaches to assessment. When the students were prompted to comment on the nature of the assessment during the module, a number of the group responded positively to the assessment efficacy promoted within CMT. For example, James stated;

*The assessment for this module was really good. I was pleased with the high number of marks available for the presentation as we have been practicing this for a while. The cases provided the problem but it was up to us to decide on the content and we were assessed on this. In other modules you receive loads of criteria and although that's helpful the lectures are based just on the assessment. Sometimes, though you have an assessment which is not related to any of the lecture material.*

*However, for Derek the assessment protocol could have been even more radical, as the following statement suggests;*

*If you ask me the best way to assess this module in the future could be to let us design the assessment criteria. After all we have to establish the content for the cases, perhaps we could be given say 60% of the marks and we decide how we wish to be assessed on this 60%.*

*One the reported issues surrounding alternative pedagogies which are grounded in constructivism (i.e. CMT) is the tension which exists between assessing formal learning objectives and goal free evaluation (Duffy & Jonassen, 1992). If programme designers are to maintain a level of congruency with constructivist learning theories, then it has been acknowledged that assessments should largely avoid objectivist assessment methods, including criterion-referencing and instead address real-life criteria (Duffy & Jonassen, 1992). The nature of the real-life assessments addressed in this particular module was appreciated by the students. For example, Jenny stated:*

*As you know we had to organise the disability training camp for a number of Olympic events. I really want to be involved with disability sport in the future and I know that if this problem ever arises, I reckon I will be a much stronger position to react and present solutions. I have already tried some of these ideas in my current coaching role and I reckon my players are beginning to see some benefits.*

## Concluding comments

Following our recent experiences, observations and reflections, and crucially the thoughts and perceptions of our students, we concluded that CMT contains a number of advantages for students enrolled on formal sports coach education undergraduate courses. However, before these are reported, it is important to acknowledge that CMT also contains a number of limitations which should also be noted.

Firstly, to prepare real-life coaching scenarios is time-consuming. Initially, our university Brokerage department contacted a variety of external agencies, however, only a small number of NGBs were prepared to provide case study material. Secondly, the time investment for preparing cases is substantial, and in our experiences at least, longer than traditional 'didactic' lecture style formats. Once the case problem has been identified, the case requires additional items including background information,

research from related disciplines, descriptive data and resources to guide the student. This involves additional reading and preparation for the tutor as they are directly responsible for orchestrating the 'in-class' discussion. A third limitation of CMT is the difficulties we encountered with facilitating the in-class discussion. Our experiences are that this requires substantial preparation, practice and patience. This aspect of CMT can also be draining especially with complex material and when confronted with unresponsive students.

On a more positive note, the student responses to CMT were very encouraging. In particular, the students made connections with different academic disciplines; previously completed modules and commented on the transfer of the problem from their case into the real world of coaching. One of our students secured a performance coaching position during the delivery of this module, and indicated via the focus group interview that his initial experiences of CMT and subsequent knowledge construction were instrumental in securing this role. The students enrolled on this module were generally positive surrounding the authentic nature of the assessment; however, they also indicated that this could have been even more radical with goal free evaluations. We are conscious not to eulogise over the merits of a particular pedagogy after only adopting it for one year, and in one core sports coaching module. However, our preliminary experiences suggest there is much potential for CMT within formal sports coach education.

Footnote Liverpool John Moores University Brokerage department supports activities through sourcing suitable employers, liaising with academics and developing branded marketing materials.

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# An Examination of the Ability of the Heads of Department to Make Decisions in Libyan Universities

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## Abstract

The overarching purpose of this study was to discover the ability of the heads of department to make decisions in universities in Libya. This was accomplished through the examination of three main aims: firstly, to examine the level of department heads' ability to make decisions; secondly, to determine the level of department heads' ability to make decisions according to certain fields of study; and thirdly, and finally, to examine if there were any differences in the level of department heads' ability to make decisions attributed to the variables of scientific qualification, experience, gender, age, and specialization. The data collection consisted of two main dimensions including one-hour interviews with 11 heads of department in Libyan universities and a questionnaire distributed to 448 heads of department in Libyan universities. It is suggested that the results of the study may help in developing education administration and management at universities in Libya and internationally.

## Introduction

The research reported in this study focuses on the ability of the heads of department to make decisions at universities in Libya. The importance of this topic is related to the fact that higher education is an instrument of change and reform in all spheres of life among nations old and new and heads of department are one the key drivers of change in modern Universities (Ibraheem, 2008; Badri, 2007).

Decision-making is undoubtedly the most difficult and most essential task a manager performs (Kepner and Tregoe, 1965). Executives rate decision-making ability as the most important business skill, but few people have the training they need to make good decisions consistently. Russo and Shoemaker (1989) point out that becoming a good decision-maker requires coaching just like becoming a good athlete. Decision-making skills can also be taught. Common mistakes when making crucial decisions can be avoided using some fairly simple methods and techniques (Forman, 2001, p.4).

The issues outlined above highlight the fact that higher education institutions such as Libyan Universities need to have effective management in order to achieve their objectives. This requires universities to prepare efficacious organizational structures to obtain these aims. Furthermore, the researcher argues that heads of department play a crucial role in the effective operation of the work of departments, requiring not only subject knowledge and teaching expertise but also the ability to manage and lead a team (Earley and Fletcher-Campbell, 1989, p.3). Moreover, Adey and Jones (1998) confirm that there is a lack of

training for heads of department and they add that such heads of department tend to be appointed on the basis of proven teaching skills, which need not be good predictors of skilled leadership (Adey and Jones, 1998).

For these reasons it is clear that the ability of leaders in education to make decisions is crucial to the further development of a high quality educational system and heads of department should be good managers as well as distinguished academics. Moreover, Eley went further to say that if an individual did not possess both attributes, then the qualities of managerial capability should be given priority in the future selection of the heads of department (Eley, 1994). One may presume, therefore, that the effectiveness of the adopted decisions is based on the individuals who manage and lead the organization (Almyheedi, 1994). Thus, heads of department in universities, as with all departments in the wider sphere, are considered to be one of the best human elements since they occupy the leading positions in their institutions and run the smallest organizational units in the universities. Therefore, it becomes necessary to improve their ability to make decisions in order to develop the mechanism of scientific and pedagogic work in all departments (Mahdi, 1988).

The research reported in this study consisted of both a questionnaire survey and interviews with heads of department and had three main aims:

- to examine the level of department heads' ability to make decisions;
- to determine the level of department heads' ability to make decisions according to certain fields of study; and,
- to examine if there were any differences in the level of department heads' ability to make decisions attributed to the variables of scientific qualification, experience, gender, age, and specialization.

The research identified a number of key challenges that face heads of department, some of which are generic to higher education trans-nationally, whiles others are specific to the cultural nuances operant in Libya.

## Literature review

This section offers a review of the relevant literature on decision making by heads of department in educational institutions. Much of the literature explored is specific to the burgeoning research in higher education but the analysis also synthesises some of the wider literature on leadership and management in educational establishments more broadly, such as research on school and colleges.

Heads of department are considered key human elements that play an important role in the success of university administration because they have administrative, organizational, and educational roles which can enhance organizational effectiveness (Hamami, 1996). My review deals with leadership as the core of the administrative process and the basis for success. I argue that the failure to address this issue has delayed some institutions in some communities in their development because of a deadlock in management due to the lack of efficient leadership and a concomitant inability to perform key tasks and functions. As was mentioned earlier, I would argue that leadership capabilities are especially important in the decision making process. Higher education institutions can dramatically improve decision making capabilities by implementing successful decision making processes that address identifiable challenges, set attainable goals and follow the framework of guiding principles and programme lifecycle management.

***Leadership***

Higher education in the UK and around the world has been undergoing rapid and remarkable changes over the past 20 years. These new challenges and the changing environment have put the spotlight on leadership in higher education (Knight and Trowler, 2001, p.27-28). The earliest literature on leadership was concerned almost entirely with theoretical issues as theorists sought to identify different types of leadership and relate them to the functional demands of society. In addition, they sought to account for the emergence of leadership either by examining the

qualities of the leader or the elements of the situation (Stogdill, 1974, p.5).

Yukl (2006) has argued that most definitions of leadership reflect the conjecture of a process whereby intentional influence is exerted to facilitate tasks and relationships within an organisation.

*"…Leadership alludes to an orientation towards human relations and organizing people by providing them with tasks, direction, support, and coherence, so that the group can fulfill its objectives…''*
(Kekale el at, 2006, p.251-252)

Leadership has been defined in terms of traits, influence, relationships, and occupation of an administrative position (Yukl, 2006, p.2). However, it is also about inspiring individuals to give of their best to achieve a desired result, gaining their commitment and motivating them to achieve defined goals (Armstrong and Stephens, 2006, p.13). Leadership is the process whereby one person influences the thoughts and behavior of others (Bennet, 1994, p.15). Leaders need vision to provide development and growth of all involved in teaching and learning (Fidler, 1997, p.23).

Leadership is the process whereby one individual influences other group members toward the attainment of defined group or organisational goals ( Greenberg and Baron, p.501, 2008). Bennis (1959) surveyed the leadership literature and concluded:

*"...Always, it seems, the concept of leadership eludes us or turns up in another form to taunt us again with its slipperiness and complexity. So we have invented an endless proliferation of terms to deal with it … and still the concept is not sufficiently defined..."* (Bennis, 1959, p.259)

Consequently, there is no comprehensive definition of leadership because every researcher deals with the definition those accords with in his or her research.

Researchers usually define leadership according to their individual perspective and the aspect of the phenomenon of most interest to them. After a comprehensive review of the leadership literature and Stogdill (1974, p.259) concluded that "there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept.'' Leadership has been defined in terms of individual traits, behaviour, influence over other people, interaction patterns, role relationships, occupation of an administrative position, and perception by others regarding legitimacy of influence (Yukl, 1989, p.2). Furthermore, leadership is an interpersonal interaction, through which one person presents information and convinces the others that if they behave according to the information presented, they will be able to achieve improved results (Roueche et al, 1989).

In defining the phenomenon of leadership in organisations, special attention should be given to the following factors: the leader – his or her abilities, personality and sources of power; the followers – their abilities, personalities, sources of power; and the situation in which the leader-follower relationship takes place, the unique circumstances, and the tasks or goals that the leader and the group face (Yukl, 1989). In addition, influence is a necessary part of most conceptions of leadership (Bryman el at, 1996). The meaning of this, according to the above researchers, is that most of the variation in leadership concepts can be accounted for by differences in who exerts influence, the nature of the influence, the purpose for the exercise of influence and its outcomes.

In conclusion, it can be said that effective leadership is increasingly regarded as a vital component of successful organizations (Bush, 2008, p.32). Consistent with Stogdill (1974) Bennett (1994) Fidler (1997) and Yukl (1994), all claim that the phenomenon of leadership is unique to situations of voluntary consent by the led members. According to this view, blind obedience cannot be linked to the area of leadership, but to other areas, such as motivation

or the personal tendencies of the group members to avoid being sanctioned. McCrimmon (2000) believed that leadership is still about power, but it is now the power of knowledge creation – a much more democratic factor – rather than the power of formal authority, physical strength or the force of personality and the power of thought leadership is used to change how we think, not to dominate us. The key move to get to this way of regarding leadership is to pursue consistently what it means to regard leadership strictly as a function that is open to anyone to perform. Everything flows from this foundation. The idea that leadership is the initiation of change rather than its implementation is a good example of this point. Thought leadership does not necessarily lead to anything being implemented beyond a change of thinking and thought leaders often do not have the power to implement their ideas in any case. This change in perspective requires us to cast aside the old idea that leadership is about achieving group goals. Crucially, leadership initiates new goals and management serves the function of implementing them (McCrimmon, 2000, p.12).

The perspectives and theories of leadership are the basis for educational leadership and underpin this kind of leadership which is an important key factor of changes in all sectors of education in schools. For instance, Bollington's (1999, p.153) point of view is that outstanding leadership is important for outstanding schools. Thus, I argue that leadership is a key factor in effectiveness for educational institutions of all types.

***Educational leadership***

The term ''educational leadership'' refers to both areas of teaching and learning as well as expertise in human resources, budget management, etc., educational leadership is not restricted to dealing only with education, but rather concerns all of the aspects the school deals with (Bush and Coleman, 2000). We may note, however, that the traditional theories of leadership are normative, focusing on the formal aspect of organizational life and on authority, and fail to provide insight into how schools are run in everyday life (Ball, 1987; Eden, 1998).

Educational leadership is all about professionalism, educational values, and vision (Coleman, 1994; Bush and Coleman, 2000, pp. 24-25; Leithwood, 1993) and the essence of educational leadership is based on the notion of transformational leadership which views the leader's role to encourage and to empower the teachers and all those involved in educational work (Bush and Coleman, 2000; Ron and Shlayfer, 1995; Duignan and Macpherson, 1992).

Sergiovanni (1991, p.86) claims that educational leadership exhibits the leader as a strong instructional leader which is appropriate for new or doubtful staff whilst at other times he/she appears on an equal basis in teaching and learning with the staff. This latter appearance of the leader's role is appropriate for more mature staff. The same notion was described by Leithwood (1993) who claimed that the meaning of the term "leadership", in the educational context, is the forming of an educational vision, the bringing of educational goals to the awareness of the educational staff, and setting the clear of objectives for the educational staff and the social environment in which the school operates. Since there is always a gap between the reality and the vision, the leader requires change and improvement strategies that help him or her in their effort to expand the staff boundaries of perception, to make them see the full picture of the school as a social system, not only satisfy the immediate needs of each individual subject (Bush and Coleman, 2000; Parker, 1990).

***Decision Making***

Every day people in organizations make decisions of varying importance, so the idea that decision making can be a rather sophisticated art may at first seem strange. On the other hand, studies have shown that most people are much poorer at decision making than they think. A considerate of what decision making involves, together with a few effective techniques, will help produce better decisions (Harris, 2009).

Decision making is the study of identifying and choosing alternatives based on the values and preferences of the decision maker. Decision making is the process of sufficiently reducing uncertainty and doubt about alternatives to allow a reasonable choice to be made from among them (Harris, 2009). Lawson & Shen (1998) noted that decision-making is the process of choosing among alternatives, implementing a decision and using the subsequent outcome data to shape any further decisions associated with the earlier one. Meanwhile, Kittisarn (2003) said that decision-making involves choosing between alternative courses of action with the aid of a systematic and structured set of criteria (Kittisarn, 2003, p.11).

Higher education has profoundly changed in the past half century. One of the most marked changes has been a vast expansion in numbers of students. Around the world, higher education is less and less the domain of the elite, but is being transformed into a mass system which, in some cases, is almost a universal phenomenon. Other changes have included increased demands for accountability, changes in composition and work of faculty, privatization, and the impact of new technologies. Although academic systems function primarily in a national environment, these changes are occurring worldwide and have had significant impacts on the participation of higher education teaching staff in decision-making (Vere, 2007, p.5).

*"...Much contemporary theorising on educational decision-making starts from the premise that the process of decision-making is a deeply embedded social practice, which is inextricably linked to behaviours, attitudes and dispositions which hold sway within an individual's social Network..."*
(Heath, Fuller and Paton, 2008, p. 219)

As modern organizations seek flexibility in response to the exponential growth in technology and globalisation, they view greater employee participation in decision making as a means of gaining more from an educated, technologically oriented workforce (Connell, 1998); defined as the act of sharing decision making with others to achieve organisational objectives (Knoop, 1991).

Participation in decision making can be operationalised in a number of different ways. Participation can offer employees various levels of influence in the decision making process, ranging from formally established consultative committees through to development of good relations with managers or supervisors (Cotton et al, 1988; Locke and Schweiger, 1979; Scully et al., 1995).
Larger departments are more likely to require decision makers to adhere to formal decision policies than smaller departments (Scott, 1992). Thus, we would expect that decision makers in larger departments will rely more heavily on prescribed criteria and less on ad hoc criteria than decision makers in smaller departments that are less concerned with formal rules and procedures. Since institutions are structured so that administrators control information, it is important that other constituents, including faculty, have a voice that is distinct from the administration (Welsh, Nunez, & Petrosko, 2005). Thus, institutions vary by the extent to which the decision making is participatory or autocratic (Garmon, 1984; Kukalis, 1991; Waters, 1996).

Decision makers are faced daily with making important and pervasive decisions. This is especially significant in higher education, where decisions about academics will have considerable impact on the next generation of leaders (Sellers, 2005, p.265).

If faculty members' participation is so central to the managerial and leadership process in academic department, what constrains the more active involvement of faculty members? Scholars have identified a host of factors ranging from, for instance, department size (Scott, 1992; Constantinople, Corneilius, & Gray, 1988), chairpersons' authority, gender (Denton & Zeytinoglu, 1993), or faculty emotions such as confidence or fear (Collins, 1984). Carroll & Wolverton (2004) said that the department heads

role begins with the challenging statement that up to 80 per cent of all administrative decisions made in colleges and universities are made by department heads. The head plays a central role in the governance and productivity of postsecondary institutions (Wolverton, 1999). Bowman (2002) suggests that the real work of academic chairpersons demands a diverse set of leadership capabilities well-honed communication skills, problem-solving skills, conflict resolution skills, cultural-management skills, coaching skills, and transition-management skills. Therefore, results of this study have important implications for department chairs and faculty members.

Decisions take on special significance when made by those in leadership positions because they impact the fate of many others and possibly even the enterprise itself. We define leadership decisions to be those moments when an individual with organizational responsibility faces a discrete, tangible, and realistic opportunity to commit enterprise resources to one course or another on behalf of the enterprise's objectives (Useem et al, 2005, p.462).

The point that school administrative decision making requires more than the mechanical application of existing rules, regulations and various levels of school and school-related policy has been well established (Hoy and Miskel, 2005).

Rausch (1996) said that enhancing suitable participation could be measured the easy way to improve the climate of an organization. Honesty and ability in seeking the contribution and participation of staff members leads to better communications, greater collaboration and more cohesive teamwork. These in turn guide to higher levels of confidence and that reinforces the openness of the climate. The great thing about participation is that it does not need sanction of higher level management. Every head of a department can practise suitable participation separately. It is improved, of course, if top management leads the way by instance and support (Rausch, 1996, p. 34).

## Methodology

The data collection elements of the study consisted of two main dimensions including:

1. One hour interviews with 11 heads of department in Libyan universities. The interviews included two phases:

1) Initial interviews carried out with 11 heads of department at Libyan Universities during the summer of 2008.
2) According to the findings of the questionnaire the researcher structured further in-depth interviews that were carried out during the summer of 2009 with the same 11 heads of department at Libyan universities in order to gather rich data about the topic under scrutiny. The kind of interviews that was chosen for this study is the semi-structured one for data collection from the sample of the study

To analyse the qualitative data in this study, the researcher analyzed key issues which were found through continuously reading and re-reading of the respondents' answers, according to the approach recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994).

2. A questionnaire was distributed to 450 heads of department in Libya universities.

Since the study aimed to identify the ability of the heads of department to make decisions, it is necessary to use a tool to identify that ability. For this reason, the researcher searched for previous studies and the measures and the questionnaires that have been used in these studies to test the ability of making decisions and leadership.

Most data collection uses the questionnaire approach and it essential that the questionnaire is designed carefully (Waters, 2001). The questionnaire of this study was composed of 62 items and seven sections, or aspects. Each item is composed of 4 options. The seven aspects included:

1. The concept of decision-making.
2. Stages of decision-making: how much the head of department knows about the steps of decision making and their sequence.
3. Objectivity: refers to the extent decision-making is affected by internal and external impacts.
4. Flexibility: refers to the extent the head of the department modifies, alters, rejects decision making concept: related to the ability of the heads of department to conceive or approves a particular decision in accordance to the circumstances and contexts.
5. Quality: refers to the ability of the head of department to make decisions characterized by appropriate characteristics in terms of clarity, excitability, etc.

In addition, two fields (the field of power and the field of communication with 10 items for everyone) were added to the questionnaire by the researcher because they are necessary to decision making in the field of administration.

The data gathered in this research was analyzed to identifying the level of the ability of the heads of department to make decisions. In order to process the collected data by quantitative method, the researcher used a number of statistical methods which suit the nature of the goals, including standard deviations, T-test, F-test and Pearson correlation coefficient. All statistical analyses of the data were accomplished using the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) software (version 16).

## Findings

In reporting the findings of the study we must be aware that the research was, in fact, a study of the perceptions of heads of department themselves who were the respondents for both the questionnaire and interview phase of the research. It is perhaps most notable that the respondents in the study considered that the level of the ability of the heads of department to make decisions overall was high and the most important factor which helps the heads of department to make good decision in Libyan universities was considered to be the length of experience as a head of department. For instance, this significant explanation was given by head No.1 when he was asked to reflect on the finding from the survey that experience was the key to greater competence

*"...Yes I agree with this result…but with regard to the skills and support necessary for the head of the department to make decisions of high quality, it depends on his understanding of his work first…and long experience gained in the area of work before he became head for a certain department…"*

(Head No.1)

Some of the evidence derived from the interviews would indicate that length of service and experience is believed to be critically important because the university does not enable the development of decision making skills of the heads of department in terms of in-service training and thus they make their decisions according to their past experience in the field of administrative work. For instance, Respondent 4 said:

*"...There are no training programs offered by the University to the heads of departments, so the way I make the decisions depends on my personal ability and my experience in the field of administrative work..."*

(Head No. 4)

Another example can be found in the words of Respondent 1, who said:

*"...The University does not do anything with regard to supporting the decision-making skills of the department heads, they do not provide any training programs to the head of department...The head of the department may worry if he does not comply with the regulations but without the presence of experience and participation of members of the department in the responsibility he will not be able to make any right decision..."*

(Head No. 1)

The heads of department involved in the study argued strongly that they administer their departments through collective participation

enacted by making academic and administrative decisions and a daily follow-up of the functioning of departments to assess the implementation of their requirements. This would suggest that heads of department perceive that they are administering their departments through the use of the democratic or collegial style of making decisions. In addition, heads of department stated that they used meetings as the most common forum for decision-making where any problems or issues are discussed in order to make a decision or find a solution. Therefore, the kind of decision that the heads of department made may be deemed to be collective. For instance, head No.7, stated that:

*"…I run the department through the daily follow-up and periodic meetings of the Council of the department…"*

(Head No.7)

Another example came from head No.4 who stated:

*"…I respect the colleagues in the department and taking into account the differences by age and academic degree of the staff member of the department…Encourage a spirit of like and cooperation among all…Encourage new individuals to creativity… When I make a decision it must be a collective decision in the department…"*

(Head No. 4)

It was clear there are difficulties facing heads of department which can impede swift and timely decision making, especially where the management of human resources was involved. For instance, an explanation was given by head No.1 who stated:

*"…There are some cases where I find difficulty to make decision about certain topics, especially when related to something that might harm the prospects of a particular individual…"*

(Heads No.1)

Data also suggested that, as a result of these pressures, heads of department may be forced to make bad or inadequate decisions at times, especially if there was insufficient time to gather the relevant data. For instance, head No.5 said:

*"…The most important difficulty in decision-making is to collect accurate data from reliable sources in a timely manner which leads to make accurate and valid resolution…"*

(Head No.5)

Head No. 2 had another explanation:

*"…when I make a decision I face the problem of delayed response to the requests of data and reports…"*

(Head No. 2)

However, the data suggests that heads of department attempt to reach the best solutions to the problems which they may encounter during their work through consultation with experts on the topic under scrutiny. Notably, there were some cases where the heads of department felt unable to make a rational and lucid decision not only because of a lack of time but also because of the lack of sufficient and accurate data. Equally, some decisions might conflict with extant regulations and legislation in Libyan universities, thus constraining decision-making further. For instance, head No.5 said:

*"…The most important difficulty in decision-making is to collect accurate data from reliable sources in a timely manner which leads to an accurate and valid resolution…"*

(Head No.5)

As mentioned in the analysis section, the heads of department demonstrated a high level of ability to make decision according to the fields of the study, which included the decision-making concept, the stages of making the decision, objectivity, flexibility, quality, control, and communication. For instance, head No.3 said that:

*"...Because to make correct decision is based on scientific grounds must follow all of these fields. Decisions should be taken collectively characterized by objectivity, flexibility, and quality…this is will improve the Communication between members of the department..."*

(Head No.3)

Furthermore, all heads believed that, there were differences in decision-making ability according to such factors as gender, age-group, whether Scientific or Humanities based departments. However, it was felt that there was no difference, based on the level of qualification of department heads', in terms of their ability to make decisions. Overall, the data revealed that many heads felt under pressure because of a lack of time and a lack of data when making decisions and colleagues also sometimes felt constrained by regulations which limited their power to act.

## Conclusions

This study aims to identify the level of the ability of the heads of department to make decisions in Libyan Universities through an examination of activities that such leaders undertake in order to achieve their desired objectives. More specifically, the study focused on the ways in which such heads of department influence staff members of their departments and other staff. Further, the study attempted to assess the ability to guide behaviour and motivation through use of the concept of decision-making. Crucial elements for examination included the stages of decision-making, objectivity, flexibility, quality, control and communication. Crucially, the researcher found that there are many differences in the ability of heads of department to make decisions according to the variables of scientific qualification, experience, gender, age, and specialization in Libyan universities.

It should be noted that the study relied on the perceptions of the heads of department and although respondents noted comparatively few differences in the quality of decision-making ability based on the level of qualification or training there was a strong consensus that good decision making was contingent upon level of experience. Findings suggest that more rigorous pre-service and in-service training will enable heads of department to act with confidence in their decision making from an earlier point in their career. Moreover, the researcher proposes that best practice in other developed systems of higher education suggests that heads of department in Libyan universities require more systematic training in the softer leadership and management skills relating to human resource management.

In conclusion this study set out to discover the factors that assist or detract from the ability of heads of department in Libyan universities to make good and timely administrative decisions. The main findings of the study have been set out in the last section of this study. It is clear that heads of department face a set of developing challenges which mean that they require support and assistance in what they do. It is incumbent on university authorities that the selection and training of university heads of department should be enhanced if Libyan universities are to achieve their desired goals in the development of the nation.

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# The role of theory in developing good practice in early career teachers – a collaborative account of the development of feedback through marking to improve both teacher and pupil progress

**McCarthy, C., Conlon, D.**

Edwards and Protheroe (2003) argue that school based Initial Teacher Training (ITT) has 'huge potential for developing the expertise of beginning teachers'. They go on to state that mentoring beginner teachers need not be limited to feedback after observation of lessons. Indeed beginner teachers need greater input after it is established that they are managing their classes well and are planning their lessons. They include helping beginner teachers to develop interpretations of pupil's learning needs and modelling responses to these needs as valid and worthwhile strategies for mentors along with the more usual diet of lesson observation and feedback. Cain (2009) challenges all mentors to make use of research. He suggests that mentors might engage with literature to directly inform practice, or develop in-depth case studies to inform and reform their own future practice and contribute to the pool of knowledge that we can all draw on when mentoring beginner teachers. School based mentoring takes place in extremely busy, challenging and changing work situations. Education theory and keeping up to date with latest thinking can sometimes be seen as a luxury by school based mentors, the very people tasked with overseeing the early development of beginner teachers.

Recent research of potential interest to many of the schools I am involved with is that of Higgins, Kobotsaki and Coe (2011). They propose that developing skills in teachers' feedback to pupils can be an excellent use of the Pupil Premium in raising standards in schools. The aim of the Pupil Premium is to raise achievement among disadvantaged children. Wider aims include increasing social mobility, enabling more pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds to get to the top Universities and helping reduce the attainment gap between the highest and lowest achieving pupils nationally. Higgins et al (2011) make the case for developing effective feedback given by teachers to pupils to raise attainment. They state (p14) that' Feedback is information given to the learner and/or the teacher about the learner's performance relative to the learning goals which then redirects or refocuses either the teacher's or the learner's actions to achieve the goal. Research suggests that feedback should be:

- About challenging tasks or goals
- Given sparingly
- More important to give feedback on what is right than what is wrong
- Be as specific as you can be – compare what they are doing right now with what they have done wrong before
- Encourage them – do not threaten their self esteem.'

My interest in how mentors make use of theory to improve practice in classrooms developed in the academic year 2010-11 as a Tutor on the TeachFirst Programme in the North West. I tutor Science trainees on this programme in local secondary schools. TeachFirst is an employment based route leading to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) after a thirteen month training period. TeachFirst trainees, called 'Participants' on this programme, are placed in a challenging urban school environment after an initial six week training period. These beginner teachers are mentored by a school based mentor, supported by a University Tutor, throughout the first year of their teaching. This route to QTS is intense and makes high demands on the mentors and mentees alike. I wanted to examine in some detail how one of my trainees had developed their feedback skills with his pupils over the academic year 2011-12. The trainee I chose to work with (D. Conlon), a beginner Science teacher in a large secondary school in Manchester. I chose to work with this particular trainee because of the positive comments he had from his school based mentors about his feedback to pupils that he developed in his year leading to QTS. The importance of feedback through marking is highlighted by the trainee on reflecting on his progress at the end of his first year in teaching.

*Although almost all aspects of my classroom practice have developed since I began teaching Science last September, none have made such a positive impact than the change I made to the way I give written feedback. With observations focusing on what had been seen during lesson time and the phrase 'written feedback' only featuring in one of the thirty-three 'Q 'standards, I gave little attention to my approach to marking and what impact it was having on my pupils and their subsequent learning. However during the summer term I realised the written feedback I was handing out was vague, poorly thought through and, most importantly, played no role in advancing the learning of my pupils. Here I shall mention how my marking policy changed, what effect it had and what I hope to achieve going into my second year.*

The first term focus of mentoring in the first year of teaching centres on classroom management skills. Conlon recognises this, stating:

*'Understandably, my focus during the first term was behaviour management. If asked about book marking back in November I would have replied and genuinely believed that it wasn't particularly important and therefore needed little attention. Thus my marking was limited to a simple 'tick and flick' technique. If an assessment had taken place, whether it was a plenary quiz, a practical task or a period of extended writing, the feedback returned to the pupil would be a series of ticks and crosses, with an overall, summative grade at the end e.g.8 out of 10 Well done! Or 'You achieved a level 4a, try harder next time.' The majority of the comments referred to attainment with no praise given for effort.*

Teachers are by their very nature successful in educational terms. TeachFirst only recruits participants with at least a 2:1 in a relevant degree. Therefore summative feedback may have been all that these beginner teachers either got or required in their own school careers. Black et al (2004) also states that 'A numerical mark does not tell pupils how to improve their work, so an opportunity to enhance their learning has been lost'. The trainee was also aware of this. *I noticed that since no advice or 'next step' was being given, the same pupils were making the same mistakes. Rather than being a 'distinctive step in the process of learning' (Black et al 2002), my giving of feedback was a one-way, largely pointless exercise that meant the pupils had no clue as to what they needed to focus on to achieve their personal targets.*

Situated learning, i.e. learning in the workplace, is a feature of the TeachFirst Participant experience in their placement schools. Good mentoring and coaching in the department and school quickly develops the beginner teacher and helps them recognise the issues they face with their own classes. Black et al (2002) recognised the vital role of more experienced teachers can play. 'Collaboration between teachers to share examples of effective comments can be very

helpful, and experience will lead to more efficient fluency'. This was a situation that needed input from mentors and other experienced teachers in the Department.

Conlon comments, *My subject mentor and colleagues allowed me to look at some of their examples of more effective, 'next-step', diagnostic approaches to marking. I found that the more experienced teachers were constantly referring to their pupils' current levels, what needed to be done to improve and gave praise for the effort and attitude rather than the final attainment.*

This approach to marking as a motivational tool was first highlighted by Butler (1987). She worked with a total of 200 mixed ability students in four groups, who were given 'thinking tasks' in three sessions. Individual comments, numerical grades, standardised praise or no feedback were given to each of the four groups respectively, after sessions 1 and 2. Results confirmed that at Session 3 (post test), the outcomes were most improved after receipt of comments. She also suggests that self-esteem was most improved by the use of grades and praise. This work has major implications for teachers in all classrooms. Most teachers will not have read Butler's paper or even have heard of it. However the ideas put forward by Butler and the positive outcomes of praising pupils in written feedback in their work has obviously taken root in this school and in many others. This 'organisational knowledge' is situated in the school and in individual departments. If it is to be passed on to new recruits it has to shared and owned by all the staff and implemented by everyone to be effective. Black et al (2003) comments on putting Assessment for Learning ideas into practice

'if the substantial rewards of which the evidence holds out promise are to be secured, this will only come about if each teacher finds his or her own ways of incorporating the lessons and ideas that are set out above into her or his own patterns of classroom work. This can only happen relatively slowly, and through sustained programmes of professional development and support.' (p16)

Willingness to change practice and experiment are indications of openness to mentoring and coaching in beginner teachers. Trainees have to be willing to listen to advice and try new approaches otherwise there will be little or no progress made in the classroom. Conlon knew his feedback was not achieving what he hoped it could. He decided things had to be different to improve.

*The first major change I implemented was to ensure all my commendations in books were for effort rather than for achieving a 'good' summative grade or mark. This was intended to build the self esteem of the less able pupils on occasions when their marks didn't quite match those of the more able pupils but their attitude to learning was commendable. This seemed to work, especially with the introduction of merit stickers that would only be handed out to those showing excellent levels of effort – this was made clear to pupils.*

The use of rewards and the effects it may have on pupils may be beyond the experience of new recruits to teaching. If beginner teacher's own experience of school did not include this strategy they may not know about the positive motivational outcomes to be had from setting up and applying a rewards system as part of a beginner teacher's developing classroom practice. Rewards are used in many schools and departments. These range from department-wide practices such as postcards/emails/texts home to parents praising effort and good work to more ambitious school wide rewards systems where pupils can trade acquired 'currency' in school shops. Again many schools know this as organisations and implement such strategies to their advantage. However the beginner may have no experience at all of rewards in classrooms and so will have to be shown the advantages of using the strategy and allowed to develop his or her own interpretation of it in their own classroom.

Levelling work can also motivate pupils. This is a new skill for beginner teachers especially when they have to level a piece of work that they are responsible for teaching. Accurate levelling takes

time and is a skill that good teachers are continually improving. Theoretically all pupils should know their target levels in all subjects as they progress through school. The reality, especially in more challenging schools can be very different.

*During a mock Ofsted inspection in April I asked many of my classes to recall what their end of year target was. Less than 10% of all pupils questioned could recall their target and the clear majority were unaware their targets were written on the front cover of their exercise book. I realised then there was no chance of my students progressing if they were unaware of what level they had reached and what they needed to do to reach the next level up.*

Conlon felt that his strategies for using this information were ineffective. It is only the imminence of an Ofsted inspection that focused attention on the use of data in the classroom.

*I made a conscious decision to refer to levels more when writing comments under assessed pieces of work. I started by informing the pupil what level they had achieved. This gave the student clear perspective on whether they had fallen above, below or exactly on target (pupils by now were much more familiar with their targets through peer/self assessment exercises). I then wrote a small comment informing the pupil what needed to be done to achieve the next level up – e.g. 'You have achieved a level 5. Can you write a balanced equation for photosynthesis to reach level 6?' I got into the habit of writing a comment like this after each piece of assessed work, so the pupils became even more familiar with their levels and familiar with the kind of work required for each level (e.g. descriptions for level 4, explanations for level 5). The target for improvement I gave to my pupils needed to be achievable but ambitious.*

There is evidence here in Term 3 that there is a much better engagement with educational theory with accompanying much improved outcomes for pupils. There is greater dialogue between the teacher and his pupils using the language of levels to motivate and inspire pupils. This marking has developed a long way from the 'tick and flick' that the beginner teacher referred to in Term 1. He further states,

*I tried to give targets/improvements that would take no longer than a couple of minutes to complete, showing pupils that the difference between the levels wasn't down to the amount of work but the quality of it. This style of marking helped me assess the learning of the pupils but also showed me which pupils don't quite possess the skills required to improve their work and are exhibiting the same mistakes/misconceptions each time. I could then provide specialist intervention where appropriate.*

Now there is evidence of the beginner teacher realising the use he can make of his marking to get a better and more accurate knowledge about the capabilities of individuals in his class. Marking books takes time and must be planned into the weekly workload of any teacher. What has emerged in this short case study is the realisation that marking and giving feedback is crucial to developing pupil understanding of where they are at and what they have to do in the future to improve the outcomes for themselves. Having made considerable changes to his regular feedback to pupils Conlon develops this even further,

*After each half termly, end of unit test, I printed off a small review telling each pupil how happy I was with their progress so far and again, what level they had achieved on their test, where this fell in respect to their target and how they could achieve their next level up.*

This adds a personal touch to the feedback process and gives all pupils regular summaries about their performance in any given term.

## Impact

The changes to marking and giving feedback as outlined by Conlon requires a huge amount of work any classroom teacher. There has to an assessment of impact to form a judgement on this strategy and its potential value to other beginner teachers and other schools. Conlon himself notes,

*I was certainly impressed by the impact of my new marking policy had on my classes and I hope to build in its success in my second year. The three most noticeable effects it had were*

1) *Pupils becoming more familiar with their targets and getting fixated on submitting work that at least achieved their target, with many trying their utmost to go above it. Many pupils would complete the work suggested to improve their level by the following lesson.*
2) *Pupils were keen to exhibit high levels of effort, due to my policy of handing out stickers/praise for effort only. Lower ability pupils gaining self esteem and higher ability pupils keen to attempt extension/enrichment activities tasks to show me they weren't 'coasting' through lessons.*
3) *Getting engrossed in the progress of my pupils. With pupils showing a marked improvement in effort, attitude and motivation, I noticed myself increasing my own work rate to ensure I was doing all I could to maximise learning gains.*

## Conclusion

Cain(2009) wants mentors to use the academic literature to inform and improve what we do with trainee and beginner teachers. Getting beyond watching lessons can be an issue for some. The above account of engaging with the issue of marking pupil's work and giving feedback is important in number of ways. Firstly it addresses Black et al (2004) concerns that poor quality feedback and indeed no feedback misses opportunities for teachers to enhance the learning of pupils. If pupils put in a lot of effort into a piece of work that only receives a tick and Well Done! comment, or even worse no comment, they are unlikely to be inspired to develop an interest in the subject. So the important issue of marking and giving feedback has to be developed in beginner teachers from the very beginning of training.

Black et al (2003) recognise the huge amount of organisational knowledge held by all schools. They may as individual teachers have forgotten who wrote the theory but they have a working knowledge and understanding why it is important and what the practical implications are of the theory in the classroom. This has to be shared with beginners who may have a limited understanding of the importance of feedback as demonstrated earlier.

Finally is this the issue that the Pupil Premium money could be used most effectively. Higgins et al (2011) state that the challenge schools face is in giving feedback to pupils is making it work in the classroom. Conlon's developing skills shows that beginner teachers have much to learn to deliver effective feedback to their pupils and this skill is best developed in cooperation with more experienced colleagues. Perhaps the Pupil Premium may provide schools with an opportunity to review their current practice and to improve their feedback through staff development. This could be an example of schools applying theory to improve pupil outcomes in terms of their motivation to learn and with improved outcomes in terms of individual progress

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# The Perceived Role of Parents/Carers of Identified Fundamentally Talented Sports Children and the development of a Conceptual Model of the Role of Parents/Carers from the Perspectives of those Involved in the Sports Talent.

**PILOT STUDY – Gloucestershire Talent Development Programme**

## Introduction

The goals of talent development research are to comprehend the development of talent, to shorten the journey on the path to expertise, and to elongate one's ability to perform at a peak level on numerous occasions (Starkes, Helson and Jack, 2001). Determining how extensive and meaningful practice, family support, competent coaches, adequate physical resources, and psychological characteristics can be maximised is an important step for researchers (Durand-Bush and Salmela, 2001). There have been a number of studies conducted that focus on talent development such as those carried out by Gould, Dieffenbach and Moffett (2002) and Morgan and Giacobbi Jr (2006), but most of these have examined talented sports performers who are already competing at an elite level.

Whilst it is clear that there are many factors associated with the development of talent in successful athletes, social support has emerged as a commonly cited contextual factor for athletes at many competitive levels (Bianco and Eklund, 2001; Holt and Dunn, 2004; Rees and Hardy, 2000). Research by Bloom (1985) and Côté (1999) both identified three distinct categories of talent development, the first stage being children between the ages of 6 and 13. The key characteristics of this phase, as opposed to later years, were fun, playful activities with guidance, stimulation of interest, and support from parents. Morgan and Giacobbi Jr (2006) developed two grounded theories of the talent development and social support process of highly successful collegiate athletes. They found that social support was multi-dimensional and dynamic and that throughout the athletes' career, social support was critical to help them develop coping skills to overcome adverse situations and become highly successful. A weakness of this particular study was that it involved retrospective interviews and therefore since the athletes had already experienced success the accounts provided by the athletes, parents and coaches were overly positive. In addition, considering the suggestion that parental support is more important at a young age (Bloom (1985), it would seem more relevant to interview athletes and their parents in the early stages of the child's sporting career.

This research project aimed to examine the impact of parents of children at the initial identification stage within a generic skills environment rather than a sports specific arena, and to look at the perceived support given by parents from their own, the athletes and the coaches/teachers perspective. One would anticipate that if the parental support mechanisms are embedded at the entry stage, funded programmes such as those delivered by SSPs would be more successful and that support at an elite level would be improved.

The aims of the pilot study were threefold:

1. To explore the knowledge and experience of the parents of selected Year 5 and 6 athletes within the Gloucestershire Sports Talent Development Programme.
2. To examine the perceptions of the role of the parents from the perspectives of the parents, coach and children within the Gloucestershire Sports Talent Programme
3. To develop a conceptual framework to explain the perceptions of the role of parents in Gifted and Talented Sports Programmes.

## Context

The National Physical Education, School Sport and Club Links (PESSCL) strategy was developed in April 2003 (DfES, 2003), to increase grass roots participation in physical activity for health benefits and to address the estimated economic costs of physical inactivity (DCMS/Strategy Unit Report, 2002). From 2008 PESSCL was replaced by The National Physical Education and Sport Strategy for Young People (PESSYP) but was still delivered by School Sport Partnerships (SSPs) through a number inter-linked work strands. One of these strands targeted Gifted and Talented children. This strand introduced a number of initiatives, which aimed to provide continuity in provision and 're-establish this Country as a powerhouse in the sporting world' (DfES, 2003, p.2). Development of talented sports performers is a complex process, with numerous agents adopting varying levels of influence and importance at different stages throughout the performers' career (Fredricks and Eccles, 2004). Through the influence a parent (or carer) makes on a child's participation in sport (Van der Horst, Chin, Paw, Twisk and Van Mechelen, 2007) and subsequent development at an elite level (Weiss and Hayashi, 1995) has been highlighted, but specific research into the support required at the different stages in a child's sporting career is limited.

## Empirical Knowledge Base

Starkes, Helsen and Jack (2001) suggest that the goals of talent development research are to comprehend the development of talent, to shorten the journey on the path to expertise and to elongate one's ability to perform at a peak level on numerous occasions.

Research into elite/talented sports performers has tended to highlight the impact that families, especially parents, have on young people's sports careers and performance (Rowley, 1992). Kay suggests that 'the family is a key agent in the process of nurturing sports talent' (Kay, 2000, p. 151), an aspect which she further suggests needs consideration in the context of recent social and economic trends in Britain. In the last 30 years, men and women in the economically advanced nations have developed new expectations about their adult roles, and about the contributions that male and female parents make to family life. Patterns of parental employment are changing and with these come transformations in lifestyles and patterns of parenting, which will impact on the support available for their children.

'After visiting any playing field or gymnasium, it is easy to observe that parents are substantially involved in their children's sports experiences' (Fredricks and Eccles, 2004, p. 145). However, considering this clearly important role of the parent in youth sports, the research on family socialisation in the context of sport is relatively limited (Brustad, 1992; Woolger and Power, 1993). Indeed, Greendorfer (1992) argues that one of the critical areas for future work is parent socialisation of sports participation, a sentiment echoed by Brustad (1992) who suggests that 'everybody talks about parents in sport, but nobody does any research on them' (p. 72). Although some researchers have responded to this, there are still many unanswered questions regarding the role of the parent in the degree to which a child experiences sporting success.

Some previous research has highlighted a number of areas in which parents play a pivotal role, for example, Rotella and Bunker (1987) suggest that children are more likely to take part in sport if parents have been, or still are participants and are more likely to achieve high levels of performance if their parents have also competed to a high level. However, (Yang et al., 1996) propose that the socio-economic background of the family and whether the family is headed by two parents (Rowley, 1992) is the key determinant of success. In contrast, sociologists and social psychologists have emphasized emotional support and socialisation as a

key factor (Howard and Madrigal, 1990; Vogler and Schwaitz, 1993), whilst policymakers have highlighted the practical resources contributed by the family and financial support necessary for young people's entry into and continuance within, sport talent programmes, as being pivotal to an athletes success (Rowley, 1992). Of particular significance to this study is research by Rowley (2002), who states that the demands made on the family are likely to increase as the child's age rises as well as a considerable amount of research that suggests boys receive more support and encouragement than girls (Welk et al, 2003; Trost et al, 2003; Yang et al, 1996)

A general model of achievement choices does provide some insight into sport parental roles and behaviours (e.g. Eccles, Wigfield and Schiefele, 1998; Fredricks and Eccles, 2004). Three distinct roles of parents on their children's sport experiences have been identified by Fredricks and Eccles (2004); that of a provider, an interpreter and a role model. They continue to suggest that parents influence children's motivation and behaviour through the beliefs and values they support and the behaviours they exhibit. For example parents enable their children to participate by funding them in the numerous ways this is required (i.e., enabling the experience), helping them to interpret their sport experience by behaving in certain ways to victory and defeat (i.e., interpreting the experience), and demonstrating critical behaviours and values, such as work ethic and composure (ie., role models) (Gould et al., 2008). This model is supported by research conducted by Brustad, Babkes and Smith (2001), who suggest that parents highly influence a child's motivation, competence and enjoyment of sports. Scanlan and Lewthwaite (1984) add to this stating that parents affect goal orientation and responses to sport. Moreover, parent feedback and behaviour might affect the length of a child's sport participation and how a child perceives his or her abilities (Harter 1978, 1981).

All of this research has been undertaken with athletes who are already competing at a high level within a specific sport and an image of the support necessary from 'the family' for top athletes to achieve success has been constructed, with an increase in commitment from both athlete and parent as the athlete moves closer to world class performance (Kay, 2000). In contrast, earlier research which compared the effect of the family, peer group, and school on children's sport participation at different developmental stages indicates that parents play an important role in the earlier years and that their influence decreases in adolescence when peers and coaches take on a more prominent role (Greendorfer, 1977; Lewko and Greendorfer, 1988; Loy, McPherson, and Kenyon, 1987). Although there appears to be some disagreement amongst researchers on the periods of time when more or less support is needed from parents, what is not disputed is the fact that parents are essential to the development of youth participants and the development of talent, mainly via support (Bloom, 1985; Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, Whalen and Wong, 1993; Gould, Dieffenbach and Moffet, 2002). Interestingly, although sport-parent research has identified this importance of parents' on the development and success of talented sports children (Gould et al., 2008), very little research has examined the 'specific' role and role-related behaviours that parents have and how they influence the youth. What is undeniable is that the role a parent plays in a child's youth-sport experience can have a profound influence on his or her reaction to sport participation (Gould et al., 2008).

Research by Balyi (1990) created a Long Term Athlete Development model for talent development, which incorporates a 'fundamentals' stage for younger athletes. This stage which links these generic movement skills of speed, agility, balance and coordination , with the introduction of fundamental sport skills such as throwing, catching, running, jumping and striking, gives young people a sound grounding in physical literacy (YST, 2004). Selection of Gifted and Talented students using a multi-skills approach rather than sports specific is intrinsically different, since parents will not have participated in this type of activity and there are no 'matches/games' for them to either watch or transport their children to. However, if, as the research proposes, parental support is an important factor in an athlete's success, it would seem logical that the structures necessary for such support need to be established from this initial fundamentals stage.

## Theoretical Perspective

"The observations we make, the way we classify them, and even what counts as relevant observation, may be governed by the theory we hold" (Trigg, 1985, p. 9). This research project will adopt an interpretivistic perspective to provide the context and a basis for the

logic and criteria used. This perspective emerged in contradistinction to positivism in an attempt to understand and explain human and social reality (Crotty, 1998). Interpretivism takes what positivism, empiricism and critical rationalism ignore – that is, the meanings and interpretations, the motives and intentions, which people use in their everyday lives, and which direct their behaviour.

The types of knowledge, values and identifications that researchers possess are acknowledged as key in shaping interpretations and understandings. For interpretivism, the social world is the world perceived and experienced by its members, from the inside and all researchers are partisans for one point of view or another (Denzin, 1989). This is particularly important in this research project, since the researcher is also a 'role player' in the talent programme (the Gloucestershire Talent Development Programme Coordinator). Hence, the task is to discover and describe this insider view, not to impose an outsider view on it. It is the everyday beliefs and practices, the mundane, tacit and taken for granted that have to be grasped and articulated in order to provide an understanding of these actions (Crotty, 1998).

The basic access to any social world is the accounts that people can give of their own actions and the actions of others. These accounts contain the concepts that participants use to structure their world, and the 'theories' that they use to account for what goes on. However, much of the activity of social life is routine and unreflexive (Klein and Myers, 1999). It is when enquiries are made about their behaviour by others (such as social scientists), or social life is disrupted and/or ceases to be predictable that social actors are forced consciously to search for or construct meanings and interpretations. Therefore, it may be necessary to resort to procedures (e.g., challenging questions and deliberately acting against the norm) that encourage this reflection in order to discover the meanings and theories. This aspect will influence both the choice of methodology and the specific data collection methods employed in this research.

It is also worth considering the place of symbolic interactionism within this research project, since this perspective explores the understandings abroad in culture as the meaningful matrix that guides our lives (Crotty, 1998). One would anticipate that any Gifted and Talented Programme established in a UK city, characterized by a multi-racial population, will need to consider the impact of culture on the organisation, delivery and ultimate success achieved. This perspective, which could be considered as a philosophical position, may prove useful in identifying research questions, influencing the methods chosen and framing the research process. The term 'symbolic interaction' refers, to the peculiar and distinctive character of interaction as it takes place between human beings (Blumer, 1969). The peculiarity consists in the fact that human beings interpret or 'define' each other's actions instead of merely reacting to each other's actions. Their 'response' is not made directly to the actions of one another but instead is based on the meaning which they attach to such actions. Thus, human interaction is mediated by the use of symbols, by interpretation, or by ascertaining the meaning of one another's actions. This mediation is equivalent to inserting a process of interpretation between stimulus and response in the case of human behaviour (Blumer, 1969, p. 180) and is more individualistic and less concerned with larger social processes. This in itself will be useful when examining individual athletes, parents and coaches/teachers within the Talent Programme, to determine their own perceptions of support and whether intervention alters behaviour.

## Methodology

The epistemology and theoretical perspective impact on the methodology which provides a strategy and plan of action for the research, and influences the choice and use of particular methods, with specific regard to the desired outcomes of the research (Patton, 2002). With a philosophical stance grounded in symbolic interactionism and a perspective based on interpretivism, a methodology which enables the researcher to take, "…to the best of his ability, the standpoint of those studied" (Denzin, 1978, p. 99) is necessary. A grounded theory methodology will be adopted for this research project. This is preferred to phenomenology, because phenomenology is concerned with discovering and understanding the meaning of individual and group lived-experiences of phenomena, whereas grounded theory is concerned with explaining a socially constructed process by presenting a middle-range substantive theory or model (Franchuk, 2004). Using grounded theory it will be possible to investigate

parents', athletes' and coaches' perspectives on the role of parents by asking them to articulate what is going on in the socially constructed process that is the parental role. It will produce a conceptual framework to address the original research concern.

Focus groups and semi-structured interviews will be used to collect data, in line with research by Crabtree et al. (1993) which suggests that combining individual and group interviews, enables depth and breadth within a study. This strategy has the advantage of first identifying a range of experiences and perspectives, and then drawing from that pool to add more depth where needed, an aspect which will be particularly beneficial for this project.

A disadvantage of this interaction is the lack of anonymity, but this will be overcome by reassuring participants that, as far as possible, discussions in the focus group will remain confidential and participants' data will remain anonymous. To complement the information gained from groups, semi-structured individual interviews will be held with parents, athletes and coaches and will adopt Tashakorri and Teddlie's (1998) perspective, which stresses the importance of examining the perceptions and experiences of participants. Advantages of using semi-structured interviews have been reported by Burns (2000), in particular, the ability to build up a better rapport with participants, elicitation of the participants' perspectives rather than the researcher imposing theirs, use of natural language by the participants and their equal status to the researcher. Through employing multiple qualitative techniques such as focus groups and interviews, triangulation of data will be achieved which will encourage trustworthiness and authenticity of the data collected (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

## Methods

*Participants*

A purposive sampling procedure (Patton, 1990) was adopted to ensure that each participant had been identified as talented in fundamental movement skills. All children (n = 24), 12 boys and 12 girls, who had been selected for the Gloucestershire School Sports Partnership Talent Development Programme were invited, via a letter given out by the coach, to take part in the study. Although only 4 children and 6 parents agreed to be interviewed along with the coach of the programme, these participants were a representative sample of the total cohort involved in the Talent Programme with regards to social and cultural considerations. The children were all in Year 6 and there were 2 boys and 2 girls. None of them played sport to a significant level (a pre-requisite to being put forward by their Primary Schools), but all of them had demonstrated good generic fundamental movement skills during the selection days for the Talent Programme. Interestingly the same number of parents for the boys and girls took part in the study, with both a mother and father being interviewed for one child and only a mother for the other. In addition the coach of the programme was interviewed, since "coaches are in an advantageous position to observe the viewpoints of both the parent and the child" (Gould et al., 2006, p.643). The coach was female, aged 45 and a Primary School Physical Education teacher, with a specialism in Multi-skills/Fundamentals. The researcher had no prior relationship with any of the children or parents and had only a casual professional relationship with the coach.

*Procedure*

Responses from four families and the coach were received and informed consent was obtained from all participants. The interviews took place at the participants' home and in all cases the child was interviewed before the parents (who were each interviewed separately). In-depth semi-structured face-to-face interviews conducted by the author were used for all participants. Interviews were audio-tape recorded and ranged in duration from 10 minutes to 25 minutes. The University of Gloucestershire Ethics Committee approved the procedures for this study.

*Interview Guide*

Grounded theory aims to 'get at key events, their contexts, and the processes that contribute to shaping those events' (Charmaz, 2002; p.679). Considering these aims, the interview questions needed to be broad enough to enable the discussion of a wide range of experiences, but also focused enough to capture participants' individual experiences. In line with previous research and with consideration of the research questions, the interview guides were carefully developed to enable the athletes, parents and coach to demonstrate knowledge of the talent development process and multi-skills, as well as their perceptions of the types and amount of support that parents/guardians provided. Probes were used throughout the interviews

to obtain more information concerning relevant issues that arose during the interview process. The interview guide was examined by a trained and experienced researcher, with a specialism in grounded theory, and it was believed to be sufficient to obtain deep and rich data.

*Data Analysis*

Grounded theory requires interview data to be collected and simultaneously analysed (Charmaz, 2002) and therefore data analysis overlapped each interview. The following process was carried out;

1. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and each participant received a copy of this along with a summary of the researcher's interpretations in order to confirm accuracy. This serves as a member check to ensure validity and reliability of the data analysis process (Sparkes, 1998).
2. The researcher performed open coding in the form of quotations from participants, in order to determine raw data themes (Charmaz, 2000). A number of categories emerged and data was placed into these categories to determine how they related to one another.
3. Constant comparative analysis was used to ensure that similarities and differences between concepts were opaque and so that diversity, richness, and complexity of the data could be explored (Henwood and Pigeon, 1992).
4. Theoretical saturation occurred when no new properties, components, or relationships emerged (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) and therefore coding subsequently ceased and grounded theories developed.

*Trustworthiness*

To establish reliability and validity and to confirm accuracy of research results, a number of methods were employed (Sparkes, 1998). Primarily interview transcripts were sent to all participants to confirm accuracy. Subsequently a research group meeting was organised with experienced qualitative researchers to discuss the results (Maxwell, 1996). The researchers were all lecturers at Gloucestershire University, one with a specialism in grounded theory and two with Masters' degrees which utilised a qualitative methodology. Any observations, decisions, concerns and hunches were recorded (Lincoln and Guba, 2000). Completed analysis and subsequent discussion was presented to all participants to confirm the accuracy of the researcher's conclusions (Sparkes, 1998).

## Results

The purpose of this pilot study was to explore the knowledge, experience and perceptions of the parents of selected Year 5 and 6 athletes and to examine the perceptions of the role of the parents from the perspectives of the coach and athletes within the Gloucester Sports Talent Programme, with an ultimate aim to develop a conceptual framework to explain the perceptions of the role of parents in Gifted and Talented Sports Programmes.

These aims were embedded within three research questions and therefore each of these categories is presented separately with themes emerging within each category. Participant responses have been coded as follows:

- Capital letter represents the family interviewed – but C is the coach.
- Number after capital letter denotes child or parent such that: 1 = child, 2 = female parent, 3 = male parent.

Research Question 1: To explore the knowledge and experience of the parents of selected Year 5 and 6 athletes within the Gloucestershire Sports Talent Development Programme.

Six categories were evident from analysing the data, with an overarching key theme consistently evident throughout. The categories were as follows:

*1. Knowledge of the Programme*

It became evident that all parents had at best a basic understanding of the Talent Development Programme and at worst no understanding at all. BA2 stated that '*I knew that he had been picked for gifted and talented but didn't know really what that meant. Gifted in what? Talented in what?*' Other comments reiterate this basic understanding such as;

*'All that I know is just what he's, from what he's done this year, I didn't even know it existed before, I don't know if it has but erm I don't know an awful lot about it its just basically he went for the two days and they just picked him out, out of*

*those two days and then they're going to monitor him now through his school PE, that's what I understand from it'* (B2).

Another parent believed that the programme was '*a course to just to see what they were capable of doing and...'* (H3). A larger number of comments suggested that most parents had no idea what the Programmes Aims were, with BA1 stating that '*he didn't know what he was going there for'* and later commenting that *'I asked one of the ladies that was stood next to me and she said I don't know, I haven't got a clue it's all new so no one knew anything.'* Other parents knew '*nothing at all really'* (BA3) or *'nothing to be honest'* (B3) and L2 suggested that '*...it would have been greater if we'd have known what it was and her games teacher also didn't really have a clear idea of what it was so it was a little ambiguous.'*

*2. <u>Knowledge of Multi-skills</u>*

In contrast to parents' knowledge of the Gloucestershire Talent Programme, some parents' understanding of multi-skills was particularly good with L2 proposing that:

*'multi-skills are lots of different types of activities using different motor skills trying to home in on what a child is particularly strong at and also as importantly weak so then to try and focus that child in certain areas that can either strengthen or further develop.'*

Other parents were moderately informed with multi-skills:

*'(It's)...wonderful I don't think that they should be pushed down one track straight away really because although she likes netball, she's good at lots of things but until you try them you don't know do you? ... And you don't always get that opportunity at school really to try the different you know types of sports its nice to do different things'* (H2).

In contrast some had very little knowledge

*'you could have a skill, you know multi-skill like you say you could have loads of skills couldn't you, you could have one skill that could help you in other things and…'* (BA2).

*3. <u>Organisation and Communication</u>*

Parental responses to questions related to the organisation and communication of the Programme were consistent and indicated that very little information was given and that *'organisation was poor and communication was poor'* (L2). There was a common theme to responses which revolved around *'several different letters given changing dates from different people'* (L2) and *...a bit of a mess up I think with the dates and times, ...a double booking'* (H2).

One parent (H3) even stated that '*obviously some of the organisational skills have been a bit poor'*. In addition, it was suggested that more detailed information and feedback would have been particularly helpful:

*'...although it was brief in the letter, but it still would have been nice to have a bit more information so we just thought oh gifted and talented oh that's nice off they went. When we picked them up again there wasn't really any, any sort of feedback as to how she got on'* (H2)

Not one of the parents interviewed felt that communication had been clear or that the organisation had been efficient.

*4. <u>Expectations</u>*

A lack of knowledge of the aims of the Talent Programme appeared to affect responses in terms of expectations, with one parent (BA2) stating that *'I don't know.*

*...He's only had two days that's all he's had, one at Plock Court and one at the Domes, he's only had two full days.'* Interestingly one parent thought *'it was more for the people who were doing the course to assess children as such as a group as a whole'*, whilst another hoped *'(they might) ...spot something in him, put him into or give him a helping hand really'* (B2). Generally expectations were low and reflected a lack of knowledge of the Programme.

5. *<u>Quality of the Multi-skills Sessions</u>*

Responses to this aspect were the most promising and ranged from quite good to very good, with one parent stating that *'I haven't been there to see what they've been doing so I wouldn't know the quality really ...but (my son) loved it'* (BA2). Generally responses suggested that the children had indicated to their parents that the actual sessions were good *'he enjoyed*

*it ...he enjoyed it and thought it was great'* (B3) and *'...thoroughly enjoyed it yeah'* (H2). One parent even suggested that '*The quality, it was very very good, it just wasn't enough'* (B2). These comments indicated that parents were pleased with the content and delivery of the multi-skills sessions and reflect on the coach of the Programme.

6. *Overall Perspective of the Programme*

Parents appeared to be pleased that their child had been identified as talented for the Programme *'I'm just happy that (son) has been picked and ...that he's got some kind of gift and talent'* (BA2), but very unsure as to what (if anything) would happen next *'not quite sure how much was entailed as to how much further it would go'* (H3). This again suggested a lack of communication with parents by the Programme Organiser.

With regards to overall knowledge of the programme, a clear theme emerged regularly throughout the interviews. All participants expressed a lack of knowledge of the programme, in particular its' aims and objectives and suggested that poor communication and organisation had been the reason for this '*I just knew he'd been picked for gifted and talented but didn't know really what that meant. Gifted in what? Talented in what?*' (BA2). This appears to have subsequently led to an overall poor perception of the programme and few or no expectations from parents '*...pleased to think she's been chosen, not quite sure how much was entailed as to how much further it would go...*' (H3). If parental support is paramount to a child's sporting success as many researchers suggest (Howard and Madrigal, 1990; Vogler and Schwaitz, 1993; Rowley 1992), then the basis of any conceptual framework must be grounded in parental knowledge of both the sports programme being delivered/experienced and the appropriate support necessary for potential to be achieved.

Research Question 2: To examine the perceptions of the role of the parents in Gloucestershire Sports Talent Programme from the perspectives of the parents, coach and children.

Responses to the role of parents generated fifteen categories, some of which were mentioned by all participants and some by only a few. All three groups of participants, ie. parents, children and the coach agreed on the following three key areas of support:

*1. Transport*

Parents commented that they are required 'to get them (child) there and get them back' (BA2) or as 'a taxi service of course' (H2 and L2). Although the coach believes this too, the comment of 'more than just a taxi drive' (C) suggests that this is only a small part of the role. Children confirm the need for transportation with B1 and L1stating that their parents 'took me there'. This reflects previous research by Rowley (1992) who stated that practical resources and financial support were pivotal to an athlete's success and for this programme transport was the only financial demand on parents. This also links to roles identified by Fredericks and Eccles (2004); that of a provider, who enables the child to experience the programme.

2. *General Support*

This term was used by all groups and indicates that although the participants when elicited by the researcher can name a number of specific requirements of parents, they feel that there is an 'umbrella' that covers all aspects together. Comments from parents such as '...the support...' (BA3), '...helping them ...supporting them' (B2) and '...they need to be supported' (H2) demonstrate this. A similar statement from a child 'supportive...' (L1) and the coach '...supporting' confirm this general view. This correlates with numerous researchers (Bloom, 1985; Gould, Dieffenbach and Moffet, 2002), who suggest that parents are essential to the development of youth participants and the development of sport talent, mainly via support.

*3. Encouraging, motivating, build confidence*

This category was overwhelming for all participant groups, with five out of the seven parents referring to this support '.just to encourage' (BA3), '.encouragement..'(H2) and 'enthusiastic...' (H2). All children expressed the need for parents to be encouraging with B1 stating that their parents '...encouraged me' and H1 stating that parents '...build up your confidence'. The coach suggested that parents needed to be '...motivating them and encouraging them' to be able to manage the rest of their lives.

In addition to these categories mentioned by all three groups of participants a number of other themes emerged. Three different parents believed that they needed to support their child by being *Physically Active* with them, one stating that

*'...well I'm getting on in my years now so I mean I go out running with him, you know and I do like his football, I help him out with his football as much as I can because I play myself, but obviously that other sort of stuff I know nothing about but you know if I could I'd help him if we were advised by people what training he needs then I'd go and help him myself on an evening'* (B3).

Another parent said that '*we have her doing the old bleep test in the garden... my husbands got the tape that bleeps, so the pair of them run up and down the garden'* (H2). Whilst the second parent of this family also added that '*if she needed to do physical exercise or whatever or I was always on hand to help her with it or any sort of techniques or anything'* (H3). This supports research by Fredricks and Eccles (2004), who discovered that parents influence children's motivation and behaviour through the beliefs and values they support and behaviours they exhibit, as well as that done by Gould et al (2008), who state that parents as role models affect the athletes' performance and development. Two parents believed that *Giving Advice* was important in the form of '*...helping them in the right direction'* (BA3), because *'...you know they need advice the children don't they?'* (H2). What kind of advice or how this could be offered wasn't elaborated upon. A number of other suggested roles from parents were offered, such as to *'...encourage them to eat healthy'* (BA2), *'finance'* (B3), *'...organising her'* and *'...listening to her'* (H2). Interestingly both parents and the child from the same family believed it was the parents' role not to be 'pushy', with comments such as *'we've never pushed her to do anything'* (H2), seconded by *'...sometimes you can pressure a child too much... I think some parents are very pushy'* (H3) and further backed up by the child *'...saying that don't worry if you don't know something'* (H1).

One child suggested that *'it helps you a lot if your parents are there or if they're helping you along with it*' (H1) and the coach thought a parent should '*...know exactly what's going to, what's going to go on in that kids you know thoughts and processes'* and should be *'part of the team'* (C).

These findings support research by Morgan and Giacobbr Jr (2006) who developed two grounded theories, one of which was based on social support processes of highly successful collegiate athletes. In their study, social support was multi-dimensional and dynamic and was critical to help the athletes cope with adverse situations on the path to becoming highly successful.

Research Question 3: To develop a conceptual framework to explain the perceptions of the role of parents in Gifted and Talented Sports Programmes.

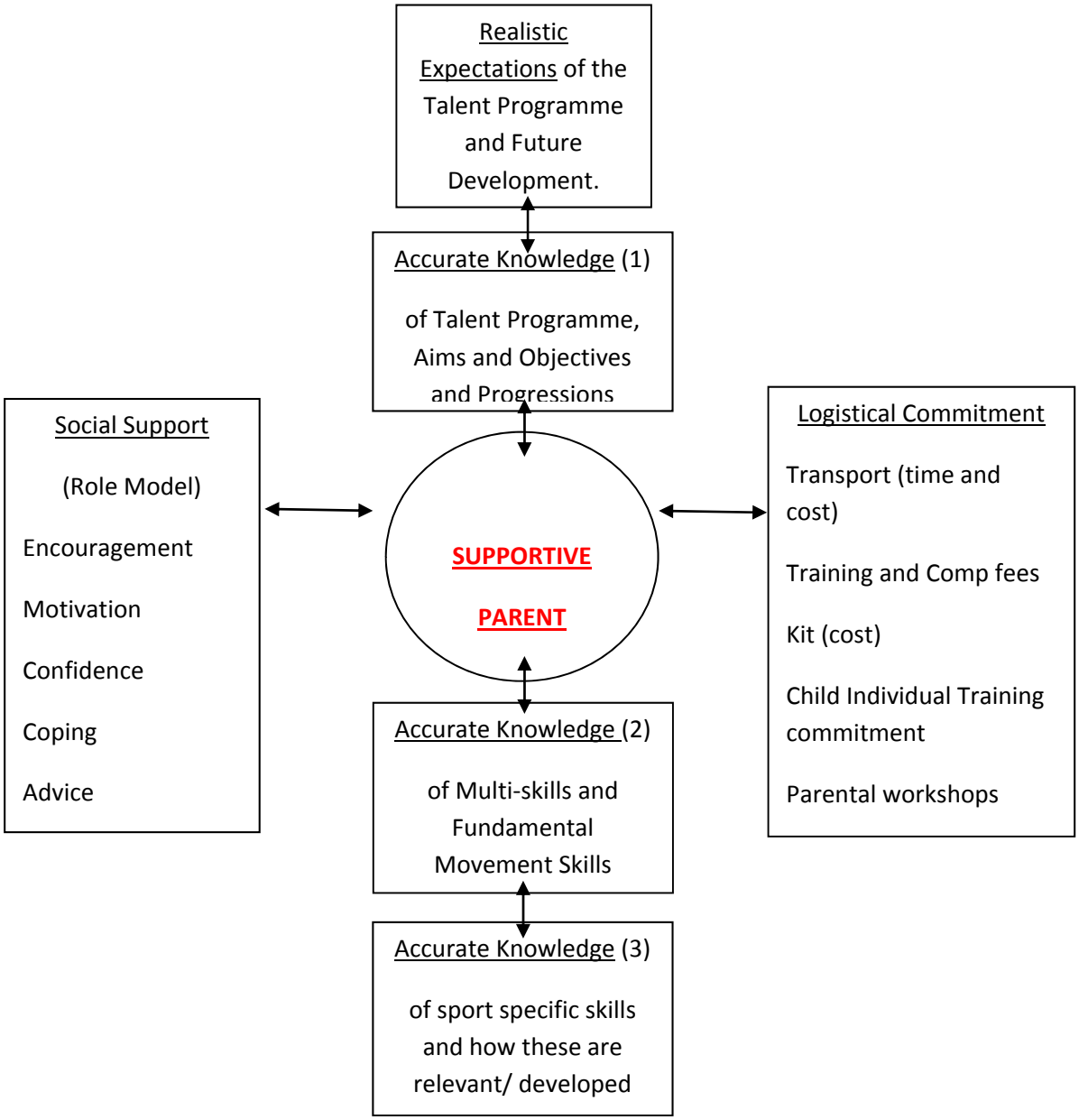
Of particular relevance to this research question is the knowledge participants had of how the programme would develop for the athlete and future commitments from the families and coach. An over riding theme of extremely limited knowledge from all participants emerged with B3 stating that *'...I don't have a clue what he's doing next no'*, H2 adding *'I don't really know...'*, and H3 and L2 both saying they had *'no idea'.*All children were unsure of the future of the programme and even the coach stated that '*No, I don't know, I don't know any of that'* and had no idea *'...where it's leading you know'* (C). It is important to note that all parents and the coach believed a key problem with the programme was a lack of information for the parents both verbal and written and that had there been good communication throughout, then few problems would have occurred and support would have been easier. BA1 states that *'...the people spoke to the children but not the parents'* and H2 believed that parents should be shown *'...what the children will be doing'* and also should be given *'...an informationpack'*

The coach confirmed this issue, stating that there should be *'...more communication with parents'* (C).

Although there have been a number of grounded theories depicting the importance of social support in the development of highly successful athletes such as that developed by Morgan and Giacobbi (2006), these have been based on elite level performers and revolve around the athlete as the focal point. This study suggests that there is a need for the development of a conceptual framework specifically to support parents/guardians of talented athletes, which can be introduced at the early stages of talent development.

The framework below requires the delivery of regular specific workshops to 'up skill' parents to enable them to provide the necessary support for their talented child. To suggest that parents are the key determinant of a child's athletic success (Kay, 2000), but then to provide insufficient 'coaching' for the parents will not enable the support process to be truly effective.

Figure 1 - Conceptual Framework for Parental Support of Identified Talented Children at the Fundamentals Stage



**Limitations**

A number of limitations have been identified with this pilot study:

1. The relatively small sample of participants who were interviewed, with only one coach.
2. The focus on only one talent programme which was in its' early stage of development.
3. The poor communication process that existed within this programme.
4. The lack of clear progression for the talented athletes

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