

Final Thesis

by MICHAEL JOHN MORAN

Submission date: 12-Sep-2025 11:03PM (UTC+0100)

Submission ID: 2749273505

File name: 25628_MICHAEL_JOHN_MORAN_Final_Thesis_918641_837568969.docx (4.04M)

Word count: 28738

Character count: 160770

Ainm / Name: MJ Moran

Bliain / Year group: 2024-2025

Uimhir mhic léinn / Student number: 18374981

Ábhar / Subject: EDF689-Dissertation Project

Léachtóir / Teagascóir:

Lecturer / Tutor: Marie McLoughlin and Suzanne O'Keefe

Spríoclá / Due date: 12th September 2025

Teideal an tionscail / Assignment title: "What do you think?" Enhancing Teaching Practice through Student Reflection in a Meaningful Physical Education Framework

Líon na bhfocal / Word Count: 21,093

Líon leathanach / Number of pages: 137

Aon ábhar eile sa tionscadal / Any other material in the assignment:

Dearbhaím gur mise amháin / mise mar bhall grúpa (cuir ciorcal timpeall na rogha a bhaineann leis an tionscadal thuas) a rinne an saothar seo. Aithním go soiléir aon chabhair a fuair mé ó aon duine eile, baill fhoirne nó gaol claimne san áireamh. Mo chuid scríbhneoireachta féin atá sa tionscadal seo ach amháin nuair a úsáidtear ábhar ar bith as foinsí eile. Tugtar aitheantas do na foinsí seo sna fo-nótaí nó sna tagairtí. Dearbhaím go bhfuil treoirlínte an choláiste do thionscail léite agam agus go dtuigim iad. Tá cóip den tionscadal coimithe agam dom féin.

I confirm that I alone / I as part of a group (please circle whichever applies in the case of the above assignment) produced this project. I clearly acknowledge any help I received from any other person, staff members or relatives included. This project is my own composition except for material of any kind taken from other sources. These sources are acknowledged in the footnotes or references.

I confirm that I have read and understand the Department assignment guidelines. I have also retained a copy of the assignment for myself.

Síniú / Signature: MJ Moran

Dáta / Date 12th September 2025

MJ Moran - 18374981



OLLSCOIL NA HÉIREANN MÁ NUAD
THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND
MAYNOOTH

**Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education
M. Ed. (Research in Practice)
(2024 – 2025)**

**Title: “What do you think?” Enhancing Teaching Practice through Student Reflection
in a Meaningful Physical Education Framework**

Name: MJ Moran

*A Research Dissertation submitted to the Froebel Department of Primary and Early
Childhood Education, Maynooth University, in fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Education (Research in Practice)*

Date: 12th September 2025

Supervised by: Grace Cardiff and Marie McLoughlin

Abstract

This action research study explored how student reflection, embedded within a Meaningful Physical Education (MPE) approach, enhanced my teaching and children's learning in senior primary physical education (PE). Guided by my values of fairness and inclusion, I critically examined my practice and identified tensions between my intentions and actions. Over two cycles, I implemented structured, scaffolded reflective activities to improve my students' experiences of PE.

Findings show that student reflection acted as a means of capturing the students' voices in a way that enabled me to adapt lessons responsively. It highlighted the value of student reflection as a formative assessment strategy for both students and teachers and drew attention to the planned and unplanned benefits of reflection. However, the findings also show that there is a need to scaffold and support the children along their reflective journey. Finally, the study identified a 'Goldilocks zone' for reflection, balancing frequency to maximise engagement without diminishing its impact.

Implications of this research include the need for professional development, practical resources and policy guidance to integrate reflective practice effectively in PE. This is particularly relevant given the emphasis on meaningful experiences as part of the Wellbeing curriculum. This research reinforces the role of the teacher as a facilitator and co-learner, demonstrating that MPE and reflection can help teachers create lessons that match their learners' needs, thereby providing a more positive PE experience for their students.

Acknowledgements

There are many people to whom I want to offer a sincere thank you because, without their contributions, this research would have never seen the light of day. I want to extend my thanks to my supervisors, Grace Cardiff and Marie McLoughlin, for all your help, guidance and feedback. Your support and advice were very much appreciated. I would also like to thank the entire Froebel Department who made the past year so beneficial for me as a teacher.

I am very grateful to the Board of Management and the Principal of my school for allowing me to carry out my research. Thank you also to my colleagues who were a constant source of support and encouragement. I appreciated every time you checked in to see how the research was going. A special thank you to my wonderful sixth class, who worked with me on the research. Your honesty, opinions and willingness to have fun made for an excellent year and a great research project.

To Charlie O'Donnell, without whom I would never have undertaken this journey. Thanks for the laughs, for lending an ear to my rants and, of course, being a shoulder to cry on. I do not think I would have made it this far without you!

To my siblings, Tom, Ella, Anna, and my dog Fred, thank you for all your love and all the laughs.

Finally, to Mam and Dad, thank you for all your love and support at every stage of my journey through education. You are an inspiration to me both professionally and personally and I cannot thank you enough for all that you do. I would not be the person I am today without your guidance and I am forever grateful.

Table of contents

<i>Abstract</i>	<i>III</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>IV</i>
<i>Table of contents</i>	<i>V</i>
<i>Declaration of authenticity</i>	<i>VIII</i>
<i>Turnitin report</i>	<i>IX</i>
<i>List of tables and figures</i>	<i>X</i>
<i>List of abbreviations and acronyms</i>	<i>XI</i>
<i>Epigraph</i>	<i>XII</i>
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Personal rationale	1
1.3 Professional significance	3
1.4 Purpose, aims and objectives of the research	4
1.5 Research context	5
1.6 EAR	5
1.7 Thesis structure	6
1.8 Conclusion	7
Chapter 2: Literature review	8
2.1 Introduction	8
2.2 PE internationally	8
2.3 PE in Ireland	11
2.4 Meaningful experiences in PE	14
2.4.1 MPE	15
2.4.2 Theoretical basis for MPE	16
2.4.3 Implementing an MPE approach	19
2.5 Theoretical foundations of reflection in education	21
2.5.1 Student reflection in education	22
2.5.2 Student reflection in PE	24
2.6 Conclusion	27
Chapter 3: Methodology	28
3.1 Introduction	28
3.2 Research paradigm: Self-Study Educational Action Research	28
3.2.1 Action research cycles	30
3.3 Research design	31
3.3.1 Setting and participants	31
3.3.2 Overview of implementation	32

3.3.3 Intervention strategies	35
3.4 Ethics	38
3.4.1 Informed consent/assent	39
3.4.2 Power dynamics	39
3.4.3 Data storage	40
3.5 Data collection methods	41
3.5.1 Student surveys	41
3.5.2 Teacher reflective journal	41
3.5.3 Children’s reflective PE journal	42
3.5.4 Teacher observation	43
3.6 Data analysis	43
3.7 Validity and trustworthiness	46
3.7.1 Triangulation of data	47
3.8 Conclusion	48
<i>Chapter 4: Findings and discussion</i>	49
4.1 Introduction	49
4.2 Reflection as a catalyst for student voice and pedagogical change in PE	49
4.3 Student reflection as an assessment tool	55
4.4 The planned and unplanned benefits of reflection	59
4.5 The need for scaffolding in developing reflective competency in PE	64
4.6 Finding the ‘Goldilocks zone’ for reflection	67
4.7 Conclusion	70
<i>Chapter 5: Conclusion</i>	71
5.1 Introduction	71
5.2 Implications for my practice	71
5.3 Implications for curriculum and policy development	72
5.4 Limitations	73
5.5 Recommendations	75
5.6 Recommendations for further research	77
5.7 Dissemination of research	78
5.8 Conclusion	78
<i>Reference List</i>	80
<i>Appendices</i>	98
Appendices A: Ethics documents regarding consent and assent	98
Appendix A1: Letter of consent for Principal/Board of Management	98
Appendix A2: School Principal/Board of Management consent form	99
Appendix A3: Child friendly information form	100
Appendix A4: Parents/Guardians information letter	101
Appendix A5: Information sheet for parents and guardians	102
Appendix A6: Parent/Guardian consent form	103
Appendix A7: Children’s assent form	104
Appendices B	105
Appendix B1: Sample gymnastics lesson plan	105
Appendix B2: PSSI lesson plan station cards	106

Appendix B3: MPE lesson plan PowerPoint	108
Appendices C	114
Appendix C1: Pre-intervention survey (27 th January 2025)	114
Appendix C2: Post-cycle one survey (12 th March 2025)	116
Appendix C3: Post-intervention survey (7 th May 2025)	119
Appendices D: Coded data	122
Appendix D1: Sample of coded data in response to the question “What did you enjoy the most about today’s lesson and why?”	122

Declaration of Authenticity

“Plagiarism involves an attempt to use an element of another person’s work, without appropriate acknowledgement in order to gain academic credit. It may include the unacknowledged verbatim reproduction of material, unsanctioned collusion, but is not limited to these matters; it may also include the unacknowledged adoption of an argumentative structure, or the unacknowledged use of a source or of research materials, including computer code or elements of mathematical formulae in an inappropriate manner.”

Maynooth University Plagiarism Policy

I hereby declare that this project, which I now submit in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education (Research in Practice) is entirely my own work; that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed: ***MJ MORAN***

Date: ***12th September 2025***

Turnitin report



Digital Receipt

This receipt acknowledges that Turnitin received your paper. Below you will find the receipt information regarding your submission.

Submission Author	MICHAEL JOHN MORAN
Turnitin Paper ID (Ref. ID)	2748036859
Submission Title	Final Thesis
Assignment Title	Submit Your Writing Here to Check for Originality/Similarity
Submission Date	12/09/25, 10:45

Print

	Submission Title	Turnitin Paper ID	Submitted	Similarity	Grade	
View Digital Receipt	Final Thesis	2748036859	12/09/25, 10:45	21%	--	Submit Paper --

List of tables and figures

Figures

Figure 3.1: McNiff and Whitehead's (2013) action research cycle

Figure 3.2: Meaningful PE approach implementation

Figure 3.3: Timeline of actions for the research

Figure 3.4: Outline of Braun and Clarke's (2021) thematic framework

Figure 4.1: Exit ticket responses: What makes PE meaningful to you?

Figure 4.2: Example of student warm-up plan

Figure 4.3: Exit ticket responses: Identify one thing that you improved upon in today's lesson?

Figure 4.4: Example of a goal set by Shannon

Figure 4.5: Example of a goal set by Stephanie

Tables

Table 3.1: List of democratic and reflective practices employed during research

List of abbreviations and acronyms

BERA	British Educational Research Association
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CSPPA	Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
EAR	Self-Study Educational Action Research
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
MPE	Meaningful Physical Education
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
PE	Physical Education
PSC	Primary School Curriculum
PDST	Professional Development Service for Teachers
QPE	Quality Physical Education
SPHE	Social, Personal and Health Education
TRJ	Teacher Reflective Journal
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WHO	World Health Organization

MJ Moran - 18374981

“Winning is being better today than you were yesterday, every day... You don’t learn to climb mountains in life by going around them or asking somebody for a ladder, you learn to climb mountains by climbing mountains, by seeking out the really toughest challenges because that makes you perform better.”

Frank Dick

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis presents an account of my learning journey as I address my research question, “How can I use student reflection as part of a Meaningful PE approach to enhance my teaching?” This self-study educational action research (EAR) study explores how purposeful, scaffolded student reflection, embedded within a Meaningful Physical Education (MPE) approach, can foster inclusion and fairness in primary physical education (PE) and, in turn, inform and strengthen my practice as a reflective, values-driven teacher. Through a dual focus on student reflection and MPE, this research aims to bridge the gap between theory and classroom application, ensuring that pedagogical strategies are both evidence-informed and contextually relevant.

This chapter sets out the rationale for my research and situates the study within both personal and professional contexts. It begins by outlining the values that underpin my teaching and considers how these values led to the development of my research question. The purpose, aims, and context of the study are then explained, followed by a discussion of the methodological approach that guided the inquiry, namely EAR. Finally, the chapter provides an overview of the research process and concludes by outlining the structure of the thesis.

1.2 Personal rationale

As a graduate of the Bachelor of Education degree from the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, I value a child-centred education (Bruce, 2020), a principle strongly emphasised during my degree. The concept of the teacher as a lifelong learner, which was also introduced to me during my undergraduate studies, has been a principle I

have incorporated into my professional development and significantly influenced my decision to pursue this programme. A strong teacher identity is expressed through agency and confidence in professional abilities, including knowing how to meet students' needs and seeking out ongoing development of this knowledge (Lasky, 2005). As such, I felt that I owed it to both myself and my students to seek out ways to further improve my practice. The emphasis placed on reflection as part of the course appealed greatly to me because, as Bruce (2020: 52) notes, "practice needs reflection," and it is through this process of reflection that teachers improve. At the outset of this research, I was motivated by values of fairness and inclusion. While I thought these values were always evident in my teaching, when I critically reflected upon my practice, I realised that I was something of a living contradiction (Whitehead, 2018), as the values I claimed to hold were not always reflected in my teaching.

My desire to explore PE as a curricular area during this research was born from a personal connection to the subject area. As a child, I adored PE in primary school and I have fond memories of being exposed to a wide range of sports and skills. However, my memory of secondary school PE is that of chaotic, unstructured football games. It was a form of PE that was heavily game-focused and there was no emphasis placed on teaching skills or providing opportunities for learners to improve. As I began to consider my own teaching at the outset of this journey, I realised that in some ways my practice mirrored my secondary school experience. I realised that my teaching was suited to the sporting enthusiasts and did not cater for the wide variety of needs within my class. There may have been more focus on skill development and structure in the lessons I taught than in those I experienced as a secondary school student. However, I realised I was emphasising a sports-driven and performance-obsessed approach that did not reflect the values I claimed to hold. Kozera articulates what I found difficult to express as a "low-organised games" (2017: 520)

MJ Moran - 18374981

approach, which presented a very narrow view of what PE was to my students. I was quickly becoming apathetic towards PE, a subject I should have relished teaching.

As a result, when I began to think about how I could improve my teaching, I wanted to focus on an approach that would better cater for all of the children in my class and not just the ones who were considered to be sporty. Consequently, I began to investigate and explore approaches to PE that went beyond the facilitation of games. This search led me to MPE and to using student reflection as part of an MPE approach to enhance my teaching.

1.3 Professional significance

The research coincided with a period of curriculum reform in Ireland. As part of the new Primary Curriculum Framework (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), 2023), PE and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) have been combined into a new curricular area called Wellbeing. While draft Wellbeing curriculum specifications have been published (NCCA, 2024), the official curriculum is scheduled for release imminently.

The Wellbeing specifications emphasise that children should be provided with meaningful experiences in PE, with reflection being identified as a tool that can assist teachers as they look to provide these meaningful experiences for their students (NCCA, 2024). This creates a timely opportunity to explore how teachers can use student reflection to facilitate these experiences for their students.

While recent scholarship on meaningful experiences in PE has led to the creation of an MPE approach (Fletcher et al., 2021), this is still a relatively new approach. In addition, limited guidance and research exist on the use of reflection with primary school children in

MJ Moran - 18374981

PE (Bjørke and Quennerstedt, 2024). Thus, this EAR project aims not only to strengthen my own pedagogical skills, enabling me to better align practice with my values, but also to contribute to the growing body of research on both MPE and student reflection. This dual focus on personal and professional growth, as well as scholarly contribution, underscores the relevance of this research to both local classroom contexts and the broader educational community.

1.4 Purpose, aims and objectives of the research

The purpose of the research was to investigate the integration of student reflection within an MPE approach in a senior Irish primary school class. The study aimed to determine how embedding student reflection within an MPE approach enhances children's learning and experiences in PE and, in turn, informs and improves my teaching in line with my professional values. Research objectives included:

- Design and implement age-appropriate reflective tasks aligned with MPE principles.
- Explore how these reflections shape children's experiences and learning.
- Analyse how pupil reflections inform day-to-day pedagogical decisions (assessment for/as learning) and my professional values.
- Identify the benefits and challenges of embedding student reflection in primary PE.
- Contribute practitioner-led insights to the broader discourse on MPE implementation in an Irish primary context.

1.5 Research context

This research was conducted in a sixth class in a medium-sized, vertical primary school with a current enrolment of approximately 400 children. The research took place with 23 students aged between 11 and 13 years old. Although all children participated in PE lessons as normal, data was only gathered from those who had given parental consent and child assent.

The research was conducted over a ten-week period, which was broken into two cycles. A variety of data sources were used, including student surveys, pupil reflections, a teacher reflective journal and notes from unstructured observations. An MPE approach guided lessons and an explicit focus was placed on student reflection. Lesson objectives were aligned with the PE curriculum (NCCA, 1999a). In cycle one, the lessons focused on the gymnastics strand, while cycle two centred on the athletics strand.

1.6 EAR

This research adopted a self-study EAR approach. EAR incorporates both the principles of self-study action research and Whitehead's Living Theory research (Glenn et al., 2023). As EAR is deeply values-based (Glenn et al., 2023), I had to consider the values I lived by as a teacher from the outset of the research. As a Froebel graduate, inclusion and fairness were important to me. McDonagh et al. (2019) note that teachers undertaking any form of action research should begin by asking themselves how they can enhance their practice and as such, I identified PE as an area of my practice that I wanted to improve. When conducting my research, I followed iterative cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting, which enabled ongoing refinement based on student feedback and my own observations and reflections (McNiff and Whitehead, 2013).

1.7 Thesis structure

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter One explains the personal and professional significance of the research, introduces my research question, explains the context of the study, summarises the EAR approach taken as part of this research and outlines the thesis structure.

Chapter Two presents the literature review, which critically examines the significant literature related to PE, MPE and student reflection. The current state of PE, both internationally and nationally, is examined, an overview of meaningful experiences and the MPE approach is provided, and the chapter concludes by focusing on the theoretical basis for student reflection and the current state of student reflection in PE.

Chapter Three is the methodology section. In this chapter, an overview of the research approach and procedure is outlined. The EAR approach is explained and the approach taken during the intervention is described. Data collection tools are also outlined. In addition, ethical considerations and the reliability, credibility and validity of the research are discussed, along with the data analysis process employed.

Chapter Four outlines the findings and discussion. The findings are presented in five themes, supported by data collected during the intervention and relevant literature.

Chapter Five is the conclusion section. The chapter summarises the personal and professional learning gleaned from the research, outlines the study's limitations, makes five recommendations based on the research findings and suggests possible avenues for further research. It concludes by discussing how the research will be disseminated.

1.8 Conclusion

In this introductory chapter, I have outlined my motivation for undertaking this research, emphasising both the personal and professional contexts that shaped my inquiry. By reflecting on my journey as a teacher and identifying areas where my values of fairness and inclusion were not consistently reflected in my practice, I was prompted to explore how student reflection, embedded within an MPE framework, could enhance my teaching.

The chapter also highlights the significance of the study within the broader context of educational reform, particularly the transition to a Wellbeing curriculum in Ireland. This reform provides a timely opportunity to explore teaching strategies that incorporate reflection and meaningful experiences in PE. By integrating reflection into the fabric of PE lessons, this study aims to bridge the gap between policy aspirations for inclusive, student-centred learning and the practical realities of the PE classroom. In doing so, it seeks to offer insights and strategies that teachers can apply to enhance both the learning process and classroom culture through reflective practice. The next chapter turns to the literature, examining research on PE, the MPE approach and student reflection, all while situating this study within existing scholarly and policy debates.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I review the pertinent literature that informs and frames this study. I begin by examining the position of PE internationally, exploring its recognised value, its place within global policy and the challenges of participation and provision. The discussion then narrows to the Irish primary context, exploring the aims, structure and delivery of PE, while also considering the opportunities and constraints presented by current practice and the forthcoming Wellbeing curriculum (NCCA, 2024). The review then turns to the concept of meaningful experiences in PE. Drawing on longstanding theoretical contributions and more recent research, I consider how the MPE approach has emerged as a framework for supporting student engagement, enjoyment and personal relevance in PE. I explore how the underpinning democratic and reflective pedagogical principles of MPE can foster meaningful learning. I examine the theoretical foundations of reflection and student reflection in education more broadly before narrowing to its application within PE. This includes a consideration of how reflection can be deliberately taught and scaffolded for primary-aged children and how it can contribute to students' meaning-making in movement contexts. The chapter concludes by identifying a gap in the literature: while reflection is widely acknowledged as valuable, there is limited research exploring how primary teachers can practically embed structured opportunities for student reflection within PE lessons. Addressing this gap provides the basis for the present study.

2.2 PE internationally

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2015a: 2) International Charter of Physical Education outlines that physical education, physical activity

and sport are “a fundamental right for all,” demonstrating PE’s role as an essential component of education, while also promoting physical fitness, mental health and social development (UNESCO, 2015a; Healthy Ireland, 2016). There is a recognition that quality PE supports lifelong physical activity and is essential for helping children develop into active adults (Pangrazi et al., 2003). This role is particularly pertinent in a world where 31% of adults and 80% of children do not meet the recommended levels of physical activity (World Health Organization (WHO), 2020). These statistics highlight the need for PE to be provided in a way that moves beyond participation and instead cultivates a lasting motivation for individuals to pursue a physically active lifestyle into adulthood and beyond.

While PE is recognised in global policy as an essential component of school curricula, participation rates and lesson frequency vary significantly, highlighting a disconnect between global policy ambitions and actual provision. PE’s position within policy structure (education, health or sport) varies significantly from country to country and the fact that there is often an interchangeability of terms used to describe PE (PE, physical activity and sports) means that the subject is often marginalised and viewed as less critical than other academic subjects (UNESCO and Loughborough University, 2024). However, while there is generally a legal requirement for PE for all children during compulsory schooling, the actual provision of PE can differ from place to place (Hardman et al., 2014). Indeed, a UNESCO and Loughborough University (2024) survey highlights that only 52.5% of countries implement the recommended minimum number of weekly PE minutes (120 minutes). Research also shows that PE lessons are often cancelled more frequently than other subjects, suggesting that PE is considered less important within the curriculum hierarchy (Hardman et al., 2014). Issues such as facility shortages or staffing issues have been shown to play a role in inconsistent PE provision in schools (Hardman et al., 2014). Furthermore, PE provision tends

MJ Moran - 18374981

to be overly focused on competitive sports activities, such as games and track and field, while less competitive areas like gymnastics and dance are often neglected (Hardman, 2008; Hardman et al., 2014).

Additionally, inclusion presents a significant barrier to PE provision globally. According to a recent study, only 58.3% of governments require that children with disabilities participate in PE lessons alongside peers without disabilities (UNESCO and Loughborough University, 2024). Although most teachers are committed to including all children in PE lessons, regardless of their ability, research highlights that a lack of resources and insufficient knowledge about planning for a variety of needs present a significant barrier to this goal. However, with targeted strategies, adequate resources and teacher support, students with disabilities can have positive and worthwhile experiences in PE (Holland and Haegele, 2021). These global patterns reveal persistent issues of access, inclusion and curriculum imbalance, highlighting the need for PE lessons that maximise the limited curriculum time available, ensuring both skill development and personal engagement.

In response to a decline in high-standard, inclusive PE provision worldwide, UNESCO's (2015b: 9) Quality Physical Education (QPE) Guidelines were created. QPE "is the planned progressive, inclusive learning experience" that offers developmentally appropriate PE lessons to help learners acquire the "skills they need to lead a physically active life." The guidelines are designed to be adopted by countries worldwide to create curricula that support students in developing the physical, social and emotional skills to become healthy and responsible adults. These guidelines recommend that PE be taught by specialist teachers who only teach PE and are experts in their subjects, as opposed to generalist teachers who teach all curricular areas.

2.3 PE in Ireland

Although UNESCO (2015b) advocates for specialist instead of generalist teachers in PE as part of a QPE approach, PE is taught by generalist teachers in Irish primary schools. This has implications for teachers' depth of subject knowledge and pedagogical confidence because generalist teachers may not have the same depth of content and pedagogical knowledge as specialists. In line with the Primary School PE curriculum (NCCA, 1999a), PE is taught for 60 minutes each week. The Irish PE curriculum prioritises the development of fundamental movement skills that can be adapted and applied across a variety of movement contexts. This contrasts with other curricula worldwide that prioritise sport-specific skills or a public health discourse (Coulter and Ní Chróinín, 2011; Ní Chróinín, 2018). In addition, the curriculum focuses more on holistic development and personal growth rather than purely physical performance or fitness outcomes. It is built on principles of maximum participation, emphasising skills development, balancing competitive and non-competitive activities and providing opportunities for achievement for each child. The Primary PE curriculum is divided into six strands: athletics, games, dance, gymnastics, outdoor and adventure activities, and aquatics, with an underlying set of broad objectives related to the child's social, physical and cognitive development. This emphasis on breadth and holistic development contrasts with more performance-oriented systems internationally.

However, in practice, there is a gap between the stated aspirations of the curriculum and the teaching and learning that takes place in Irish primary schools (Ní Chróinín, 2018). According to the 2022 Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study (CSPPA) (Woods et al., 2023), only 75% of primary school children reported meeting the required curriculum time of 60 minutes of PE per week (NCCA, 1999b). Although this represents an

improvement from the 2010 survey (Woods et al., 2010), one in four Irish primary children still do not receive the required PE time. In addition, echoing practice worldwide (UNESCO and Loughborough University, 2024), the 2022 survey (Woods et al., 2023) reports that the games strand dominates PE lessons, with other strands notably less prevalent. A significant drop was noted in the number of aquatics, gymnastics and dance lessons compared to the 2010 survey (Woods et al., 2010). This may have been due to the COVID-19 pandemic, during which teachers and students had limited access to indoor sports facilities. Moreover, 38% of primary schools lacked access to an indoor space for sports/PE, leaving many Irish schools vulnerable to the Irish climate when teaching PE lessons without indoor facilities. The 2023 survey also highlights that the recommendations from the 2018 report (Woods et al., 2018) to examine barriers to teaching specific strands remain unaddressed, with many strands still neglected at both primary and secondary levels. The literature also suggests that the use of external teachers is prevalent in the provision of PE in Ireland (Bowles and O'Sullivan, 2012; Coulter et al., 2020; Ní Chróinín and O'Brien, 2019). Studies have found that while the external provider may be an expert in their sport/field, they can lack the curricular or pedagogical knowledge to successfully teach PE in schools (Dyson et al., 2016; Petrie et al., 2014). There is also evidence that, in some instances, GAA coaches are replacing teachers in the delivery of PE in primary schools (Mangione et al., 2020). This reliance on external providers raises questions about curriculum fidelity and highlights the need for preservation of educational, rather than purely sporting, aims.

Echoing international findings, an intellectual or physical disability has a profound impact on a child's experiences of PE in Ireland. Although there is evidence of good practice when teachers work with students with additional needs, only 30% of students are always included and engaged in PE lessons (Marron et al., 2021). This is worrying as trends suggest

that students with disabilities are also less likely to meet physical activity guidelines than those without disabilities (Woods et al., 2023). Given that these students are already on the margins, approaches that help create a more inclusive PE experience for these children should continue to be explored.

As part of ongoing Primary School Curriculum (PSC) development, PE and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) are combined into a redeveloped curricular area called Wellbeing. This curriculum is due to be published imminently. The rationale for integrating PE and SPHE into one curriculum is to provide children with “the opportunity to develop a holistic understanding of their well-being and acquire the necessary tools to lead healthy and fulfilling lives” (NCCA, 2024: 1). It has been acknowledged that schools play a crucial role in helping encourage children to engage in lifelong physical activity, with PE being one of the most critical ways schools can help children understand the importance of physical activity (Ní Chróinín et al., 2012). In the revised PSC, additional time will be allocated to PE (120 minutes per week, as opposed to 60 minutes per week), aligning it with the recommended timing in the QPE guidelines (UNESCO, 2015b). This increased allocation offers a rare opportunity to embed new pedagogical approaches, without displacing existing content.

Given the contextual challenges in Irish PE, including generalist teacher provision, strand imbalance, facility constraints and inclusion issues, there is scope for approaches that help generalist teachers create richer learning experiences within limited timeframes, which may both deepen engagement and inform teachers’ pedagogical decisions. One of the focuses of the new curriculum (NCCA, 2024) is the focus placed on providing children with

meaningful experiences as part of PE lessons to empower children to build a positive relationship with movement, both in primary school and into the future.

2.4 Meaningful experiences in PE

For the past fifty years, researchers have highlighted the value and potential of movement as a site for meaningful engagement (Chen, 1998a; Ennis, 2017; Kretchmar, 2007; Metheny, 1968). Kretchmar (2000) suggests that learning in PE is best facilitated when the activity is perceived as important and personally meaningful and suggests that meaningful experiences are those that hold “personal significance” for the individual (Kretchmar, 2007: 382). Similarly, Subramaniam and Silverman (2007) state that the activities children engage in during PE should be personally meaningful and the children should feel like active participants in the learning process. When active participation is combined with personal meaning, students are more likely to develop the motivation and skills needed for lifelong physical activity. It has been acknowledged that meaningful experiences are highly individualised and personal. The experiences a learner finds meaningful will depend on the value they assign to PE, as well as their learning goals (Chen, 1998a). Factors such as gender and family background influence meaningful engagement with PE (Beni et al., 2017). Braga et al. (2015) highlight how the activities that students consider meaningful will depend on the availability and importance of activities in their context. This means that children may find activities they engage in or are already familiar with to be more meaningful. Understanding what makes and influences a meaningful experience will help teachers plan lessons that prioritise meaningful experiences for children. In recent years, the idea that the prioritisation of meaningful experiences might be a worthwhile objective of PE has led to the creation of an MPE approach (Beni et al., 2017; Fletcher et al., 2021).

2.4.1 MPE

Based on the literature on meaningful experiences, an MPE approach that emphasises these types of experiences as part of PE lessons has been created. Beni, Fletcher and Ní Chróinín (2021: 666) define MPE as “a pedagogical approach to PE instruction designed to help teachers explicitly prioritise meaningful experiences for students.” MPE prioritises “meaningful experiences as an organising concept for decision-making in PE” (Ní Chróinín et al., 2021: 43). In practice, this means that the personal significance and quality of students’ experiences guide teachers’ pedagogical choices. Fletcher et al. (2021: 4) state that the primary theme of MPE is to “support students in coming to value physical education through experiencing meaningfulness ... and recognizing ways participation enhances the quality of their lives.” When considering what meaningfulness means as part of an MPE approach, Fletcher et al. (2021) use three components identified by Martela and Steger (2016) to conceptualise meaningfulness: coherence (life feels understandable and logically organised), purpose (life has direction and meaningful goals) and significance (life feels valuable and worth living). When applied to PE, these components suggest that meaningfulness arises when children can see their experiences as coherent and purposeful, and when they recognise personal value in their participation. In this way, meaningfulness is not only about enjoyment in the moment, but also about fostering lasting connections between physical activity, personal growth and everyday life.

MPE has gained popularity in recent years as practitioners shift their focus from traditional skill and fitness models towards approaches that emphasise engagement, enjoyment, and personal relevance (Fletcher et al., 2021). MPE positions PE not only as an opportunity for developing physical abilities but also for fostering lifelong appreciation of movement, social connection and well-being (Bailey et al., 2009; Kretchmar, 2006). As the redeveloped Wellbeing curriculum (NCCA, 2024) and the CSPPA 2022 survey (Woods et

al., 2023) highlight the importance of meaningful experiences in PE, the MPE approach provides educators with a framework for prioritising meaningfulness in their PE practice.

2.4.2 Theoretical basis for MPE

The theoretical basis for MPE is grounded in social constructivism (Fletcher et al., 2021).

From a social constructivist perspective, learning occurs through social interactions and knowledge is constructed within this learning community. Key psychological and educational theorists (Piaget, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978) have been critical in the formation of ideas on social constructivism, but the work of Dewey is most cited in the literature on MPE (Beni et al., 2023; Fletcher et al., 2021; Ní Chróinín et al., 2021). Dewey's work on experience is informative when understanding the factors that influence meaningful experiences. Dewey (1938: 44) states that individuals find experiences valuable "because of a transaction taking place" between an individual and their environment. Similarly, Jarvis (1987: 171) states that the "meaning attributed to an experience depends on the inter-relationship between a personal stock of knowledge and the socio-cultural-temporal milieu" in which the experience occurs. Fletcher and Ní Chróinín (2021) emphasise how teachers will focus on the positive qualities of a meaningful experience. Still, at times, a meaningful experience may also have negative attributes attached to it. Dewey (1938) would describe these positive experiences as 'educative', as they promote growth, experience and development, leading learners to continue or seek them out again. The negative experiences would be 'miseducative', as they hinder growth and learning that learners look to avoid in the future.

Despite the subjective nature of meaningfulness, the literature suggests that meaningful experiences in PE tend to be comprised of certain features. In a review of the literature about young people's meaningful experiences in PE and youth sport, Beni et al.

(2017) identified five features as prominent influences on meaningful experiences, as well as a sixth feature that does not appear as commonly in recent literature.

1. **Social Interaction:** Social interaction can support learning (Lyngstad et al., 2019) and foster a sense of achievement when working in teams or groups, especially self-selected ones (Koekoek and Knoppers, 2015). Positive social interactions also promote ongoing participation (Light, 2010). Teachers should create opportunities for social interactions that meet students' needs and preferences. Beni et al. (2017) suggest that teachers be conscious of opportunities for social interaction and plan for them in an organised and structured way based on the learners' needs.
2. **Fun:** Fun is often identified as being central to meaningfulness in PE (Dyson, 1995). Dismore and Bailey (2010) suggest that fun in PE was less about playing games and more about learning and challenge in lessons. Beni et al. (2017) indicate that pedagogical models, such as Teaching Games for Understanding (Kirk and MacPhail, 2002) or Game Sense (Light, 2013), facilitate meaningful experiences in PE that are enjoyable for children while promoting high-quality teaching.
3. **Challenge:** When looking to engage students in PE meaningfully, the challenge provided to the students should be "just right" (Kretchmar, 2006; Mandigo and Holt, 2006). Activities that are not tailored to suit the children's abilities can lead to boredom if they are too easy, or disengagement if they are too difficult (Chen, 1998b; Domville et al., 2019). Therefore, the balance in challenge, particularly in competitive situations, is crucial to prevent boredom and foster motivation in learners.
4. **Motor Competence:** Motor competence contributes to students' meaningful engagement in PE by enabling them to perform skills and movements effectively,

recognise their skill levels compared to peers, and receive positive reinforcement from instructors or classmates (Beni et al., 2017).

5. Personally Relevant Learning: Helping children make connections between PE, real-world activities and personal interests helps promote lifelong physical activity (Beni et al., 2017). When students struggle to link PE with their broader lives, they report a lack of meaningfulness in PE (Quennerstedt, 2013). The provision of choice for students during PE lessons may be one of the most effective ways of ensuring learning is personally relevant to students. (Beni et al., 2017).
6. Delight: Delight has been proposed as a possible sixth feature of MPE. Kretchmar (2006: 7) suggests that delight is a characteristic that lies beyond fun, stating that “when students experience delight, they are transported from the mundane to the memorable. However, Beni et al. (2017) did not find empirical support for delight in the literature. This may be because delight is a very abstract and challenging concept for a child to articulate or express and Beni et al. (2017) acknowledge that delight may be present in children’s meaningful experiences in PE, but it may often go unexpressed.

Taken together, these features illustrate that meaningfulness in PE is not the outcome of isolated elements, but rather of their dynamic interaction (Beni et al., 2017). Even when one feature appears more prominent in a particular experience, it remains closely interconnected with the others (Fletcher et al., 2021). However, as Ní Chróinín et al. (2021) noted, simply having the features does not guarantee that a child will see the experience as personally significant or meaningful. Beni, Fletcher and Ní Chróinín (2019) highlight that a teacher might design experiences that allow learners to engage with all the features, or they might choose to focus on one or two features for in-depth exploration.

2.4.3 Implementing an MPE approach

As an MPE approach to PE is still relatively new, strategies that support this approach are still being explored (Beni et al., 2017). However, Fletcher and Ní Chróinín (2021) have identified two pedagogical principles that underpin an MPE approach, namely democratic and reflective pedagogies.

Democratic pedagogies in PE emphasise student agency, inclusivity and shared decision-making, allowing learners to co-construct experiences that are personally relevant and meaningful (Fletcher and Ní Chróinín, 2021). These pedagogies are considered essential for meaningful experiences because they position students as active participants in the learning process, giving them greater autonomy, voice and opportunities to connect learning to their own lives (Fletcher et al., 2021; Fletcher and Ní Chróinín, 2021). Within a democratic approach to PE, pupils have opportunities to contribute to the decision-making process, which in turn can help foster meaningful experiences in PE (Beni et al., 2017; Walseth et al., 2018). Simple ways of involving children in the decision-making process, such as allowing the children to pick a skill or task to focus on, allowing them to choose whom they play with, using a voting system to modify activities, the duration of a task, or providing children with free time to direct their activities have been shown to make the learning more personally relevant to the children (Enright and O’Sullivan, 2010; Ní Chróinín et al., 2021). Research has shown that children enjoy and appreciate having a say and having an increased sense of ownership over their learning experiences in PE (Cardiff et al., 2024; Ní Chróinín et al., 2021). While children are generally unfazed by increased involvement in the decision-making process (Ní Chróinín et al., 2021), Beni et al. (2021) caution that it may be better for teachers and students to become comfortable with children making simple decisions before progressing to more complex ones. The underpinning democratic pedagogical principle of

MPE aligns with the redeveloped curriculum, which positions children as active agents in their own learning who have the “capacity to act independently and to make choices about and in their learning” (NCCA, 2023; 9).

Reflective pedagogical practices are also a key part of the MPE approach. These practices support learners in critically engaging with past, present and future experiences. This helps learners articulate and deepen the meaning of their participation in PE and allow students to “become aware of, evaluate and attach personal significance to physical education” (Fletcher and Ní Chróinín, 2021: 7). Reflective activities have been shown to help children understand their progress in PE and make sense of their experiences, which in turn helps facilitate meaningful experiences in PE (Beni, et al., 2022; Ní Chróinín et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2023). Ní Chróinín et al. (2021) suggest that children enjoyed being aware of the learning intentions as it allowed them to set goals and then reflect on and evaluate these goals post-lesson. This goal setting can support the learning process by framing a purpose and allowing for subsequent reflection on and evaluation of experiences. Research has also shown that mid-lesson reflections can be employed to enable students to adjust lessons or activities in real-time (Cardiff et al., 2024). Cardiff et al. (2024) found that some children enjoyed using a PE scrapbook, but others felt that they were repeating themselves. This highlights a potential challenge in designing reflection tasks, ensuring variety and perceived relevance to avoid disengagement. To counteract this, the use of a variety of reflective approaches during lessons is suggested. The importance of using regular reflection, including both written and verbal tasks, has been emphasised (Beni et al., 2021). However, it has also been noted that some teachers may initially struggle to integrate student reflection into their PE lessons, which are designed using an MPE approach (Beni et al., 2021). Fletcher et al. (2021) outline the role that teacher reflection plays in an MPE approach, and this reflection may help

teachers overcome initial challenges as they look to embed the approach in their practice. In summary, reflective pedagogies within an MPE framework equip students with the tools to interpret and evaluate their own PE experiences, while also providing teachers with valuable insights into learner needs and perceptions. Given the emphasis on reflection, MPE's alignment with the aims of the redeveloped Wellbeing curriculum in Ireland provides a timely opportunity to explore how reflective approaches can be embedded in future PE practice.

2.5 Theoretical foundations of reflection in education

Reflection is widely recognised as a cornerstone of effective learning and development for both teachers and students. Its role extends beyond mere recall, encompassing the integration and the synthesis of experiences into personally and socially meaningful knowledge.

However, this ubiquity and general acceptance of the value of reflection can lead to “mixed messages and confusing agendas” as reflection is often used and understood as a “catch-all term” in both educational research and educational practice (Fendler, 2003: 20). In educational research, reflection is generally understood as the practice of looking back on experience in order to think critically about what happened, to notice patterns and to draw out meaning that can guide future decisions (Dewey, 1933; Kolb, 1984; Schön, 1983). It is particularly important in student-centred learning environments, as it looks to encourage learners to take greater responsibility for making sense of their own experiences as part of their learning journey.

Dewey (1933) framed reflection not as a spontaneous reaction but as a deliberate, structured and educative activity, emphasising its iterative nature as learners move between experience and conceptualisation. Dewey regarded reflection as a particular type of problem

solving that involves the individual critically analysing an issue while actively drawing on relevant knowledge and beliefs about the situation (Adler, 1991). Building on these theories, Schön (1983) introduced the twin concepts of “reflection in action” and “reflection on action”. Schön’s writing focused on teachers using these concepts to help them analyse their teaching and decision making. For example, a teacher may adapt their teaching approach mid-lesson in response to a class’s engagement with a lesson (reflection in action), while after the lesson the teacher may evaluate the effectiveness of their instructional choices (reflection on action). Dewey’s ideas heavily influenced Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle (1984). In this model, reflection functions as a bridge between concrete experience, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. Across these perspectives, reflection, particularly critical reflection, is associated with higher-order cognitive processes such as self-regulation and metacognition (Paris and Winograd, 2003), which are central to fostering learner autonomy and are particularly relevant in student-centred learning environments.

Teacher reflection has been a dominant theme in education, particularly since Schön’s (1983) notion of the reflective practitioner. The Teaching Council (2016) suggests that teachers should be reflective practitioners and that reflection plays a significant role in many Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes (Russo and Ford, 2006). Reflection is viewed as a means of supporting teachers as they strive to enhance their teaching (Brookfield, 2017). While there is a large body of evidence that shows the value of reflection for teachers, there is a growing understanding that student reflection may also greatly benefit learners.

2.5.1 Student reflection in education

Just as teacher reflection has been closely linked to Dewey's theories, student reflection can also be traced back to his ideas. Brownhill (2021) acknowledges that student reflection with

primary school children is a growing area of study, due to the historical assumption that younger children could not engage in reflection. However, recent research shows that children can self-reflect, with the sophistication of their reflection shaped by developmental age and language ability, and that this capacity strengthens when children are given the chance to regularly practice reflection (Leigh, 2020; Zelazo, 2004). Philip (2006) outlines how student reflection allows students to get the most from their education, helps engender lifelong learning and maximises personal and economic potential. Reflection with children is critical as it contributes to their growing identities as learners (Carr, 2011). Similarly, Zuckerman (2004) argues that teaching students reflective thinking skills, such as evaluating their actions and considering others' perspectives, can expand their zone of proximal development. This expansion enables greater independent learning once appropriate teacher support is provided. Student reflection has also been shown to enhance "learning as understanding reality" and ultimately resulted in students' abilities to "see learning as personally meaningful" (Bednar et al., 2007: 46)

Despite the benefits associated of reflection, it should be noted that reflection is not an innate skill and requires deliberate teaching and practice, particularly with children (Moon, 2004). Depending on the child's age and metacognitive abilities, reflection can be a challenging skill to teach. For example, primary-aged students often struggle with self-monitoring and self-regulation and require explicit teacher guidance to engage in reflective practice effectively (Branigan and Donaldson, 2020; Tungalag, 2024). Additionally, students do not always respond positively to reflective assignments, especially when they are first introduced (Liudmila, 2020). Scaffolding by the teacher can, however, reduce initial resistance to reflection and support students on their reflective journeys (Hickson, 2011; Moon, 2004). Moon (2004) states that teachers can support students as they learn to reflect,

scaffolding them where necessary and using strategic teaching interventions. Kabat-Zinn (1990) suggests that by teaching students to become aware of their thoughts and feelings, they can learn to reflect effectively. The challenge for teachers is therefore to design age-appropriate, engaging reflection tasks that are relevant to students, while also supporting them as they build the vocabulary and skills needed for deeper responses.

While there are many reported benefits of reflecting with children, a lack of clarity exists, however, around how reflective practice should be taught to children (Leigh and Bailey, 2013). Research has historically concentrated on second- and third-level students' use of reflection (Coulson and Harvey, 2012; Feron and Schils, 2020) and although there is a growing body of literature on the use of reflection with primary school children (Brownhill, 2021), it still lags behind research in other sectors of education. Similarly, the specific application of reflection within the context of PE warrants closer examination as studies tend to focus primarily on teachers' use of reflection rather than on students' engagement in reflective processes (Bjørke and Quennerstedt, 2024). The lack of focus on student reflection is also reflected in the QPE guidelines (UNESCO, 2015b), which mention that teachers delivering QPE should be reflective practitioners without addressing the development of students' reflective competencies. This omission suggests that building students' reflective capacity is not yet embedded in dominant international frameworks, creating an opportunity for practitioner-led innovation

2.5.2 Student reflection in PE

Although research on reflection with children is limited, the draft Wellbeing curriculum specifications (NCCA, 2024) mandates for integrating reflective practices into everyday primary PE practice. Given the unique physical, social and pedagogical aspects of PE, it

presents opportunities and challenges for reflective practice (Bjørke and Quennerstedt, 2024). Recent studies have begun to shed light on how reflection can help students bridge theory and practice in PE (Mong and Standal, 2022). Beni et al. (2019) found that reflection helped students understand why they were learning specific skills in a game unit. Similarly, Sánchez-Hernández et al. (2018) found that cooperative learning and critical reflection helped students challenge gender relations in PE. Bjørke and Moen (2022) also note that primary school students' group reflection helped them develop competence in working together. Together, these studies illustrate that student reflection in PE can contribute not only to skill development but also to social learning and critical engagement with broader issues. Similarly, there is a growing body of research within the context of PE that has shown that reflection offers a way for people to use practical experience to add life to theory and use theory to create meaning out of practical experience (Fletcher and Ní Chróinín, 2021; Johansson, 2023; Standal and Moe, 2013). For example, Standal (2015: 110) suggests reflection moves “the learner from one experience to the next” and helps develop a deeper understanding of the experience.

There is also a growing evidence base that demonstrates how student reflection might be integrated as part of PE lessons. As part of an overall MPE approach, reflective pedagogical practices have been used to help children set goals, track their progress, and direct their learning (Ní Chróinín et al., 2021). Reflection with children also features prominently in other PE frameworks, such as activist approaches (Enright and O’Sullivan, 2010) and student voice practices (Howley and O’Sullivan, 2021). Howley (2022), for example, proposes providing children with small, consistent opportunities to reflect in PE to help them make sense of their learning. This gradual approach may prevent cognitive overload and help normalise reflection as part of the PE routine, particularly in situations

where students are initially resistant to reflection. Practical strategies, including the use of exit tickets at the end of lessons, facilitate student reflection on lesson outcomes and help identify areas for future improvement (Iannucci and Parker, 2022). Nilges (2004) used journaling and think-aloud exercises to help children reflect on experiences. O'Connor (2019) explored how PE could be made more meaningful by asking students to reflect on moments where they found meaning in movement before beginning a unit of work. He found that when students reflected on these moments, wrote about them and discussed their feelings, students connected these moments with the broader contexts of their lives, which helped to make PE more meaningful. Cardiff et al. (2024) also suggest that everyday assessment for learning strategies offers opportunities for students to reflect, stating that reflection supports two-way communication between student and teacher. As children can become frustrated if reflection is overused or if they feel it is not relevant to their learning (Howley, 2022), student reflection must be purposeful, connected to the learning objectives and integrated into the curriculum rather than treated as an add-on (Cavilla, 2017).

Echoing the broader research on student reflection (Hickson, 2011; Moon, 2004), Bjørke and Quennerstedt (2024) argue that there is a need for students to learn how to reflect as part of PE lessons. They suggest that over time, reflective practices such as connecting previous, present and future experiences could be fostered to promote deeper understanding. However, as with reflection more generally, research in PE shows that children's reflections can often be limited by their language capabilities (Beni et al., 2022; Iannucci et al., 2024). Children may struggle to describe their experiences, resulting in superficial or repetitive responses that fail to capture deeper meaning. Teachers must scaffold the children as they reflect to ensure that they can appropriately engage in reflective activities such as modelling vocabulary for the children or providing them with prompts (Cardiff et al., 2024). Empirical

MJ Moran - 18374981

research is lacking, however, which shows how teachers navigate embedding reflection into their everyday PE practice, while supporting their students in developing their capacity to reflect. With the upcoming publication and rollout of the redeveloped PSC, additional guidance will be needed to ensure teachers can effectively use reflection to enhance students' learning experiences in PE.

2.6 Conclusion

The review highlights that while the concept of meaningfulness in PE is not new, MPE offers a clear and practical way for teachers to place it at the centre of their practice. Reflection, alongside democratic pedagogies, is a particularly effective means of supporting students in identifying and valuing meaningful experiences in PE. However, the current research base is still developing, with limited studies exploring how primary-aged children engage with reflective practices in this context. There is also a need to better understand the specific strategies that can help teachers enhance their PE provision and prioritise meaningfulness in diverse school settings, especially in light of the upcoming publication of the redeveloped PSC. This provides me with an opportunity to explore the use of student reflection as part of an MPE approach in my unique context.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines my research methodology, including the intervention strategies, data collection tools, ethical considerations and data analysis techniques employed in this study. Key concepts such as validation and triangulation are also discussed in the context of my research.

3.2 Research paradigm: Self-Study Educational Action Research

In research, paradigms are “ways of looking at the world, different assumptions about what the world is like and how we can understand or know about it” (Cohen et al., 2018: 8). Bassey (1990) refers to three research paradigms that form the basis for many educational enquiries: the positivist paradigm, the interpretivist paradigm and action research. Glenn et al. (2023) highlight how positivist research is about observing and testing, while an interpretivist approach involves observing and interpreting. On the other hand, action research is about individuals or groups looking to improve action or practice (Bassey, 1990). Action research seeks not only to “understand a situation or phenomenon but with changing it” (Cohen et al., 2018: 30).

For this research, I adopted an action research paradigm with the goal of enhancing my teaching of PE. Specifically, I utilised self-study educational action research (EAR) as my methodology. While action research, in general terms, is “an investigation which is intentionally directed towards solving a problem or focusing on an issue raised by and owned by, an individual or a group” (Cohen et al., 2018: 441), EAR is a form of action research that enables teachers to improve their practice, develop new knowledge and inspire a vision of education that contributes to a better world (Glenn et al., 2023). It incorporates the

philosophies of self-study action research and Whitehead's (2018) Living Educational Theory approach and seeks to apply "the concepts and practices of action research to the context of education" (Glenn et al., 2023: 21). According to McDonagh et al. (2019), self-study action research is concerned with teachers studying their practice, to improve it and then making the process visible for others. Meanwhile, Living Educational Theory emphasises that educators create their own evidence-based theories by aligning their practice with their core values (Whitehead, 2018).

Unlike some other forms of research, in EAR, the researcher plays a dual role, acting as both the subject and agent of change as they focus on personal improvement (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010). Action research is inherently collaborative and participatory and focuses on doing research "with" rather than research "on" participants (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000). While a positivist and an interpretivist paradigm would view participants as "subjects" in the study, in action research, collaboration is encouraged with participants, whether they be students, colleagues or other stakeholders (Winter, 1996). Sullivan et al. (2016) advocate for viewing students as co-researchers and fostering a collaborative and participatory classroom environment, an approach which I encouraged during my research.

Noffke and Zeichner (1987) outline the benefits of action research to teachers, highlighting how it increases their awareness of classroom issues, allows them to link theory and practice, improves their ability to reflect critically and helps them further their understanding of education and society as a whole. This type of research-based teaching helps to tip the balance of power away from teachers and towards students (Stenhouse, 1979). In this sense, action research opposes the "Banking" concept of education (Freire, 1999),

whereby the teacher merely deposits information into students and positions children as active agents in their learning.

I chose EAR as my research method because it allowed me to critically examine my teaching practice while placing my values at the heart of the research. EAR is deeply values-based (Glenn et al., 2023), and in the context of this research, my values of inclusion and fairness guided my implementation of student reflection in an MPE approach. By positioning myself at the centre of the study, I critically reflected on how these values influenced my teaching and impacted the children's engagement and learning (Whitehead, 2018). Living Educational Theory serves as a bridge between reflective practice and my goal of enhancing my PE instruction. While my research question aimed to investigate student reflection in my implementation of an MPE approach, the desire to engage in this project stemmed from a desire to improve my teaching.

3.2.1 Action research cycles

There are many models of action research, such as those outlined by McAteer (2013), Stringer (2014) and Lewin (1946). While these models differ in their stages or components, Kemmis et al. (2014) suggest that action research consists of four primary phases: planning, acting, observing and reflecting. Action research is cyclical (Noffke, 1997), with stages that are connected and repeated across cycles, allowing for the continual refinement of practice. As part of my research, I used an action research model proposed by McNiff and Whitehead (2013: 56), which consists of cycles of "planning, acting, observing and reflecting ... extending into ongoing action-reflection cycles." McNiff and Whitehead (2013: 67) outline how action research can often "begin in one place and end up somewhere unexpected." While action research, like life, "seldom follows a straightforward pathway" (McNiff and

Whitehead, 2010: 95), my cycles remained anchored in McNiff and Whitehead's (2013) model as illustrated in Figure 3.1 below. As the research intervention took place over two cycles, information gathered during the first cycle influenced future cycles (Noffke, 1997).

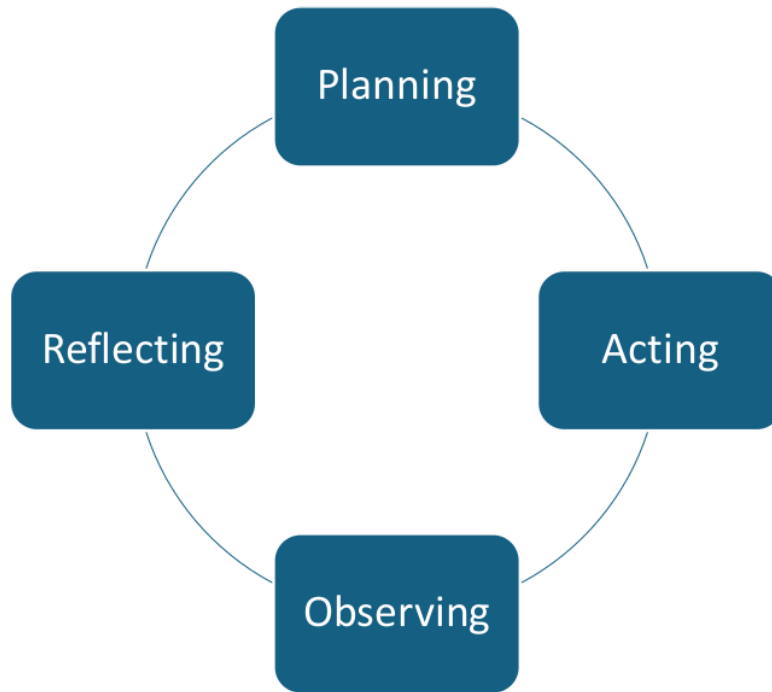


Figure 3.1: McNiff and Whitehead's (2013) Action Research Cycle

3.3 Research design

3.3.1 Setting and participants

The research site was a coeducational primary school with a Catholic ethos. It has approximately 400 children enrolled and has sixteen mainstream classes and three Autism classes. Most children come from urban areas around the local town and a small number come from rural areas. The children involved in the research were the twenty-three sixth class

children (aged 11-13 years), of whom I was the class teacher. Data was analysed from the 17 children who provided parental consent and child assent. The research took place during my regular weekly PE lesson, which is approximately sixty minutes long. The intervention began in January and continued until early April.

The PE lessons took place in the school hall, schoolyard, or school playing pitches. However, some reflective activities, particularly written reflections and discussions, took place in the classroom. These reflective activities took place before and after PE lessons. A lesson on the concept of MPE and goal setting was also facilitated as part of SPHE lessons and in the discretionary time allowed in the Curriculum (NCCA, 1999b).

3.3.2 Overview of implementation

I carried out two action research cycles over a period of ten weeks. As part of my intervention, I investigated my research question, “How can I use student reflection as part of a Meaningful PE approach to enhance my teaching?” All lessons were designed using an MPE approach (Beni et al., 2017) and I ensured that my lesson outcomes and objectives were aligned with the PE Curriculum (NCCA, 1999a). As noted by Fletcher et al. (2021), MPE is designed to be integrated with local curricular objectives and other pedagogical approaches and models. MPE does not offer teachers a “step-by-step guide” (Beni et al., 2019: 612). Instead, it is a framework that helps guide teachers’ pedagogical decision-making as they prioritise meaningful experiences. Therefore, while it guided my planning, it did not dictate my learning objectives. Within cycle one of the research, I focused on teaching the gymnastics strand, while in cycle two, I taught the athletics strand. Resources like the PSSI lesson plans (Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), n.d.) and Move Well, Move Often (PDST, 2017) assisted in the design of lessons. For example, the PSSI lesson

task cards were used during gymnastics lessons when a station teaching approach was employed (see Appendix B2 for a sample).

The research design consisted of four phases, which together formed the research cycle (McNiff and Whitehead, 2013). The four stages of implementation based on these four phases are explained in Figure 3.2 below.

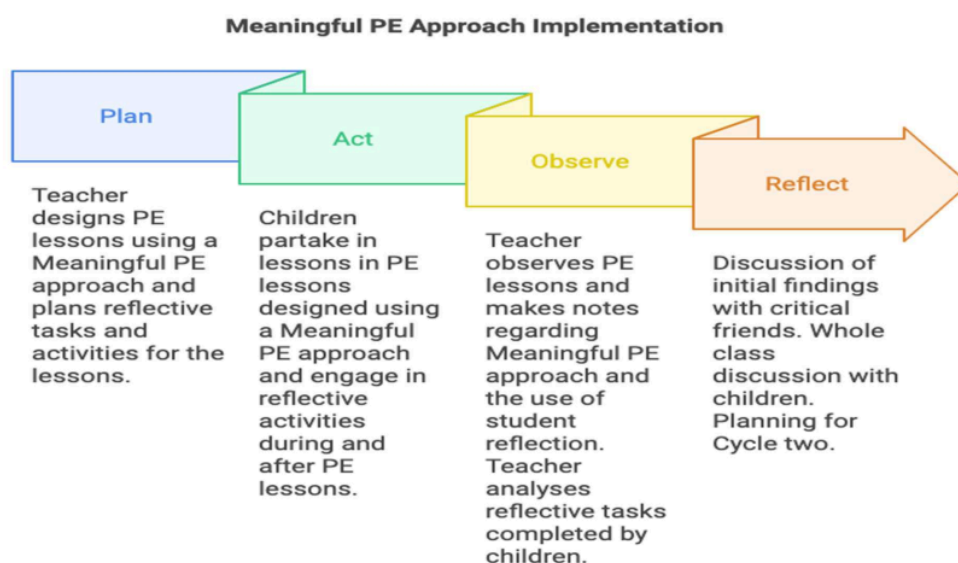


Figure 3.2: MPE approach implementation

Ongoing reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983) through observation and reflective journaling helped me identify any changes required during the cycles. For instance, following the completion of cycle one, I took some time to reflect on and discuss the intervention with my critical friends and validation group before planning for cycle two. The research timeline is outlined in Figure 3.3 below.

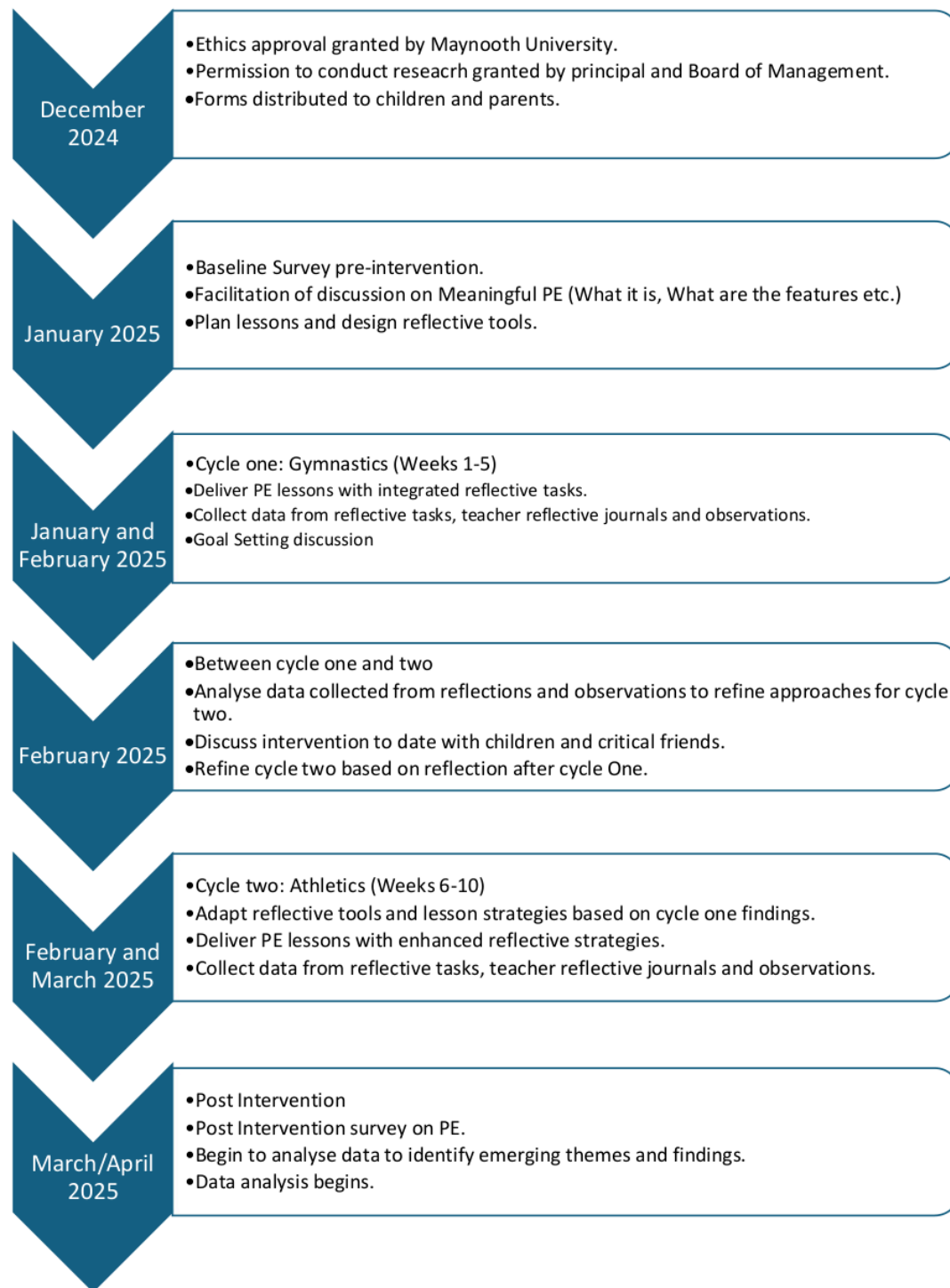


Figure 3.3: Timeline of actions for the research

3.3.3 Intervention strategies

The research intervention began with a whole-class discussion focusing on the MPE approach. I introduced the five features of MPE, as identified by Beni et al. (2017) and we discussed these features to create a shared language of meaningfulness. A lesson on goal setting was also facilitated during cycle one. Before each lesson, I made a PowerPoint presentation outlining the lesson objectives and plan (for example, see Appendix B3). This facilitated the children in setting practical goals for the lessons. This also allowed me to share videos with the class. For example, during the Athletics strand, I showed the children videos of Olympians demonstrating how to hurdle. The first cycle focused on introducing student reflection within an MPE framework, with observations and data collection providing insights for refinement. The second cycle built on these emerging findings to deepen engagement and measure any changes in student outcomes.

Lessons were planned with an explicit focus on strategies and tools that address the features of meaningful experiences. Democratic and reflective principles (as seen in Table 3.1) were to the fore in the design of lessons as they have been identified as pedagogical principles that support the prioritisation of meaningful experiences in PE (Fletcher and Ní Chróinín, 2021). For example, as part of the democratic practices integrated into the lessons, the children had the opportunity to choose their partners/groups when engaging in peer work. The children also had the chance to vote and choose from various activities during lessons. For instance, there would be a vote to decide on the warm-up game that would be used during the lesson. There was also free time, where the children could self-direct their own activities during lessons. A typical lesson would involve three democratic practices and three reflective practices used over the course of the lesson (see Appendix B1 for a sample of a gymnastics lesson plan). In a typical lesson, I would share the lesson plan and learning intentions in the

MJ Moran - 18374981

classroom, allowing the children to set and write down their own lesson goals. Before the lesson, a pair of students would design a warm-up which they would deliver during the lesson. During the lesson, there were opportunities for the children to self-select their own groups and free time was also allowed to the children so they could choose to work on a particular skill introduced within the lesson. Peer and self-assessment strategies, such as two stars and a wish, were used to help the children evaluate their performance and identify areas for improvement. When the children returned to the classroom, they would write in their PE journal in response to a reflective prompt.

Democratic Practices	Reflective Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student chosen groupings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole class reflections and discussions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group and peer discussions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflective prompts for PE journal activities (What was the best part of today's lesson? Share one success and one challenge from today's lesson etc.)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children having a choice of activities facilitated by a voting system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal setting (individually and as groups)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free time for children to self-direct their own activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self and peer assessment (Two stars and a wish, assessment rubrics etc.)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer teaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open-ended questions during lessons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group and pair work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exit ticket (What was one thing you did well today and what is one thing you want to improve next time?)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children modifying the nature of a task (duration, type of task, focus of task etc.) based on feedback and discussion 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children designing and directing the lesson warm-up 	

Table 3.1: List of democratic and reflective practices employed during research

As I aimed to investigate my use of student reflection as part of an MPE approach, a particular focus was placed on the reflective strategies employed in the lessons. Some methods, such as open-ended questions, were used across all lessons. In contrast, other reflective practices were used at different points during the intervention to prevent the

reflective activities from feeling repetitive. Both written and verbal forms of reflection were regularly used to avoid the children feeling overloaded by written reflections. When using written reflective methods like journals or exit tickets, I provided a prompt for the children which helped to guide them as they wrote. Reflections were facilitated before, during and after lessons, and consisted of a variety of written and oral activities such as:

- Exit Ticket: Name one thing you felt you achieved in today's lesson.
- Drawing: Imagine you were teaching today's lesson. How would you change it? Draw your version of the lesson and write a three-sentence summary!
- Exit Ticket: How can I make PE more meaningful for you?
- Reflective Journal: Did goal setting help you in today's lesson?
- Reflective Journal: If you could teach someone else one thing you learned while doing athletics, what would it be and why?

The children each received their own A4 hardback, which served as their reflective PE journal throughout the intervention. The children's written reflections were stored in these journals.

3.4 Ethics

Before beginning the research project, I sought and received ethical approval from Maynooth University. My school's principal and Board of Management also granted me permission to conduct my research. As part of my research, I abided by all school policies, professional codes and ethical guidelines, such as the Maynooth University Research Ethical Policy Guidelines, Children First Policy, British Educational Research Association (BERA) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2024) General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

3.4.1 Informed consent/assent

Informed consent was obtained from parents and assent was secured from children, aligning with Cohen et al.'s (2018) four key elements: competence, voluntarism, full information and comprehension. I explained the project in a child-friendly and accessible way to the children (Sullivan et al., 2016). I explained that participation was entirely voluntary and the children had the right to withdraw at any time. I invited the children to ask any questions they may have about the research. Children were also provided with a letter explaining the research in child-friendly language. As the children are under the age of 18, I sought their informed assent (Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), 2012). Children were given time to assimilate the information, ask questions and discuss the research with their parents before returning their assent forms. I sought informed and voluntary consent from the children's parents/guardians. Parents were provided with a letter and an information sheet explaining the purpose of the research and their child's part in it. I asked the children's parents to discuss the research with their children at home before obtaining their written consent and their children's written assent. Parents were provided with my email address and invited to send me any further questions they might have. Copies of the letters, information sheets, and consent/assent forms provided to the Board of Management, parents, and children are included in Appendices A.

3.4.2 Power dynamics

Power dynamics play a role in every type of research (Brooks et al., 2014) and this can be particularly evident in schools as children can sometimes "perform and conform" to teacher expectations (Moyles, 2001: 21). While power issues can never be truly controlled in a classroom, Harcourt and Conroy (2011) outline how the best research occurs when a trusting relationship is established between the researcher and those participating in the study. To do

this, I provided the children with clear information about the nature of the research and looked to build on the good relationships I had already established with my class. My intervention was integrated into my regular PE lessons, ensuring that no child was rewarded or excluded by opting in or out of the research. Sullivan et al. (2016: 97) emphasise that to avoid power issues, the teacher should critically analyse their value system “and take the students seriously as agents in their own education.” My values of inclusion and fairness were to the fore throughout the research, as were the Teaching Council’s (2016: 6) values of “Respect, Integrity, Trust and Care”, which underpin my work as a teacher. Throughout the process, the children were viewed as co-participants whose contributions were respected and valued. It was also emphasised to the children that the purpose of the research was about me learning more about my teaching rather than about doing research on them (Sullivan et al., 2016). I remained conscious of not seeking out a “victory narrative” to impress others or justify my work (MacLure, 1996: 293).

3.4.3 Data storage

All data collected was stored in accordance with Maynooth University’s data handling guidelines (Maynooth University, 2025). Any data stored online was saved in an encrypted folder. Any physical data was cleared of personal identifiers, such as children’s full names and the gathered data was kept in a locked box in a secure filing cabinet. Throughout the process, only the minimum amount of personal data was retained (Sullivan et al., 2016). Before disseminating my research findings, the data was anonymised using pseudonyms. Data is being held and will be destroyed in accordance with the guidelines of Maynooth University.

3.5 Data collection methods

I used a variety of qualitative data collection tools during the research. These included pupil surveys, the children's reflections, the children's reflective PE journal, unstructured observation notes and my teacher's reflective journal.

3.5.1 Student surveys

Pupil surveys allow students to share their thoughts and experiences regarding classroom practices (Fink, 2024). Surveys are beneficial in this form of research as they “gather data at a particular point in time with the intention of describing the nature of existing conditions” (Cohen et al., 2018: 334). An advantage of surveys is their ability to gather data from a large group quickly and efficiently. Surveys were used pre-intervention to collect students' baseline thoughts, mid-intervention to assess the effectiveness of cycle one and post-intervention to gather their thoughts on PE and the pedagogical approaches used in the research. Surveys were administered at three points (pre: 27th January 2025; mid: 12th March 2025; post: 7th May 2025; see Appendices D1, D2 and D3)

3.5.2 Teacher reflective journal

Throughout the process, I maintained my own teacher reflective journal. McDonagh et al. (2019) emphasise the importance of reflection on practice and critical reflection as key elements in the self-study action research process. A reflective journal is a personal account of thoughts, experiences and learning that documents and analyses practice, collating these reflections in one place (Schön, 1983). The individual nature of the journal is essential as action research is about the researcher studying their practice, not the practice of others (McNiff and Whitehead, 2013). Reflective journals are flexible, allowing teachers to

“determine their own focus and what they want to understand” (Francis 1995: 230). As a result, I used my observations, comments from children, conversations with critical friends and reflection on my teaching as stimuli for my reflective journal, which supported me in investigating my research question. However, I did not want to reflect for the sake of reflection and I wanted my reflections to go beyond simply “pausing for thought from time to time” (Thompson and Thompson, 2018: 6). As a result, I used Schön’s (1983) reflection in action and reflection on action model to help guide my reflections. This provided me with a framework to guide my decision-making during lessons and analyse these decisions post-lesson. Throughout the process, my reflective journal proved valuable as I worked through the complexities of my practice, identified recurring patterns and challenged my own assumptions. By engaging in critical reflexivity, I was able to connect day-to-day classroom experiences with broader theoretical frameworks, generating insights that informed both my pedagogical decisions and the direction of my research. Post-lesson, I reflected on each of the intervention lessons using Schön’s model to allow me to describe events, analyse their significance and identify areas for further improvements. I would also write in my reflective journal as I planned my lessons and followed conversations with critical friends.

3.5.3 Children’s reflective PE journal

It has been shown that students’ reflective journals offer authentic insights into their experiences (Boud, 2001; Helm et al., 1997). Billups (2021: 157) highlights how journals provide first-hand accounts of specific experiences and the resulting data generate a story that can evolve and solidify over time.” Students’ Reflective journals can provide authentic, individualised reflections that offer a deeper insight into individual students’ experiences (Mills, 2011). Each of the children kept a reflective PE journal during the course of the research cycles. The journal supported the children in documenting their thoughts, planning

activities and providing feedback on PE activities. They captured written reflections, drawings and self-assessment tasks which allowed them to act as a portfolio, providing evidence of the child's learning and progress throughout the research (Helm et al., 1997). When completing written reflections, the children were provided with prompts that varied from lesson to lesson. By keeping the reflections in one place, the children were able to revisit their previous reflections at different points during the intervention.

3.5.4 Teacher observation

As part of my intervention, I used unstructured observations to understand how the children were engaging with the lesson content during the observation. Cohen et al. (2018) note that observation is a valuable tool in research. It allows the researcher to gather first-hand data in naturally occurring situations, potentially yielding more valid or authentic data than reported data or second-hand accounts. Tisdall et al. (2009) note that observation is less disruptive than other data collection methods as it takes place while the children are doing activities. This allows children to focus on the task at hand. Unstructured observations also allow for the exploration of verbal and non-verbal behaviour, which can be used as sources of evidence in both planned and unplanned situations (Pollard, 2019). For this reason, I employed unstructured observations throughout the research intervention. Notes from unstructured observations were recorded during lessons and were subsequently analysed in my reflective journal, allowing me to make sense of what I noticed during lessons.

3.6 Data analysis

The data I gathered was analysed using a reflexive thematic analysis approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021). Thematic analysis involves "identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within the data" (Braun and Clarke, 2006:6). The approach was chosen for its

flexibility and systematic approach to identifying patterns and themes in qualitative data, aligning with the reflective and iterative nature of EAR. The reflexive nature of this approach is essential, as it requires teachers to actively interrogate their own assumptions, decision-making processes and positionality throughout the analysis. In doing so, it not only helps to identify potential biases but also emphasises the need for researchers to critically scrutinise both others' work and their own (Cohen et al., 2018; Braun and Clarke, 2021). The approach is divided into six phases, as shown in Figure 3.4:

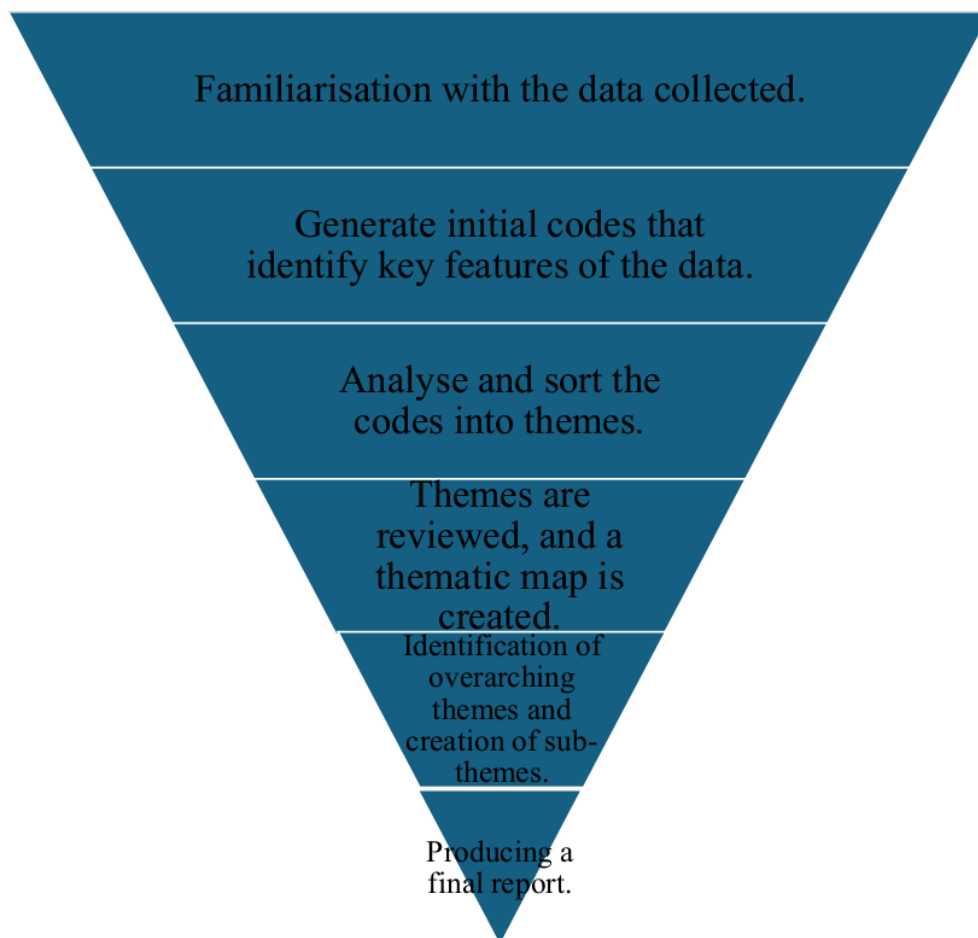


Figure 3.4: Outline of Braun and Clarke's (2021) Thematic Framework

To begin the data analysis process, I refamiliarised myself with the data by rereading my reflective journals and the reflections and surveys that the children had completed during cycle one and cycle two of the intervention. I transcribed the data and began highlighting common ideas that appeared in the reflections. After reviewing this data, I began to generate initial codes to describe the patterns that were emerging from the data (see Appendix D1 for a sample of the students' coded data). For example, codes such as teamwork, reflection in action, challenge, challenges with reflection, choice, variety of activities and personal relevance all emerged during the initial coding phase. After reviewing the codes, I began grouping them to form initial themes. For instance, I grouped the codes "teamwork", "choice" and "personal relevance" under the theme "The importance of social interaction in an MPE Approach." Initially, I had six themes:

- The children's engagement with student reflection in an MPE approach
- Barriers to Reflection
- Issues with my teaching
- Children's Ownership of the Process
- The Quality and Value of the Student's Responses
- The Importance of social interaction in an MPE approach

These initial themes did not directly relate to my research question and as such, I had to continually reevaluate them as I sought to connect them to my research question and my values. However, the data contained within many of these initial themes provided the basis for the findings presented in Chapter 4; for example, the theme on "Children's Ownership of the Process" morphed into a finding on the role reflection can play in allowing teachers to

access student voice. During this period, the data was revisited on many occasions and the themes were refined. This involved reflexively viewing the data myself and consulting with my critical friends and supervisor. Byrne (2021: 1393) observes that this process of thematic analysis is highly subjective and there is no guarantee that “themes interpreted by one researcher may be reproduced by another.” However, I acknowledge that my themes are “inter-related and value-laden, rather than objective truths” (Peel, 2020: 4). This laborious process of data analysis resulted in the identification of five emergent themes, which are presented in Chapter 4.

3.7 Validity and trustworthiness

Rigour and validity are crucial in EAR (Glenn et al., 2023). In educational action research, rigour refers to the systematic and transparent alignment of inquiry, data collection, and reflection to ensure findings are credible, trustworthy and meaningful in both theory and practice (McNiff and Whitehead, 2013). However, in a self-study project, the researcher must be mindful of the tension between “relevance and rigour”, reflecting the challenge of balancing practical, meaningful outcomes with methodologically robust research (Vanassche and Kelchtermans, 2015: 518). Validity relies on “concrete examples of actual practices, fully elaborated so that members of a relevant research community can judge for themselves their ‘trustworthiness’ and the validity of observations, interpretations” (LaBoskey, 2002: 20). Unlike empirical research, action research does not seek replicability or generalisation. Consequently, Winter (2002) suggests that the value of qualitative studies, such as action research, lies in their authenticity. Research has authenticity when “it gives direct expression to the genuine voice, which really belongs to those whose life-worlds are being described” (Winter, 2002: 146). As part of my research, I used social validity to subject my claims to the critical scrutiny of others. Social validity is evident when it is demonstrated that research is

comprehensible, truthful, authentic and appropriate (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010). McNiff and Whitehead (2009) also note that reflection and reflexivity must be evident for action research to be valid.

3.7.1 Triangulation of data

Triangulation in qualitative research involves cross-checking work from multiple perspectives or data sources to validate findings and enhance the reliability of the research (Cohen et al., 2018; Glenn et al., 2023; Sullivan et al., 2016). Sullivan et al. (2016) suggest that incorporating the opinion of others, such as critical friends, colleagues, or peers, assists in the triangulation of data as it adds a variety of perspectives. This study employed methodological triangulation by collecting data from multiple sources, including my reflective journal, pupil surveys, children's reflection journals, observations and work from critical friends. This multi-source approach enhances reliability, reduces bias and provides a comprehensive way of investigating my research question. The role of triangulation is crucial in Living Theory research, as it helps mitigate personal bias and subjectivity by including 'others not directly involved in the research' (McDonagh et al., 2019: 148).

A key aspect of Living Theory research which forms the basis for EAR is that "you share your thinking with one or more colleagues from the outset and invite critique" (McDonagh et al., 2019: 73). As a result, critical friends were selected to "provide support" and "constructively challenge and critique" my claims to knowledge (Sullivan et al., 2016: 27). These critical friends included colleagues in my school, other students undertaking the M. Ed. programme and two experienced teachers who are not in my school. These critical friends questioned, critiqued and advised me during the intervention and data analysis process, allowing me to see my practice through "new eyes" (Sullivan et al., 2016: 53).

I also utilised a validation group as part of my research. A validation group is a group of knowledgeable people who “may pick holes in your research and give you a hard time questioning every assumption you might make” (Sullivan et al. 2016: 103). I established a validation group to “give critical feedback ... about the validity of knowledge claims” (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010: 197). Before commencing the research, I explained the purpose and focus of the study to members of the validation group. I met with the validation group between cycle one and cycle two to discuss emerging findings and plan for cycle two. Following the conclusion of cycle two and my data analysis, claims to knowledge that emerged during the research were discussed so the validation group could test the “validity of those claims” (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010: 47), as I aim to show that my research is comprehensible, truthful, authentic and appropriate.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter outlines my justification for choosing EAR as my research paradigm and its underlying principles that helped guide my work. I described my intervention, outlined its structure and timeline. I discussed and justified the data collection instruments used and acknowledged some of the ethical issues that I was mindful of during the research process. Finally, I outlined Braun and Clarke’s (2021) reflexive thematic analysis and explained how I applied the approach while analysing the data generated throughout my study to identify the five emerging themes discussed in Chapter 4. Finally, I explained how I ensured that my research was valid and trustworthy.

Chapter 4: Findings and discussion

4.1 Introduction

The findings of this research offer insight into how reflective practice can enhance teaching and shape a more student-centred approach to PE. The findings are presented in five key themes: Reflection as a catalyst for student voice and pedagogical change in PE, Student reflection as an assessment tool, The planned and the unplanned benefits of reflection, The need to scaffold children's learning, and The 'Goldilocks Zone' for student reflection. Each theme is supported by evidence from student responses and my own critical reflections.

4.2 Reflection as a catalyst for student voice and pedagogical change in PE

Student reflection plays a vital role in eliciting children's input and accessing their thoughts and feedback in PE (Howley and O'Sullivan, 2021). By taking time to reflect in PE, children are given the opportunity to make sense of their past experiences, understand their current situation and inform their future experiences. Although student voice was not the primary focus of the research, the role that student reflections played in empowering the voices of my students and the subsequent influence this had on my teaching cannot be overlooked.

From the beginning of the project, I enlisted student reflection to assess my students' knowledge, access their voices, gain insight into their preferences and allow them to make sense of their experiences. Before the lesson, the children would also set goals in alignment with the learning objectives. During the lessons, they would engage in reflective activities, such as self- or peer assessment, reflective questioning, or discussions. After each lesson, children would complete a reflective activity such as a reflective journal entry, an exit ticket to reflect on their experience, or they would be invited to share their thoughts in whole-class or small-group discussions. These reflections offered valuable insights into the children's

experiences of lessons and highlighted what was important to them in PE. Several themes, such as the desire for fairness, their likes and dislikes, and suggestions for improving the lessons, were especially prominent in the children's reflections. For example, the children's desire for fairness in PE reflections quickly became evident. For example, the question "What makes PE meaningful to you?" generated the responses shown in Figure 4.1 and demonstrated the children's desire for fairness and inclusivity.

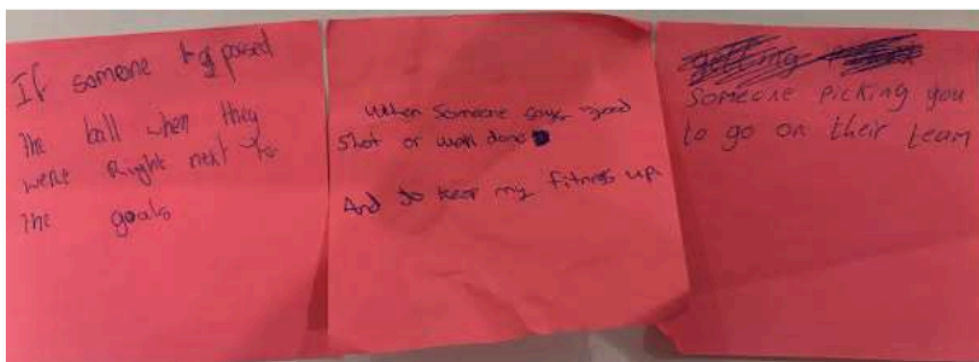


Figure 4.1: Exit ticket responses: What makes PE meaningful to you?

The children also expressed frustration about teams being unfair and the challenges of games when certain team members didn't participate fully. For example, in the pre-intervention survey, Conor (pseudonyms used for all children's names) stated that "Sometimes teams can be unequal causing the action to be on one other side, so you are unable to play" (Student Survey, 27th January 2025) while another child stated that a problem they noticed with PE was "when I'm put with people who won't play and just stand there talking with their friends" (Marty Student Survey, 27th January 2025).

A common theme in the children's reflection was the importance of working with their friends, echoing prior research (Beni et al., 2019; Ní Chróinín et al., 2021). For instance,

after a gymnastics lesson, Gary shared that “the thing that I found fun was the poses because it was really funny watching everyone fall and trip” (Student Reflection, 28th January 2025). Similarly, Alannah felt that “PE is fun because it is fun to play with my friends” (Student Reflection, 7th February 2025). When asked how PE lessons could be improved, there was a consensus that children wanted the opportunity to choose who they worked with, typified by replies such as, “Let us work with whoever we want” (Áine, Student Exit Ticket, 28th January 2025). In response to the prompt “What changes would you like to see in PE lessons?”, Michael responded, “Being able to pick our own teams” (Student Reflection, 7th February 2025). Based on this feedback, I increased opportunities for the children to choose with whom they worked during lessons, in an attempt to enhance their sense of ownership over their learning. In line with democratic pedagogies that support an MPE approach, I also asked the children to plan and deliver the warm-up activity for PE lessons. This was a task the children relished, as evidenced by the level of detail they put into the planning. An example of a student warm-up plan can be seen in Figure 4.2

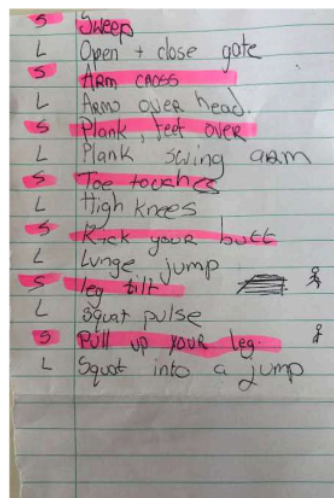


Figure 4.2: Example of student warm-up plan (Shannon and Eimear, 28th of February 2025)

The children also used the reflections to share aspects of lessons that they disliked, particularly in terms of the activities chosen, groupings and engagement with the activities. Shannon noted that although she loves playing GAA, “it is just a bit annoying how we mostly just do that for PE” (Student Survey, 27th January 2025), while Gary stated after a gymnastics lesson in the hall that he “would’ve preferred if we went outside.” (Student Reflection, 14th February 2025). Student reflection allowed the children to share their likes and dislikes, as well as their understandings and perceptions of the different dynamics at play in PE lessons.

As the children saw that they were being listened to, they suggested additional ways to modify PE lessons, often based on the content being covered in those lessons. Game suggestions were common and children frequently approached me before or after lessons with their ideas or requests. For example, one child suggested doing a “game like chaos tag to improve our running and dodgeball to improve our throwing” (Áine, Student Reflection, 28th March 2025). Providing an opportunity for the children to reflect after lessons helped them to think about how they would change/modify the lesson to match their needs. After a lesson on running, Michael said, “I really liked this lesson, but I would have liked to race the other group” (Student Reflection, 21st March 2025). As the project progressed, children began to make suggestions about how their voices could be heard, with Ciarán suggesting that we “Do a vote for what type of PE you want to do” (Student Survey, 12th March 2025). In line with Fielding’s (2001) research, the children’s growing willingness to contribute demonstrates that when students are given genuine opportunities to influence their learning, they are not only capable of doing so but also become active co-constructors of the learning environment.

While written reflections provided the children with an opportunity to share their voices, these reflections also proved helpful in recording their thoughts. Having the children's ideas on paper was valuable as I could revisit the reflections while planning and subsequently incorporate their voices and suggestions into future lessons. Before this project, student input was typically informal and undocumented, making it difficult to translate into actionable changes. I discussed this with a critical friend who noted,

"The children say so many things to you during the day that much of it gets lost in the wash ... and even if you do ask the children for oral feedback, you are probably going to only hear from the same 5 or 6 children. At least with some sort of written feedback, each child has to give some sort of opinion." (TRJ, 30 March 2025).

By modifying my lessons based on the students' feedback, they were able to see that their reflections were impacting what was happening in the classroom.

Mirroring the work of Philpot et al. (2024), the ongoing dialogue between the children and I helped them to feel a sense of ownership over their learning. As the cycles continued, I noticed that the students' "engagement increased as the children feel they have a sense of ownership over the project" and there was "a sense of dialogue within this project that does not necessarily shine through in other aspects of my teaching" (TRJ, 7th April 2025). By the end of the process, the children were even suggesting ways to modify the reflective activities to better suit their needs: "If we talked about it more or did a show of hands" (Megan Student Survey, 7th May 2025) and "If we could pick how to reflect, like two stars and a wish or drawing" (Eimear Student Survey, 7th May 2025). Ensuring that the children are involved and their voices are heard in the classroom is emphasised as part of the Wellbeing Curriculum (NCCA, 2024: 39) as it states that teachers should look to ensure students' "voices contribute

meaningfully to shaping inclusive and engaging learning, teaching and assessment experiences.” This understanding empowers the child's voice, informs future movement experiences and fosters a continuous improvement mindset.

The results reflected recent literature that suggests that reflection played a crucial role in supporting students, not only as a feedback mechanism but also as a cornerstone for authentic student voice and engagement (Cardiff et al., 2024). By embedding reflective practices into PE, the children were enabled to share their opinions and preferences, allowing me to adapt and design lessons that were more inclusive and personally meaningful to students. When students saw that their feedback directly influenced lessons, such as allowing them to choose teams or activities, they became more engaged and motivated. This aligns with Rudduck and McIntyre's (2007) view that authentic student voice occurs when feedback is acted upon. Furthermore, the use of varied reflective methods, such as journals and exit tickets, ensured that every student's voice was heard, promoting inclusivity and ensuring that quieter students were not overlooked. Cardiff et al. (2024) argue that reflection is an essential component of student voice pedagogies and research suggests that student reflection may also provide a means for teachers to capture student voice and use it as a means of informing their teaching (Howley and O'Sullivan, 2021).

Embedding structured reflection in PE transformed student voice from occasional feedback into genuine co-construction of learning, leading to more inclusive, engaging and responsive lessons. By acting on students' input and capturing it through varied methods, the process strengthened teacher–student partnerships and ensured that every child's perspective was valued. This approach not only enhanced lesson quality and student ownership but also

MJ Moran - 18374981

created a sustainable model for authentic student voice in PE, with clear potential to be applied across the wider PSC.

4.3 Student reflection as an assessment tool

Formative assessment is central to responsive teaching and student learning (Black and Wiliam, 1998; Moura et al., 2020). Student reflection, when used as a formative assessment tool, can help teachers to refine and adapt their instructional practices to better meet the needs of their students (Boud et al., 2014). Aarskog (2020) highlights the connection that exists between assessment and reflective experiences in the context of PE, suggesting that students' reflections can also act as a form of self-assessment. Additionally, reflection serves as a self-assessment tool for children as they consider their performance and learning during lessons. Throughout this intervention, student reflection functioned both as a form of formative assessment and a feedback tool for me as a teacher, while also serving as a means of self-assessment for the children. By analysing the children's reflections, I could gauge their understanding of the lesson content, track their emotional engagement and assess the effectiveness of my teaching strategies.

The children's written and verbal responses to reflective activities enabled me to assess their understanding of the lesson's learning intentions. Following an Athletics lesson, during which we focused on high jump technique, one child identified how you have to "lift your body and leg over the bar, because most people will jump straight over it. If you know how to jump over it, you will jump much higher" (Ciarán Student Reflection 30th April 2025). This reflection allowed me to see that the children understood that running head-on at the high jump was an inefficient way to perform their jump and that a better technique enabled them to jump higher. Similarly, following a lesson on hurdling, another student

MJ Moran - 18374981

reflected: “Maybe the hurdles should be closer together. It was harder to use the same lead leg when the distance was longer” (Amy Student Reflection, 4th April 2025). This reflection was valuable in demonstrating the student’s learning and illustrating her developing understanding of hurdling technique. Amy clearly understood the importance of maintaining a consistent lead leg while hurdling, a key teaching point from the lesson. As such, I was able to assess that Amy understood the lesson’s learning intentions. Student reflections also informed my instructional choices. Amy’s reflection, for example, highlighted that the extended hurdle spacing I introduced as a challenge had made the task inaccessible for this student. As a result, when we revisited hurdling at the end of the athletics unit, I provided three different lanes with the hurdles at varying distances in each lane. The children could then select their level of challenge.

When I reflected on my practice before the intervention, I began to realise that the children themselves had little say in what assessment looked like in PE. At the start of the project, I noted, “I might not like what I see when I hold the mirror up to my own teaching” (TRJ, 6th January 2025). After a few lessons, I realised my fears were genuine, as it became apparent that the assessment I had been doing in PE prior to the intervention was incidental and relied heavily on teacher observation. I realised that “asking the student to self-assess and reflect on their work in PE feels like an entirely new concept to me” (TRJ, 14th February). As a result, I looked to provide more opportunities for the children to engage in self-assessment during cycle two. This included an increased emphasis on self-assessment checklists, reflective questioning prompts and further opportunities for students to set personal goals before lessons and review their progress afterwards. By involving the children in the assessment process, “the importance of the children having input was really driven home to me” (TRJ, 7th April 2025). The children embraced the opportunity to be involved in

assessment in PE and their reflections highlighted their strengths and areas for improvement. Following an Athletics lesson in which the focus was on the skill of throwing, Conor noted how his “accuracy has improved a lot and my throwing technique” (Student Reflection, 21st March 2025). Similarly, when asked to focus on team dynamics within another lesson, Alannah confidently stated that the best thing about the lesson “was the way we did everything together and got to do different things” (Student Reflection, 7th February 2025). Figure 4.3 illustrates Exit Ticket responses to the question “Identify one thing that you improved upon in today’s lesson?”

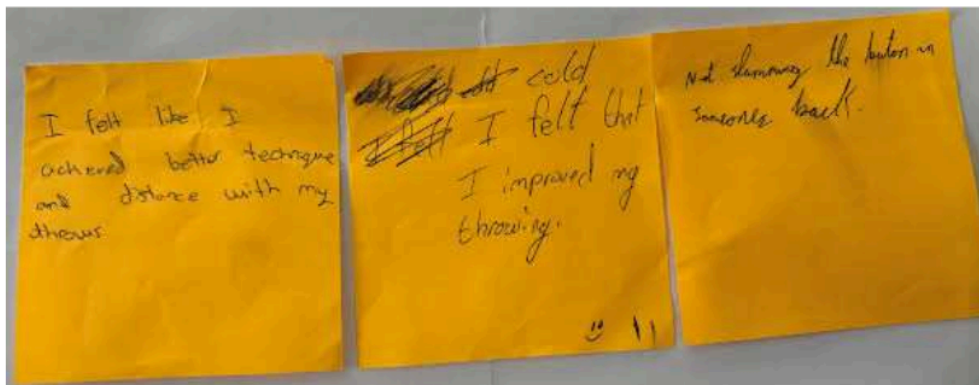


Figure 4.3: Exit ticket responses: Identify one thing that you improved upon in today’s lesson?

Additionally, the children were able to identify areas of difficulty or a need for improvement, with Stephanie noting that the biggest challenge when working with others in a Gymnastics lesson “was finding out what different people could do for tumbles.” (Student Reflection, 7th February 2025). Post-lesson reflections also revealed the children’s awareness of power imbalances in lessons, with one group identifying that one area for improvement was

“different people taking charge at different times” (TRJ, 7th February 2025). This prompted a discussion on how to overcome this issue, with some of the children suggesting that assigning roles before beginning an activity may lead to a more equitable workload. Student reflections, therefore, proved invaluable as a method of self-assessment, supporting children in identifying their strengths and challenges, and prompting discussion on the nuances of collaborative problem-solving, equitable participation and the social dynamics that influence both individual progress and group success in PE.

The role played by reflective assessment practices in the holistic development of children has recently been emphasised in the Wellbeing Curriculum (NCCA, 2024). The PSC (NCCA, 1999b) states that teachers should use reflection to increase student involvement in the assessment process. However, research notes that in practice, teachers often tell students what to do instead of initiating student reflection about what they could try differently or improve upon (Aarskog, 2020). There is a need to teach children how to assess reflectively, not simply just involving them in the assessment process (Aarskog, 2020). In this research, the children pointed to goal setting as being the self-assessment mechanism that helped them improve during PE lessons. Iannucci and Parker (2022) note that involving children in the design and modification of activities helps develop their agency and enables them to further direct their learning, echoing earlier findings on the importance of curriculum negotiation in PE (Enright and O’Sullivan, 2010). Encouraging them to take ownership of their learning and helping them reflect on their strengths and areas for growth helped foster independence and motivation (Andrade, 2010). Incorporating student reflection as a formative assessment tool transformed my evaluation of PE learning. It allowed me to move beyond surface-level observations and gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives held by children. These insights guided my instructional decisions, creating a more inclusive environment where

children's thinking was acknowledged and acted upon. It also provided a form to involve the children in the assessment process, allowing them to self-assess their learning and identify areas where they had done well in the lesson.

4.4 The planned and unplanned benefits of reflection

Reflection in PE has been shown to play a role in enacting student voice pedagogies (Cardiff et al., 2024), curriculum negotiation (Enright and O'Sullivan, 2010) and helping children to make sense of and value their PE experiences (Fletcher and Ní Chróinín, 2021). While my intention was to use reflection to help students improve their skills in PE and identify ways in which they could improve, other unplanned benefits, such as the children's growing awareness of social dynamics, were also captured and developed during the students' reflections.

The children themselves gradually came to appreciate the benefits which stemmed from reflecting in PE. At the end of the project, the children were asked to provide examples of how reflection had helped them improve during the project. Several children pointed to goal-setting as a key factor in their improvement. For example, Figures 4.4 and 4.5 show how children listed their learning goals prior to the lesson, before returning to the goal and stating how it helped support them during the lesson.

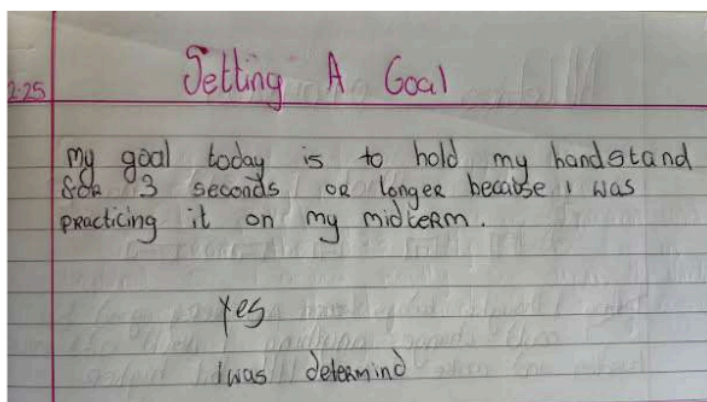


Figure 4.4: Example of a goal set by Shannon

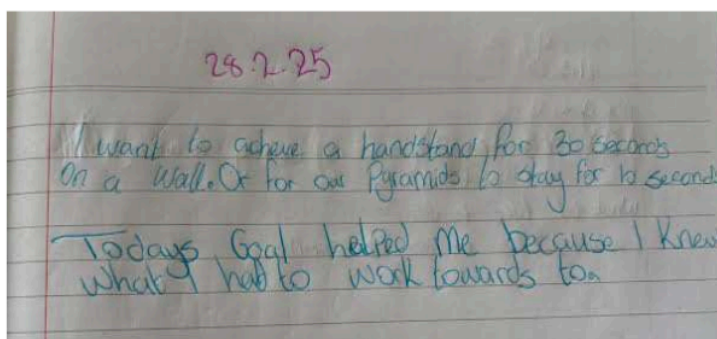


Figure 4.5: Examples of a goal set by Stephanie

Áine also noted how, “Setting goals also sets determination, not just for me, for many people” (Student Survey, 7th May 2025). Similarly, Stephanie pointed out that “reflection helped me try harder in PE because I knew I had a goal to work towards” (Student Reflection, 7th May 2025). Others noted how reflection helped give them perspective on their strengths and abilities. Gary stated that reflection helped because “I would know what I would need to improve and what I’m already happy with” (Student Survey, 7th May 2025). These statements were echoed by Conor, who said, “Reflection helped me realise flaws to improve on and the things I am doing well and let me refine those skills” (Student Survey,

7th May 2025). These responses suggest that while I, as the teacher, recognised the value of reflection in PE, the children also acknowledged and appreciated its benefits.

While reflection is often associated with planned written activities in PE, unplanned, oral reflections also proved invaluable in my classroom. During cycle two, when teaching an athletics lesson on continuous running, I asked the children to pair up with someone of a similar fitness level. Instead, most grouped with friends, leading to mismatched pace levels. This resulted in frustration, as evidenced by comments such as, “Come on, we’re not meeting at the cone,” and “Slow down, you’re faster than me” (TRJ, 9th April 2025). While I had not planned for a discussion at this point in this lesson, we paused for a group discussion on appropriate challenges and the consequences of mismatched groupings. Students shared thoughtful insights: “One child identified that ‘people challenging themselves at their own level’ is very important in any activity and another suggested that ‘sometimes we are influenced by what our friends do’” (TRJ 9th April 2025). Following this discussion, we moved on to a high jump activity, in which children were invited to choose the height at which they practised. I observed that “most children challenged themselves at the level I would have selected if I were grouping the children based on ability”. Without the impromptu discussion and whole group reflection in the middle of the lesson, “I’m not sure the children would have pitched themselves at the correct level” (TRJ, 9th April 2025). This demonstrates the value of a teacher maintaining a reflective disposition, as recommended by Zeichner and Liston (2014) and seeking to identify moments that may provide opportunities for reflection throughout PE lessons, as sometimes the moments that require reflection will arise in organic situations during the lessons.

While the majority of the reflective tasks focused on the children's physical learning and their experience of PE, post-lesson discussion and written reflections also supported the children's learning and awareness of issues that went beyond what was being explicitly taught in the lessons. For example, following a lesson on gymnastics, I noted "that Mary and Thomas were often not included in group/ pair activities, so I have been consciously saying to make sure everybody is included in group activities" (TRJ 4th April 2025). While I wanted to respect the children's wishes to select their own groups and be faithful to the democratic pedagogical principle of MPE (Fletcher and Ní Chróinín, 2021), I had to intervene to ensure that all children were included in a group.

"When Shannon asked me if she could go in a group of four, I had to say no to ensure everybody would be included. At this point, Shannon noticed that Mary had no group and asked her to join her group. I was impressed that Shannon noticed that Mary was not in a group, but it made for an uncomfortable moment in the lesson." (TRJ, 4th April 2025).

After the lesson, I engaged the class in a discussion about ensuring nobody was left out when the children were selecting groups. Shannon's reflection on the social dynamics at play in the class was evident in a later discussion on group work, where she noted that, "You [the teacher] always say, 'make sure no one is left out' before we pick our groups" (TRJ, 9th April 2025). It was clear that Shannon had thought about the intricacies of self-selected grouping in the class. Shannon is a popular student with lots of friends and would never have to worry about being left out of a group. However, discussion and reflection helped her to realise that other children in the class may not share that experience. After this discussion, I noticed that the class as a whole became better at ensuring everybody was included during group activities, not just in PE but in all areas. I noted that when the children were asked to self-select groups,

“[They] still gravitate towards their friends, but it is clear that they are more aware of the children who don’t have a group of friends to join with and they are going out of their way to ask these children to join their groups. It is not perfect, but I have had to intervene less to ensure everybody is in a group” (TRJ, 12th May 2025).

While not all the children may have had Shannon’s sense of empathy, it was clear that engaging the children in reflection at least made them conscious of the social dynamics at play in the class and led to a situation where the children who may have typically been on the margins were included in a more natural way than the teacher having to intervene.

The findings demonstrate that reflection in PE generated both planned and unplanned benefits. It allowed me to access the students’ voices, providing valuable insights into their understanding, progress and experiences, while functioning as a formative assessment tool that informed my instructional decisions (Black and Wiliam, 1998; Moura et al., 2020). Beyond these intended outcomes, reflection also cultivated social awareness and empathy among students, encouraging them to consider not only their own performance but also the perspectives and needs of their peers. By prompting critical thinking about both individual and group dynamics, reflection became a powerful learning process that extended far beyond physical outcomes (Bailey et al., 2009). This aligns with Enright and O’Sullivan’s (2010) assertion that student-centred pedagogies in PE, particularly those that integrate reflective practice, can foster emotional intelligence, cooperation and interpersonal understanding. In my practice, reflection ultimately bridged the gap between my teaching values and the realities of the classroom, creating space for both teachers and students to adapt in real-time and co-construct a more inclusive and responsive PE environment.

4.5 The need for scaffolding in developing reflective competency in PE

Reflection in PE has been shown to support students in making connections between their experiences in PE and broader social contexts (Beni et al., 2022) and develop their social and teamwork skills (Bjørke and Moen, 2022). However, Bjørke and Quennerstedt (2023) argue that children need to learn to reflect before they can apply it in educational contexts and recent research has highlighted the importance of supporting primary-aged children in engaging in reflective tasks to ensure their ability to engage with tasks (Cardiff et al., 2024).

Lack of familiarity with reflection emerged as a barrier early in the process. In the pre-intervention survey, 10 of the 15 students surveyed stated that they were unsure of what reflection entailed in this context. This unfamiliarity with reflection was also noted by the children in the end-of-intervention survey. They acknowledged that they sometimes found it difficult to reflect: “When we first did it and I didn’t really understand it (reflection)” (Amy Student Survey, 7th May 2025). One child noted that reflection was difficult at the beginning, “when I didn’t know how to explain it” (Student Survey, 7th May 2025). In addition, the children identified an inability to know what to write or how to express themselves in their reflections as a challenge. In response to a survey question before beginning cycle two, Stephanie stated, “I don’t know how to word what I want to say in the copy” (Stephanie Student Survey, 12th March 2025). This sentiment was echoed by Alannah, who said, “I don’t know what to say.” (Student Survey, 12th March 2025). This suggested that the children needed more support when it came to writing their reflections, both in terms of understanding the purpose and process of reflections and in putting their thoughts into words.

I quickly realised that reflection is a skill that develops over time and is something in which I, as the teacher, played an essential role in supporting. As younger children often lack

the necessary language and reflective competencies to meaningfully engage in reflective tasks, scaffolding is critical (Cardiff et al., 2024; Moon, 2004). To support my students' understanding of the process of reflection, I taught a lesson on the concept of MPE early in cycle one. This served as an important starting point for the class's shared language of meaningfulness (Fletcher and Ní Chróinín, 2021). In addition, I taught a lesson on reflective writing, with a particular emphasis on the concept of reflective journaling. At various points, the ideas and language covered in these lessons were revisited. A lesson on goal setting was also included mid-way through cycle one. To support the children as they engaged in reflection, I provided prompts and clarification to facilitate their participation in reflective tasks. For example, I would give the children thinking time before they began reflective tasks and ask children to share their thinking before completing reflective tasks. As the children completed reflective tasks, I would confer with them to help them articulate their thinking. I also completed reflective tasks alongside the children, shared excerpts from my reflections and modelled the process. This provided concrete examples of reflective thinking while demystifying the task.

While the quality of the children's responses to reflective activities improved throughout the research cycle, there were still specific tasks that they struggled with. When I questioned the children on what they would change about a particular lesson at the midpoint of cycle two, I noted that "several children indicated that they could not think of anything they would change." Rather than interpreting this as my teaching being perfect, I acknowledged that "pupils are rarely asked to think in such a way" (TRJ, 4 April 2025). This particular activity was noteworthy as Stephanie referred back to it in the end-of-intervention survey when I asked if there were any reflective activities that the children found difficult. She said, "Yes, when you asked what we would change about the lesson" (Student Survey,

7th May 2025). This suggests that while children may have felt comfortable in sharing their likes and dislikes of the lesson, they were not yet thinking deeply about how they could make changes in PE to better match their preferences.

Furthermore, some children may have been reluctant to share honest feedback with me as the teacher. I noted how perhaps “the children were worried that if they wrote something negative, it was an implied criticism of my teaching” (TRJ, 4th April 2025). As Rodgers (2018) notes, students often try to say what they think the teacher wants to hear and asking the children to critique a lesson was not the norm in my class. As this occurred at the end of cycle two, I did not have the opportunity to scaffold the children through this issue. However, if I were to scaffold the children, I would look to share my own reflections with the children, where I pointed out areas in lessons I could have improved upon. This would hopefully illustrate that my lessons are not perfect and allow the children to critique the lessons in an open and honest way.

Based on these findings, starting with a highly structured and scaffolded approach to reflection may be necessary before transitioning to more student-led reflection methods. Moving from guided to independent, a tiered or gradual-release model of reflection may help students internalise reflective habits while avoiding cognitive overload and supporting equitable participation in reflection (Pearson and Gallagher, 1983). As Zelazo (2004) suggests, children’s developmental age and language ability may limit their full engagement with reflective activities, so the teacher must choose activities that reflect this. Overall, this experience underscored the importance of treating reflection not as a one-off activity, but as a developmental process. There was a need to scaffold the children as they learned to reflect on their learning. This idea is reflected in the Wellbeing Curriculum

(NCCA, 2024: 34), which states that teachers should be “scaffolding reflection opportunities for children.” Thus, a more sustained and intentional focus on building reflective capacity is essential to integrate student reflection into PE lessons meaningfully.

4.6 Finding the ‘Goldilocks zone’ for reflection

While research shows that children can become frustrated if reflection is overused (Howley, 2022), there is limited practical guidance for teachers on how to implement student reflection in PE lessons in a meaningful way. In attempting to implement an MPE approach, teachers often struggle to provide the time and space for children to reflect and make sense of their experiences (Beni et al., 2022). While there is a recognition that children need to “talk and listen” in PE before they “walk and move” (Howley, 2022: 40), children expect to be engaged in physical activity during the majority of PE time. At the start of my intervention, I struggled to include reflection in a way that truly benefited the children’s learning. Consequently, there was a need to find a balance between the level of physical activity and reflective tasks during the research.

The challenge of finding the correct frequency of reflection was something that troubled me before the intervention had begun. As I planned my lessons, I noted that “I do not want to create a situation where students feel burdened or encumbered by reflection as this completely defeats the purpose of MPE” (TRJ, 6th January 2025). Despite my awareness of this pre-intervention issue, I initially struggled to integrate reflection into the lessons in a meaningful way. I observed that “The reflective activities became an unnecessary addendum to the lesson” (TRJ, 28th January 2025) and I was perhaps too ambitious, as I “probably jumped in at the deep end ... and the children probably felt I was adding unnecessary workload onto them” (TRJ, 28th March 2025). This led to the realisation that reflection must

MJ Moran - 18374981

be situated within a wider pedagogical purpose, to support learning, rather than functioning as a separate or performative element within the lesson.

This was reflected in my experience during the early lessons, particularly with written reflection, which often felt disjointed from the flow of the lesson. Following our first PE lesson in cycle one, I noted that “some of the reflective activities felt gratuitous in the context of the lesson” (TRJ, 28th January 2025). The children also reported a disconnect between PE lessons and written reflections. When talking to the children at the end of cycle one, Conor indicated that “the reflection would be a bit generic, or a bit vague, which can be a bit difficult or just too simple, and there wouldn't be a lot of reflection to do” (Student Survey, 7th May 2025). Others noted that the written activities could sometimes feel onerous, with one child commenting, “After PE, I'm too tired to write” (Cameron Student Survey, 21st March 2025). This illustrated a broader issue in cycle one, where reflective activities were being shoehorned into lessons rather than emerging organically.

After reviewing the data generated and discussing my thoughts and feelings with critical friends, I entered cycle two of the action research, reminding myself that “Reflective practices are just a portion of the MPE pie” (TRJ, 6th March 2025). I realised that I needed to “ensure reflective activities help make PE more meaningful for the children” (TRJ, 7th March 2025) and situate them within the broader elements of MPE (such as social interaction, fun, personal relevance, challenge, motor competence) (Beni et al., 2017). I subsequently revised the reflective activities to be more targeted, flexible and relevant to the children. I shifted the focus from an evaluative process to one in which I supported and empowered students to reflect on and make sense of their learning experiences. In practice, this meant integrating three core reflective tasks during lessons: (1) Before lessons, I would

share the outline of the plan and learning intentions for the lesson, while providing time for the children to set personal goals. (2) During lessons, I would use a variety of reflective methods, such as discussion, self-/peer-assessment and questioning. I also sought unplanned reflective opportunities (for example, engaging the children in reflective discussions when the opportunity arose) to facilitate meaningful reflection and deeper thinking. (3) After lessons, I would facilitate a concluding reflection through exit tickets, journalling, or class discussions. This structure helped avoid overburdening students while also embedding reflection in a meaningful way. By being attentive, I was able to engage the children in a “just right amount of reflection” (TRJ, 30th April 2025).

Although there are many benefits associated with reflection in PE, it has also been noted that the overuse of reflection can have a negative impact on children’s experiences in PE (Howley, 2022). Echoing these findings, the children in my class grew tired of reflective activities when they were overused at the beginning of cycle one. However, the alternative of not including any reflection means that the children are missing out on opportunities to make sense of their experiences in PE. Therefore, I propose that a ‘Goldilocks zone’ of reflection exists. As noted in the findings, when I focused too much on including reflection, the flow of the lesson was interrupted and the reflection became less relevant to the children. Brookfield (2017) notes that reflection loses its value if it becomes overly formalised or imposed, leading learners to disengage or ‘perform’ reflection without genuinely fostering inclusive practices. Howley (2022) recommends biweekly written reflections to prevent the children from becoming fed up with reflection. Therefore, teachers must aim to find this ‘Goldilocks zone’ in their classroom when using reflective pedagogies. In this way, reflection becomes a means of promoting ownership and enhancing student voice, suggesting that small and consistent reflection opportunities are more effective for both students and teachers. This

shift in approach enhanced the relevance and accessibility of reflection for all students, reinforcing its importance as a tool for deeper engagement with their learning. Ultimately, this experience taught me that the quality of reflection lies not in its frequency but in its timing, relevance and alignment with student needs. A flexible and responsive approach to reflective practice honours student voice while sustaining enjoyment and motivation in PE.

4.7 Conclusion

The findings of this project highlight the value of student reflection as both a pedagogical tool and a tool to facilitate student voice in PE. By integrating structured, varied and purposeful reflection into my lessons, I was able to access authentic student insights that had previously gone unheard. These reflections not only informed my instructional decisions but also fostered greater student ownership, agency and engagement. When scaffolded appropriately, reflection can serve as a formative assessment tool for both teachers and students, promoting metacognition, skill development and emotional awareness. However, implementation must be carefully balanced. Too little reflection can stifle valuable insights, while too much can overwhelm students and disrupt the flow of physical activity. Notably, the project revealed the need for flexibility and responsiveness in attempting to integrate student reflection as part of an MPE approach. These five themes have implications for my future practice and have the potential to inform broader PE pedagogy, guiding the development of student reflection as part of an MPE. The implications and recommendations based on these themes are outlined in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the implications of the study for my personal practice, curriculum development and policy, as well as the broader field of PE pedagogy. It also outlines the limitations of the study, presents recommendations based on the findings and suggests directions for future research. Finally, it describes the steps taken to disseminate the study and concludes with a reflection on its overall significance.

5.2 Implications for my practice

While my Bachelor of Education degree, completed through the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, introduced me to the importance of reflective practice, this research has deepened my understanding of authentic reflection, moving beyond superficial analysis to genuine, evidence-based self-examination (Schön, 1983; Brookfield, 2017). I have come to appreciate this authentic reflection, which contributes to meaningful professional development.

Prior to undertaking this research, I believed that I was a reflective practitioner; however, after holding a true mirror up to my practice, I quickly realised that my reflection rarely went beyond surface-level analysis. Upon further examination of my teaching, I realised that I was the “Living Contradiction” (Whitehead, 2018) as my teaching did not reflect the values I claimed to hold. Critical reflection enabled me to explore my core values, refine my teaching strategies and make informed decisions about improving student learning. By incorporating multiple perspectives and engaging in action research, I have cultivated my reflective practice and made evidence-based adjustments to my teaching. I now recognise reflection not simply as an add-on, but as an integral pedagogical tool that enhances both

MJ Moran - 18374981

teaching and learning. By engaging in ongoing critical reflection of my practice, I aim to continue to critically examine my practice to ensure that I am living closely to my values.

In terms of implications for my teaching of PE, I will continue to utilise an MPE approach as I look to provide children with meaningful experiences that will encourage life-long engagement in physical activity. I believe that when done correctly, incorporating student reflection into PE lessons can have a profound impact on the children's learning and enable them to see the value of PE and lifelong physical activity.

5.3 Implications for curriculum and policy development

When creating curricula, teachers' values and current practices should be a significant consideration, and the perspectives of practising teachers and schools should be represented meaningfully in curriculum design (Whitehead, 2018). As such, I believe that my research raises several points for consideration as the new Wellbeing Curriculum is rolled out in the coming years.

The new Wellbeing Curriculum (NCCA, 2024) emphasises providing children with meaningful experiences in PE. This aligns with the MPE approach, which is well-positioned for Irish teachers to utilise, as it is designed to integrate with local curricula (Fletcher et al., 2021). While MPE does not necessarily offer a step-by-step approach for teachers looking to prioritise meaningful experiences in PE, democratic and reflective pedagogies may help provide a starting point for these teachers. Although an MPE approach is being integrated into ITE programmes (Fletcher et al., 2024), this form of teaching remains somewhat uncharted territory as teachers have not been trained to teach for meaning (Kretchmar, 2008).

MJ Moran - 18374981

Consequently, upskilling will need to be provided to practising teachers who may not be familiar with the approach.

I recommend that professional development opportunities be provided to in-service teachers to learn about the need for the explicit teaching of reflective skills, as a reflection is included as a key pedagogical practice suggested for use in the Wellbeing Curriculum (NCCA, 2024), because although the new Curriculum mentions reflection and goal setting, my research revealed that these skills must be taught to and fostered in children. Reflection aligns closely with existing recommended approaches such as active learning, assessment for learning and democratic pedagogies (Cardiff et al., 2024; Fletcher et al., 2021) and could support teachers in moving from their current practice to the envisioned aims of the Curriculum.

5.4 Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the use of student reflection within an MPE approach, several limitations should be acknowledged to contextualise the findings and guide future research.

As this was a practitioner-led action research study, my dual role as both teacher and researcher presents potential for bias. While this insider perspective provided deep contextual understanding (Glenn et al., 2023), it also risked influencing pupil responses during reflective tasks, as students may have been inclined to provide feedback they believed I wanted to hear (Rodgers, 2018). Efforts were made to mitigate this risk through anonymous feedback opportunities and triangulation of data sources. For example, I made it clear that reflections were not graded and offered anonymous feedback at multiple points. I also created low-

pressure conditions (quiet individual writing, minimal teacher circulation) and triangulated across surveys, pupil journals, my teacher journal and observations, with critical friends to analyse emerging themes. These steps reduce, though cannot eliminate, the influence of my dual role as the teacher and researcher. This is a risk of EAR and may temper some of the positive student sentiment.

A further limitation of the study pertains to the focus of PE lessons. I chose the gymnastics and athletics strands as I believed they would complement my research. However, as the PE lessons in my school context are generally taught by external coaches who focus on the games strand, some of the children's positive responses may simply have been down to associated with engaging with previously unfamiliar strands the curriculum. This links to research by White et al. (2021), which suggests that children's perceived novelty can lead to increased motivation levels in PE lessons. This is particularly relevant, as the children could not recall doing gymnastics in school previously. It must be acknowledged that the novelty of engaging in a new strand may have influenced some of the children's positive comments towards the PE lessons.

Finally, the unique nature of any EAR project affects the transferability of the study's findings. As Baumfield et al. (2013) note, the aim of action research is for a teacher to investigate their own practice. Consequently, I was not seeking to generate generalisable findings. Indeed, McNiff and Whitehead (2011) argue that all forms of action research, by their very nature, create results that are not generalisable. The unique factors of my study, such as my school, the number of children in my class, facilities available and the social dynamics at play within the class, mean that the study's findings pertain to me and my teaching.

5.5 Recommendations

This research has shown that student reflection, when deliberately embedded within an MPE approach, can enhance both teaching and learning in the senior primary classroom. Based on my findings, I propose five recommendations both for myself, other teachers and those developing future policy. The purpose of providing these recommendations is to support teachers looking to implement student reflection as part of an MPE approach and to open opportunities for further research.

1. *Embed reflection as an iterative process*

My findings indicated that students required multiple opportunities to revisit reflective activities to develop deeper, more meaningful responses. This supports Moon's (2004) assertion that reflection is a learned skill requiring repeated, scaffolded practice. I recommend that teachers who want to use student reflection should introduce reflective strategies early in the school year and revisit them regularly, adapting activities to suit the lesson content and the developmental level of their class.

2. *Scaffold reflective skills explicitly*

A key finding of my research was that the students' reflections, particularly early reflections, were frequently superficial and constrained by limited vocabulary. Effective scaffolding, such as teacher modelling, sentence starters and structured peer dialogue, helped students articulate richer reflections and helped make these tasks more relevant to the children (Cardiff et al., 2024). Professional development opportunities should focus on equipping teachers with strategies to effectively scaffold students along this reflective journey.

3. *Maintain a balanced frequency of reflection ('The Goldilocks Zone')*

Research has shown that children get bored or frustrated when reflection is overused (Howley, 2022); however, infrequent use has the potential to limit and stifle learning. Teachers should balance the use of reflection to maximise learning without disrupting lesson flow. For example, in my research, this consisted of a structure where three reflective activities were conducted: Pre-lesson, during the lesson and post-lesson.

4. *Act on student feedback*

My findings show that reflective tasks provided pupils with an opportunity to share their voices, which in turn influenced activity selection, groupings and lesson design. Acting on this feedback and communicating changes to students reinforced the value of their contributions and enhanced ownership of learning (Beni et al., 2017; Cardiff et al., 2024).

5. *Provide targeted professional development and resources*

Given the emphasis placed on meaningful experiences in the Wellbeing curriculum, it is likely that more teachers will begin to explore an MPE approach. However, without an adequate understanding of MPE principles and reflection pedagogy, teachers may struggle to effectively embed reflection. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) activities should provide realistic learning experiences, enabling teachers to contextualise and implement new knowledge in real-world settings (Abakah, 2023). A centralised bank of high-quality reflection prompts, vocabulary resources and strand-specific activity ideas should be developed to support curriculum implementation, which may reduce the reliance on sport-specific approaches which are prevalent across the curriculum (Ní Chróinín et al., 2021). However, as shown in this research, existing support materials (PSSI Lesson Plans, Move Well, Move Often resources)

can be used alongside an MPE approach to help teachers create lessons that help provide children with meaningful experiences in PE.

5.6 Recommendations for further research

While the idea of prioritising meaning in PE is not new, an MPE approach has only been explored explicitly in the last ten years. New research continues to study pedagogies that facilitate meaningful experiences for children (e.g. Cardiff et al., 2023; Cardiff et al., 2024) and the utility of MPE in different settings (Smith et al., 2023). As this study only took place over ten weeks, there is a need for longitudinal studies to consider how student reflection can be used as part of an MPE approach. Also, as my research was conducted with 6th class children, who had the language capacity and writing ability to engage in the reflective tasks, it is necessary to investigate what changes need to be made when using student reflection with younger classes. While I proposed the ‘Goldilocks Zone’ whereby three reflective activities would be used during lessons, as part of my findings, there is a chance that this may have been unique to my class. Further research on the frequency and types of reflection in PE would assist teachers as they use student reflection to enhance the children’s experiences in PE. Continued research would add to the existing literature base and help teachers or schools who want to implement an MPE approach. While MPE might not be ‘the’ solution to problems that exist in PE, the literature suggests it offers a promising, evidence-informed contribution to addressing these challenges. As the Wellbeing Curriculum becomes embedded in practice, the next phase for MPE research must address how teachers can be supported to design and deliver experiences that are both personally meaningful and systematically reflective. By building on the growing evidence base and integrating practical strategies for reflection, future work can bridge the current gap between conceptual endorsement of meaningfulness and the everyday realities of teaching PE.

5.7 Dissemination of research

A key aspect of EAR is that findings are shared to add to the existing literature base on the chosen topic. Through this study, I aim to add to the growing literature base on MPE and student reflection in PE. Firstly, I have shared the emerging findings from my research with my fellow students in the M.Ed. programme. This thesis will also be published on the Maynooth University Mural Research Library and will be freely available to be read online. I also plan to present my research to the staff at my school in the near future. I endeavour to share my research widely in professional learning communities, peer-reviewed academic journals and through professional development centres to support current research, policy development and practices in the areas of student reflection and PE.

5.8 Conclusion

This action research study has been a journey of both professional and personal transformation. By critically examining my own practice through a reflexive lens, I uncovered tensions between my espoused values of fairness and inclusion and my actual teaching approaches in PE. Through the intervention, I embedded elements of an MPE approach, with a particular focus on fostering student reflection, to align my teaching more closely with my values.

I found that structured, scaffolded opportunities for reflection enhanced both my teaching and my students' learning. Students became more articulate in expressing what made their PE experiences meaningful, demonstrated increased empathy towards peers and developed a stronger sense of ownership over their learning. This, in turn, allowed me to

MJ Moran - 18374981

adapt lessons responsively, thereby strengthening engagement across the class and creating a style of teaching that was more reflective of my values.

Having read and analysed the literature and reflected on my own role as a teacher and researcher, I now feel more confident in advocating for MPE and reflective pedagogies as practical approaches that help enhance students' experiences of primary PE. I believe that, when implemented thoughtfully, these strategies can create inclusive, student-centred learning environments that support the aims of the Wellbeing Curriculum (NCCA, 2024). The role of the teacher as a facilitator, listener and co-learner remains critical in ensuring these pedagogies truly serve the needs and voices of all children.

Reference List

- Aarskog, E. (2020) 'No assessment, no learning': exploring student participation in assessment in Norwegian physical education (PE). *Sport, Education and Society*, 26(8), 875–888.
- Abakah, E. (2023) Teacher learning from Continuing Professional Development (CPD) participation: A sociocultural perspective. *International Journal of Educational Research Open* [online]. 4, 1-11.
- Adler, S. (1991) The Reflective Practitioner and the Curriculum of Teacher Education. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 17(2), 139–150.
- Andrade, H. (2010) *Students as the Definitive Source of Formative Assessment: Academic Self-Assessment and the Self-Regulation of Learning*. NERA Conference Proceedings 2010.
- Bailey, R., Armour, K., Kirk, D., Jess, M., Pickup, I., Sandford, R. and BERA Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy Special Interest Group. (2009) The educational benefits claimed for physical education and school sport: an academic review. *Research Papers in Education* [online]. 24(1), 1–27.
- Bassey, M. (1990) *On the Nature of Research in Education*. Nottingham: Nottingham Polytechnic.
- Baumfield, V., Hall, E. and Wall, K. (2013) *Action Research in Education: Learning Through Practitioner Enquiry* [e-book]. 2nd ed. London: SAGE Publications.
- Bednar, P., Eglín, R. and Welch, C. (2007) Contextual inquiry: a systemic support for student engagement through reflection. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Knowledge and Learning Objects* [online]. 3, 45-55.
- Beni, S., Fletcher, T. and Ni Chróinín, D. (2017) Meaningful Experiences in Physical Education and Youth Sport: A Review of the Literature. *Quest* [online]. 69(3), 291–312.

MJ Moran - 18374981

Beni, S., Ní Chróinín, D. and Fletcher, T. (2019) A focus on the *how* of meaningful physical education in primary schools. *Sport, Education and Society* [online]. 24(6), 624–637.

Beni, S., Chróinín, D. N. and Fletcher, T. (2021) ‘It’s how PE should be!’: Classroom teachers’ experiences of implementing Meaningful Physical Education. *European Physical Education Review* [online]. 27(3), 666-683.

Beni, S., Fletcher, T. and Ní Chróinín, D. (2022) It’s not a linear thing; there are a lot of intersecting circles’: Factors influencing teachers’ implementation of meaningful physical education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 117, 103806.

Beni, S., Ní Chróinín, D., Fletcher, T., Bailey, J., Cariño Fraise, L., Down, M. and Gross, K. (2023) Teachers’ sensemaking in implementation of Meaningful Physical Education. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy* [online]. 1–14.

Billups, F. D. (2021) *Qualitative data collection tools: Design, development, and applications*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Bjørke, L. and Moen, K.M. (2022) Cooperative Learning in Physical Education: A Study of Students’ Learning Journey Over 24 Lessons. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy* [online]. 25(6), 600–612.

Bjørke, L. and Quennerstedt, M. (2023) Reflecting on student reflections in physical education practice: moving beyond a theory-and-practice divide. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy* [online]. 1–14.

Bjørke, L. and Quennerstedt, M. (2024) Exploring student reflection in physical education practice. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy* [online]. 1–14.

Black, P. and Wiliam, D. (1998) Assessment and Classroom Learning. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice* [online]. 5(1), 7–74.

Boud, D. (2001) Using journal writing to enhance reflective practice. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* [online]. 2001(90), 9-18.

MJ Moran - 18374981

Boud, D., Lawson, R. and Thompson, D. G. (2014) The calibration of student judgement through self-assessment: disruptive effects of assessment patterns. *Higher Education Research & Development* [online]. 34(1), 45–59.

Bowles, R. and O’Sullivan, M. (2012) Rhetoric and reality: the role of the teacher in shaping a school sport programme. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy* [online]. 17(3), 303–316.

Braga, L., Elliott, E., Jones, E. and Bulger, S. (2015) Middle school students’ perceptions of culturally and geographically relevant content in physical education. *International Journal of Kinesiology and Sports Science*, 3(4), 62–73.

Branigan, H. E. and Donaldson, D. I. (2020) Teachers matter for metacognition: Facilitating metacognition in the primary school through teacher-pupil interactions. *Thinking skills and creativity* [online]. 38, 100718.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology* [online]. 3(2), 77-101.

Braun, V. and Clarke V. (2021) *Thematic analysis : a practical guide to understanding and doing*. London: Sage Publications.

British Educational Research Association (BERA). (2024) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*. 5th ed. London: BERA.

Brookfield, S. (2017) *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Brooks, R., Te Riele, K. and Maguire, M. (2014) *Ethics and education research*. London: SAGE.

Brownhill, S. (2021) Asking more key questions of self-reflection. *Reflective Practice* [online]. 23(2), 279–290.

Bruce, T. (2020) *Educating young children: A lifetime journey into a Froebelian approach: The selected works of Tina Bruce*. 1st ed. London: Routledge.

- Byrne, D. (2021) A worked example of Braun and Clarke's approach to reflexive thematic analysis. *Quality & Quantity* [online]. 56(3), 1391-1412.
- Cardiff, G., Ní Chróinín, D., Bowles, R., Fletcher, T. and Beni, S. (2023) 'Just let them have a say!' Students' perspective of student voice pedagogies in primary physical education. *Irish Educational Studies* [online]. 42(4), 659–676.
- Cardiff, G., Bowles, R., Beni, S., Ní Chróinín, D. and Fletcher, T. (2024) The role of reflection in the enactment of student voice pedagogies in primary physical education. *Curriculum Studies in Health and Physical Education* [online]. 1–17.
- Carr, M. (2011) Young children reflecting on their learning: teachers' conversation strategies. *Early Years* [online]. 31(3), 257–270.
- Cavilla, D. (2017) The Effects of Student Reflection on Academic Performance and Motivation. *SAGE Open* [online]. 7(3).
- Chen, A. (1998a) Meaningfulness in physical education: A description of high school students' conceptions. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education* [online]. 17, 285–306.
- Chen, A. (1998b) Perception of Boredom: Students' Resistance to a Secondary Physical Education Curriculum. *Research in Middle Level Education Quarterly* [online]. 21(2), 1–20.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2018) *Research methods in education*. 8th ed. London: Routledge.
- Coulson, D. and Harvey, M. (2012) Scaffolding student reflection for experience-based learning: a framework. *Teaching in Higher Education* [online]. 18(4), 401–413.
- Coulter, M. and Ní Chróinín, D. (2011) What is PE? *Sport, Education and Society*. 18(6), 825-841.
- Coulter, M., McGrane, B. and Woods, C. (2019) 'PE should be an integral part of each school day': parents and their children's attitudes towards primary physical education. *Education 3-13* [online]. 48(4), 429–445.

MJ Moran - 18374981

Coulter, M., Scanlon, D., MacPhail, A., O'Brien, W., Belton, S. and Woods, C. (2020) The (mis)alignment between young people's collective physical activity experience and physical education curriculum development in Ireland. *Curriculum Studies in Health and Physical Education* [online]. 11(3), 204–221.

Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) (2012) *Guidance for developing ethical research projects involving children*. Department of Children and Youth Affairs: Dublin.

Fink, A. G. G. (2024) *How to Conduct Surveys: A Step-by-Step Guide*. United States: SAGE Publications.

Dewey, J. (1933) *How we think: A restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to the educative process*. Boston, MA: D.C. Heath.

Dewey, J. (1938) *Experience and Education*. New York: Touchstone.

Dismore, H. and Bailey, R. (2010) Fun and enjoyment in physical education: young people's attitudes. *Research Papers in Education* [online]. 26(4), 499–516.

Domville, M., Watson, P. M., Richardson, D. and Graves, L. E. F. (2019) Children's perceptions of factors that influence PE enjoyment: a qualitative investigation. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy* [online]. 24(3), 207–219.

Dyson, B. P. (1995) Students' voices in two alternative elementary physical education programs. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 14, 394–407.

Dyson, B., Gordon, B., Cowan, J. and McKenzie, A. (2016) External Providers and Their Impact on Primary Physical Education in Aotearoa/New Zealand. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Health, Sport and Physical Education* [online]. 7(1), 3–19.

Ennis, C. D. (2017) Educating Students for a Lifetime of Physical Activity: Enhancing Mindfulness, Motivation, and Meaning. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport* [online]. 88(3), 241–250.

MJ Moran - 18374981

Enright, E. and O'Sullivan, M. (2010) 'Can I do it in my pyjamas?' Negotiating a physical education curriculum with teenage girls. *European Physical Education Review* [online]. 16(3), 203-222.

Fendler, L. (2003) Teacher Reflection in a Hall of Mirrors: Historical Influences and Political Reverberations. *Educational Researcher* [online]. 32(3), 16-25.

Feron, E. and Schils, T. (2020) A Randomized Field Experiment Using Self-Reflection on School Behavior to Help Students in Secondary School Reach Their Performance Potential. *Frontiers in Psychology* [online]. 11, 1356.

Fielding, M. (2001) Students as Radical Agents of Change. *Journal of Educational Change*, 2(2), 123-141.

Fletcher, T. and Ní Chróinín, D. (2021) Pedagogical principles that support the prioritisation of meaningful experiences in physical education: conceptual and practical considerations. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy* [online]. 27(5), 455-466.

Fletcher, T., Gleddie, D., Ní Chróinín, D. and Beni, S. (2021) *Meaningful Physical Education: An Approach for Teaching and Learning*. New York: Routledge.

Fletcher, T., Ní Chróinín, D., Dillon, M., Beckey, A., Bowles, R., Hamblin, D., Harrison, L. and Kitching, N. (2024) Learning about meaningful physical education in physical education teacher education: two case studies of sustained implementation. *Curriculum Studies in Health and Physical Education* [online]. 1-17.

Francis, D. (1995) The Reflective Journal: A Window to Pre-Service Teachers' Practical Knowledge. *Teacher & Teaching education*, 11, 229-241.

Freire, P. (1999) Pedagogy of the Oppressed In: Pollard, A., ed. (1999) *Readings for Reflective Teaching*. London: Continuum.

Glenn, M., Sullivan, B., Roche, C. and McDonagh, C. (2023) *Action research for the classroom: A guide to values-based research in practice*. London: Routledge.

MJ Moran - 18374981

Harcourt, D. and Conroy, H. (2011) Informed Consent: Processes and procedures in seeking partnerships with young children In: Harcourt, D., Perry, B. and Waller, T., eds.

(2011) *Researching Young Children's Perspectives: Debating the Ethics and Dilemmas of Educational Research with Children*. New York: Routledge. 38-52

Hardman, K. (2008) Physical education in schools: a global perspective. *Kinesiology* [online]. 40(1), 5-18.

Hardman, K., Murphy, C., Routen, A. and Tones, C. (2014) *Worldwide Survey of School Physical Education*. Paris: UNESCO.

Healthy Ireland. (2016) *Get Ireland Active! National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland*. Dublin: Government of Ireland.

Helm, J. H., Beneke, S. and Steinheimer, K. (1997) Documenting children's learning. *Childhood Education* [online]. 73(4), 200-205.

Hickson, H. (2011) Critical reflection: Reflecting on learning to be reflective. *Reflective Practice*, 12(6), 829–839.

Holland, K. and Haegele, J. A. (2021) Perspectives of students with disabilities toward physical education: A review update 2014–2019. *Kinesiology Review*, 10(1), 78-87.

Howley, D. and O'Sullivan, M. (2021) 'Getting better bit by bit': Exploring learners' enactments of student voice in physical education. *Curriculum Studies in Health and Physical Education* [online]. 12(1), 3–19.

Howley, D., Dyson, B., Baek, S., Fowler, J. and Shen, Y. (2022) *Opening up Neat New Things: Exploring Understandings and Experiences of Social and Emotional Learning and Meaningful Physical Education Utilizing Democratic and Reflective Pedagogies*. *International journal of environmental research and public health* [online]. 19(18), 11229.

MJ Moran - 18374981

Howley, D. (2022) Talking the Talk, Walking the Walk: Six Simple Strategies for Enacting Student Voice in Physical Education. *Strategies* [online]. 35(6), 38–40.

Iannucci, C. and Parker, M. (2022) Student Voice in Primary Physical Education: A 30-Year Scoping Review of Literature. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education* [online]. 41(3), 466-491.

Iannucci, C., van der Smee, C. and Parker, M. (2024) Teachers' Perspectives of Enacting Student Voice in Primary Physical Education. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education* [online]. 43(3), 442-450.

Jarvis, P. (1987) Meaningful and meaningless experience: Towards an analysis of learning from life. *Adult Education Quarterly (American Association for Adult and Continuing Education)* [online]. 37(3), 164-172.

Johansson, E. (2023) An Analytical Toolbox for Research on Reflection. *Quest* [online]. 75(4), 237–252.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990) *Full catastrophe living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain and illness*. New York, NY: Delacourt.

Kemmis, S. and McTaggart, R. (2000) 'Participatory action research' in Denzin, N.K. and Kemmis, S., McTaggart, R. and Nixon, R. (2014) *The Action Research Planner: Doing Critical Participatory Action Research*. Singapore: Springer.

Kinchin, G. D., Macphail, A. and Ní Chróinín, D. (2009) Pupils' and teachers' perceptions of a culminating festival within a sport education season in Irish primary schools. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy* [online]. 14(4), 391–406.

Kirk, D. and MacPhail, A. (2002) Teaching Games for Understanding and Situated Learning: Rethinking the Bunker-Thorpe Model. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education* [online]. 21(2), 177-192.

MJ Moran - 18374981

Kretchmar, R. S. (2000) Movement subcultures: Sites for meaning. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance* [online]. 71(5), 19-25.

Kretchmar, R. S. (2006) Ten more reasons for quality physical education. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance*, 77(9), 6–9.

Kretchmar, R. S. (2007) What to do with meaning? A research conundrum for the 21st century. *Quest*, 59, 373–383.

Kretchmar, R. S. (2008) The Increasing Utility of Elementary School Physical Education: A Mixed Blessing and Unique Challenge. *The Elementary School Journal* [online]. 108(3), 161–170.

Koekoek, J. and Knoppers, A. (2015) The role of perceptions of friendships and peers in learning skills in physical education. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy* [online]. 20(3), 231–249.

Kolb, D. (1984) *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.

Kozera, T. (2017) *Physical Literacy in Children and Youth*. Doctoral Thesis, Winnipeg Canada: University of Manitoba.

LaBoskey, V.K. (2002) Stories as a Way of Learning Both Practical and Reflective Orientations In: Lyons, N. and LaBoskey, V.K. (2002) *Narrative Inquiry in Practice*. New York: Teachers College Press. 31-47

Lasky, S. (2005) A sociocultural approach to understanding teacher identity, agency and professional vulnerability in a context of secondary school reform. *Teaching and Teacher Education* [online]. 21(8), 899-916.

Leigh, J. and Bailey, R. (2013) Reflection, reflective practice and embodied reflective practice. *Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy* [online]. 8(3), 160–171.

MJ Moran - 18374981

- Leigh, J. (2020). Using creative research methods and movement to encourage reflection in children. *Journal of Early Childhood Research* [online]. 18(2), 130–142
- Lewin, K. (1946) Action Research and Minority Problems. *Journal of Social Issues*, 2(4), 34-46.
- Light, R. (2010) A cross-cultural study on meaning and the nature of children’s experiences in Australian and French swimming clubs. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Health, Sport and Physical Education*, 1(3-4), 37–43.
- Light, R. (2013) *Game sense: pedagogy for performance, participation and enjoyment*. Oxford: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Liudmila, M. (2020) Introduction: Encouraging student reflection—approaches to teaching and assessment. *European Political Science: EPS* [online]. 19(1), 1-8.
- Lyngstad, I., Bjerke, Ø. and Lagestad, P. (2019) Students’ views on the purpose of physical education in upper secondary school. Physical education as a break in everyday school life – learning or just fun? *Sport, Education and Society* [online]. 25(2), 230–241.
- MacLure, M. (1996) ‘Telling Transitions: Boundary Work in Narratives of Becoming an Action Researcher’. *British Educational Research Journal*, 22(3), 273–283.
- Mandigo, J. L. and Holt, N. L. (2006) Elementary students' accounts of optimal challenge in physical education. *The Physical Educator* [online]. 63(4), 170-183.
- Mangione, J., Parker, M., O’Sullivan, M. and Quayle, M. (2020) Mapping the landscape of physical education external provision in Irish primary schools. *Irish Educational Studies* [online]. 39(4), 475–494.
- Marron, S., Murphy, F., Pitsia, V. and Scheuer, C. (2021) Inclusion in Physical Education in primary schools in Europe through the lens of an Erasmus+ partnership. *Education 3-13* [online]. 51(5), 715–730.

MJ Moran - 18374981

Martela, F. and Steger, M. F. (2016) The three meanings of meaning in life: Distinguishing coherence, purpose, and significance. *The Journal of Positive Psychology* [online]. 11(5), 531–545.

Maynooth University (2025) *Research Data Management Policy*. Maynooth: Office of the Vice President Research and Innovation

McAteer, M. (2013) *Action Research in Education*. London: Sage.

McDonagh, C. Roche, M. Sullivan, B. and Glenn, M. (2019) *Enhancing Practice through Classroom Research: A Teacher's Guide to Professional Development*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge.

McNiff, J. and Whitehead (2009) *Doing and Writing Action Research*. London: Sage.

McNiff, J. and Whitehead, J. (2010) *You and your action research project*. 3rd ed. London: Routledge.

McNiff, J. and Whitehead, J. (2011) *All You Need to Know About Action Research*. London: SAGE.

McNiff, J. and Whitehead, J. (2013) *Action Research: Principles and Practice*. 3rd ed. New York: Routledge-Falmer.

Metheny, E. (1968) *Movement and Meaning*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Mills, G.E. (2011) *Action research: A guide for the teacher researcher*. 4th ed. Boston, MA: Pearson.

Moyles, J. (2001) “Just for fun? The child as an active learner and meaning-maker” In: Collins, J., Insley, K. and Soler, J., eds. (2001) *Developing Pedagogy: Researching Practice*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Mong, H. and Standal, Ø.V. (2022) Teaching Health in Physical Education: An Action Research Project. *European Physical Education Review* [online]. 28(3): 739–756.

MJ Moran - 18374981

Moon, J.A. (2004) *A handbook of reflective and experiential learning: Theory and practice*.

London: Routledge.

Moran, M.J. 'Reflective Journal.' Unpublished. August 2024 to July 2025.

Moura, A., Graça, A., MacPhail, A. and Batista, P. (2020) Aligning the principles of assessment for learning to learning in physical education: A review of literature. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy* [online]. 26(4), 388–401.

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) (1999a) *Primary School Curriculum Physical Education*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) (1999b) *Primary School Curriculum*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) (2023) *Primary Curriculum Framework*. Dublin: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) (2024) *Draft Wellbeing Curriculum Specification*. Dublin: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

Ní Chróinín, D., Murtagh, E. and Bowles, R. (2012) Flying the 'Active School Flag': physical activity promotion through self-evaluation in primary schools in Ireland. *Irish Educational Studies* [online]. 31(3), 281–296.

Ní Chróinín, D. (2018) Primary physical education in Ireland/eire. In: Griggs, G. and Petrie, K., eds. (2018) *Handbook of Primary Physical Education*. New York: Routledge. 205-216.

Ní Chróinín, D. and O'Brien, N. (2019) Primary school teachers' experiences of external providers in Ireland: learning lessons from physical education. *Irish Educational Studies* [online]. 38(3), 327–341.

Ní Chróinín, D., Fletcher, T., Beni, S., Griffin, C. and Coulter, M. (2021) Children's experiences of pedagogies that prioritise meaningfulness in primary physical education in Ireland. *Education 3-13* [online]. 51, 41–54.

MJ Moran - 18374981

Nilges, L. M. (2004) Ice can look like glass: A phenomenological investigation of movement meaning in one fifth-grade class during a creative dance unit. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport* [online]. 75(3), 298-314.

Noffke, S. E. and Zeichner, K. M. (1987) *Action research and teacher thinking*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Washington, DC.

Noffke, S. E. (1997) Professional, Personal, and Political Dimensions of Action Research *Review of Research in Education* [online]. 22, 305–343.

O'Connor, J. (2019) Exploring a pedagogy for meaning-making in physical education. *European Physical Education Review* [online]. 25(4), 1093-1109.

Pangrazi, R. P., Beighle, A., Vehige, T. and Vack, C. (2003) Impact of promoting lifestyle activity for youth (PLAY) on children's physical activity. *The Journal of School Health* [online]. 73(8), 317-321.

Paris, S.G. and Winograd, P. (2003) *The role of self-regulated learning in contextual teaching: Principles for teacher preparation*. A Commissioned Paper for the U.S. Department of Education project, "Preparing Teachers to Use Contextual Teaching and Learning Strategies to Improve Student Success in and beyond School.", Washington DC.

Pearson, P. D. and Gallagher, M. C. (1983) The instruction of reading comprehension. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 8(3), 317–344.

Peel, K.L. (2020) A Beginner's Guide to Applied Educational Research using Thematic Analysis. *Practical Assessment, Research, and Evaluation* [online]. 25(2), 1-15.

Philip, L. (2006) Encouraging reflective practice amongst students: a direct assessment approach. *Planet* [online]. 17(1), 37–39.

MJ Moran - 18374981

- Philpot, R., Martínez-Álvarez, L., Gerdín, G., González-Calvo, G., Bores Calle, N. J. and García-Monge, A. (2024) Teachers' enactment of Freirean democratic pedagogies in primary school physical education. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy* [online]. 1–14.
- Piaget, J. (1999) *Play, dreams and imitation in childhood*. Oxford: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Pollard, A. (2019) *Reflective Teaching in Schools*. 5th ed. London: Continuum.
- Professional Development Service for Teachers. (PDST) (n.d.) *Primary School Sports Initiative (PSSI)*. Available at: <https://pssi.pdst.ie/> (accessed 27 December 2024).
- Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST). (2017) *Move Well, Move Often: Developing the physically literate child through the lens of fundamental movement skills (Book 1 – Skills and Activities)*. Available at: https://www.scoilnet.ie/fileadmin/user_upload/Book_1.pdf (accessed 1 January 2024).
- Petrie, K., Penney, D. and Fellows, S. (2014) Health and physical education in Aotearoa New Zealand: an open market and open doors? *Asia-Pacific Journal of Health, Sport and Physical Education* [online]. 5(1), 19–38.
- Quennerstedt, M. (2013) PE on YouTube – investigating participation in physical education practice. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy* [online]. 18(1), 42–59.
- Rodgers, C. (2018) Descriptive feedback: Student voice in K-5 classrooms. *The Australian Educational Researcher* [online]. 45(1), 87–102.
- Rudduck, J. and McIntyre, D. (2007) *Improving learning through consulting pupils*. London: Routledge.
- Russo, T. C. and Ford, D. J. (2006) Teachers' reflection on reflection practice. *Journal of Cognitive Affective Learning*, 2(2), 1–12.
- Sánchez-Hernández, D., Martos-García, S. and Flintoff, A. (2018) “Challenging Gender Relations in PE Through Cooperative Learning and Critical Reflection”. *Sport, Education and Society* [online]. 23(8), 812–823.

MJ Moran - 18374981

Schön, D.A. (1983) *The reflective practitioner: how professionals think in action*. New York: Basic Books.

Smith, Z., Carter, A., Fletcher, T. and Ní Chróinín, D. (2023) What is important? How one early childhood teacher prioritised meaningful experiences for children in physical education. *Journal of Early Childhood Education Research* [online]. 12, 126–149.

Stenhouse, L. (1979) Research as a basis for teaching. In: Elliot, J. and Norris, N. eds. (2011) *Curriculum Pedagogy and Educational Research: The Work of Lawrence Stenhouse*. London: Routledge.

Standal, Ø. F. and Moe, V.F. (2013) Reflective Practice in Physical Education and Physical Education Teacher Education: A Review of the Literature Since 1995. *Quest* [online]. 65(2), 220–240.

Standal, Ø. F. (2015) *Phenomenology and Pedagogy in Physical Education*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Stringer, E. T. (2014) *Action Research: A Handbook for Practitioners*. 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Subramaniam, P. and Silverman, S. (2007) Middle school students' attitudes toward physical education. *Teaching and Teacher Education* [online]. 23, 602-611.

Sullivan, B., Glenn, M., Roche, R. and McDonagh, C. (2016) *Introduction to Critical Reflection and Action Research for Teacher Researchers*. London: Routledge.

The Teaching Council. (2016) *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers*. 2nd ed. Maynooth: The Teaching Council.

Thompson, S. and Thompson, N. (2018) *The critically reflective practitioner*. 2nd ed. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

MJ Moran - 18374981

Tisdall, E. K., Davis, J. M. and Gallagher, M. (2009) *Researching with children and young people: Research design, methods and analysis*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Tungalag, O. (2024) Research on metacognitive strategies of children's self-regulated learning. *Health psychology research* [online]. 12, 120366.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2015a) *International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport*. Paris: UNESCO.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2015b) *Quality Physical Education (QPE) Guidelines for Policy-Makers*. Paris: UNESCO.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and Loughborough University. (2024) *The Global State of Play: Report and Recommendations on Quality Physical Education*. Paris: UNESCO.

Vanassche, E. and Kelchtermans, G. (2015) The state of the art in Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices: a systematic literature review. *Journal of Curriculum Studies* [online]. 47(4), 508-528.

Vygotsky, L. (1978) *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Walseth, K., Engebretsen, B. and Elvebakk, L. (2018) Meaningful experiences in PE for all students: an activist research approach. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy* [online]. 23(3), 235–249.

White, R. L., Bennie, A., Vasconcellos, D., Cinelli, R., Hilland, T., Owen, K. B. and Lonsdale, C. (2021) Self-determination theory in physical education: A systematic review of qualitative studies. *Teaching and Teacher Education* [online]. 99, 103247.

Whitehead, J. (2018) *Living Theory Research as a Way of Life*. Bath: Brown Dog Books.

Winter, R. (1996) Some principles and procedures for the conduct of action research. In: Zuber Skerritt, O. ed. (1996) *New Directions in Action Research*. London: Falmer. 9-22

MJ Moran - 18374981

Winter, R. (2002) Truth or fiction: problems of validity and authenticity in narratives of action research. *Educational Action Research* [online]. 10(1), 143–154.

Woods, C.B., Tannehill D., Quinlan, A., Moyna, N. and Walsh, J. (2010) *The Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study (CSPPA)*. Research Report No 1. School of Health and Human Performance, Dublin City University and The Irish Sports Council, Dublin, Ireland.

Woods, CB., Powell, C., Saunders, JA., O'Brien, W., Murphy, MH., Duff, C., Farmer, O., Johnston, A., Connolly, S. and Belton S. (2018) *The Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study 2018 (CSPPA 2018)*. Department of Physical Education and Sport Sciences, University of Limerick, Limerick, Ireland, Sport Ireland, and Healthy Ireland, Dublin, Ireland and Sport Northern Ireland, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

Woods, CB., Ng, KW., Britton, U., McClelland, J., O'Keeffe, B., Sheikhi, A., McFlynn, P., Murphy, MH., Goss, H., Behan, S., Philpott, C., Lester, D., Adamakis, M., Costa, J., Coppinger, T., Connolly, S., Belton, S. and O'Brien, W. (2023) *The Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study 2022 (CSPPA 2022)*. Physical Activity for Health Research Centre, Department of Physical Education and Sport Sciences, University of Limerick, Limerick, Ireland, Sport Ireland and Healthy Ireland, Dublin, Ireland and Sport Northern Ireland, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

World Health Organization (WHO) (2020) *WHO Guidelines on Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour*. Geneva: WHO.

Zelazo, P. (2004) The development of conscious control in childhood. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*. 8(1), 12–17.

Zeichner, K. M. and Liston, D. P. (2014) *Reflective teaching : an introduction*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.

MJ Moran - 18374981

Zuckerman, G. (2004) Development of reflection through learning activity. *European Journal of Psychology of Education* [online]. 19(1), 9–18.

Appendices

Appendices A: Ethics documents regarding consent and assent

Appendix A1: Letter of consent for Principal/Board of Management



**Maynooth University
Froebel Department of
Primary and Early
Childhood Education
Roinn Froebel Don Bhun-
agus Luath- Oideachas
Ollscoil Mhá Nuad.**

8th December 2024

Dear Principal and Board of Management,

I have recently started a Master of Education degree in Maynooth University. As part of this degree, I will complete a self-study action research project where I investigate my teaching and aim to improve my practice. I would like to request your permission to carry out this research as it will be taking place as part of a whole class project with my 6th class.

As part of this research, I will study my teaching of PE, with a focus on my use of student reflection in the implementation of a Meaningful PE approach. Meaningful PE is an approach to PE that emphasises personal relevance, enjoyment, and social connection for students, making activities more engaging and impactful. It aims to foster positive attitudes toward physical activity by focusing on experiences that are purposeful, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate.

I will explain the research to my class and seek informed and voluntary consent from parents and informed and voluntary assent from children before data is collected. Participants will be allowed to withdraw at any point if they wish. The children will be viewed as co-collaborators who are valued and respected, and data will be collected in a sensitive and non-stressful manner. Data will be collected via anonymous surveys on Google Forms, questionnaires, children's written feedback, the children's PE scrapbooks, analysis of children's work, teacher observation notes and a teacher's reflective journal. All data collected will be anonymised. Children's names and the name of the school will not be mentioned in the research, as confidentiality and data protection procedures will be strictly followed.

All children are welcome to participate in the research project. As the research will take place as part of my normal PE lessons, the children will not be impacted in any way if they choose not to take part, and their work will not be used as part of the project.

If you agree to the research taking place, kindly sign the attached consent form and return a copy of the signed form. Thank you for taking the time to read my letter, and feel free to contact me at ... if you have any queries about the research.

Kindest regards,
MJ Moran

Appendix A2: School Principal/Board of Management consent form



**Maynooth University Froebel
Department of Primary and Early
Childhood Education
Roinn Froebel Don Bhun-
agus Luath- Oideachas
Ollscoil Mhá Nuad.**

School Principal/Board of Management Consent Form

I/We give consent for you to approach parents to gain consent for children to participate in the given Research Project.

I have read the letter explaining the purpose of the research study and understand that:

The School:

- The role of the school is voluntary.
- I may decide to withdraw the school's participation at any time.
- The school will not be identifiable in any part of the study to preserve the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants.

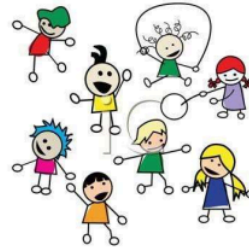
Participants:

- Participants will give informed consent and will understand that they may only participate in the study with this consent.
- All information obtained will be kept confidential and will be treated in strictest confidence.
- The participants' names will not be used and individuals will not be identifiable throughout the study.
- Participants may withdraw during any part of the study without consequence.
- Participants will not receive any incentive to participate in the research study.

Signed: _____ Date: _____
Principal or Chairperson

MJ Moran - 18374981

Appendix A3: Child friendly information form



Hi (child's name),

This year, I have gone back to college to learn even more about teaching! I want to improve the way I teach PE in school. I would like to find out how I can teach PE in a way that makes it fun, important and meaningful to you. I would like to watch and listen to you when you are in school and to write down some notes. I really want to hear what you have to say, and I will ask you to take part in some surveys on Google Forms, keep a PE scrapbook and talk and write about your learning in PE. Everything we do will happen during normal PE lessons, and there are no right or wrong answers—it's all about your ideas! At the end of the research, I will be writing about what I have learned about PE teaching and sharing this with other teachers.

Are you happy to take part? Circle one. YES NO

I have asked an adult at home to talk to you about this. If you have any questions, I would be happy to answer them. If you are happy with that, could you sign the form that I have sent home? If you change your mind after we start, that's ok too. You can talk to me about the research at any stage if you would like.

Thank you,

Mr. Moran

MJ Moran - 18374981

Appendix A4: Parents/Guardians information letter



**Maynooth University Froebel
Department of Primary and Early
Childhood Education
Roinn Froebel Don Bhun-
agus Luath- Oideachas
Ollscoil Mhá Nuad.**

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

This year, I have chosen to return to education. I am currently studying to complete a Master of Education degree in Maynooth University.

As part of my degree, I am undertaking an action research project in which I explore how student reflection can aid me in the implementation of a Meaningful PE approach. Meaningful PE is an approach to PE that emphasises personal relevance, enjoyment, and social connection for students, making activities more engaging and impactful. It aims to foster positive attitudes toward physical activity by focusing on experiences that are purposeful, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate.

I intend to carry out my research by designing PE lessons using a Meaningful PE approach and asking the children to reflect on their experiences. The intervention will take place during my normal PE lessons. The children will assist in the design of some activities during PE lessons, partake in the PE lessons, reflect on the lessons and discuss their experiences of PE. Data will be collected via anonymous surveys on Google Forms, questionnaires, children's written feedback, the children's PE scrapbook, analysis of the children's work, teacher observation notes and a teacher's reflective journal. All data will be collected in a sensitive and non-stressful manner. Your child can withdraw from the research process at any stage. Children who do not participate in the research will not be affected, and their work will not be used as part of the project.

The children's privacy is of paramount importance. All information will be confidential, and information will be destroyed in a stated timeframe in accordance with the University guidelines. The child's name and the name of the school will not be included in the thesis that I will write at the end of the research. The correct guidelines will be complied with when carrying out this research. The research will not be carried out until approval is granted by the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education.

I would like to invite you to give permission for your child to take part in this project after you have discussed the research with them. If you have any queries on any part of this research project, feel free to contact me by email at ...

Kindest regards,

MJ Moran

Appendix A5: Information sheet for parents and guardians



**Maynooth University Froebel
Department of Primary and Early
Childhood Education
Roinn Froebel Don Bhun-
agus Luath- Oideachas
Ollscoil Mhá Nuad.**

Information Sheet for Parents and Guardians

Who is this information sheet for?

This information sheet is for parents and guardians.

What is this Action Research Project about?

Teachers undertaking the Master of Education in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education at Maynooth University are required to conduct an action research project, examining an area of their practice as a teacher. This project will involve an analysis of the teacher's practice. Data will be generated using anonymous surveys on Google Forms, questionnaires, children's written feedback, the children's PE scrapbook, analysis of the children's work, teacher observation notes and a teacher's reflective journal. The teacher is then required to produce a thesis documenting this action research project.

What is the research question?

"How can I use student reflection as part of a Meaningful PE approach to enhance my teaching?"

What sorts of methods will be used?

The research methods used will be anonymous surveys on Google Forms, questionnaires, children's written feedback, the children's PE scrapbook, analysis of the children's work, teacher observation notes and a teacher's reflective journal. All data will be gathered in a sensitive and non-stressful manner.

Who else will be involved?

The study will be carried out by myself as part of the Master of Education course in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education. The thesis will be submitted for assessment to the module leaders Suzanne O'Keefe and Marie McLoughlin and will be examined by the Department staff. The external examiners will also access the final thesis.

What are you being asked to do?

You are being asked for your consent to permit me to undertake this study with my class. I have explained the information to the children, and I would appreciate it if you would also talk to them about it. Participation in the research is completely voluntary, and you/your child can withdraw from the study at any stage. In all cases, the data that is collected will be treated with the utmost confidentiality, and the analysis will be reported anonymously. The data captured will only be used for the purpose of the research as part of the Master of Education in the Froebel Department, Maynooth University and will be destroyed in accordance with University guidelines. If you have any queries about the research, please contact me at the email below.

Student: MJ Moran

Email: ...

Appendix A6: Parent/Guardian consent form



**Maynooth University Froebel
Department of Primary and Early
Childhood Education
Roinn Froebel Don Bhun-
agus Luath- Oideachas
Ollscoil Mhá Nuad.**

Parental/Guardian Consent Form

I have read the information provided in the attached letter, and all my questions have been answered. I voluntarily agree to the participation of my child in this study. I am aware that I will receive a copy of this consent form for my information.

Parent / Guardian Name: _____

Parent / Guardian Signature: _____

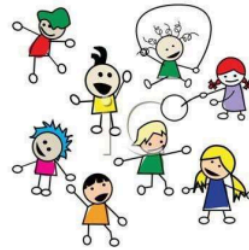
Date: _____

Name of Child: _____

Child's signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix A7: Children's assent form



Child's assent to participate

My parent/guardian has read the information sheet with me, and I agree to take part in this research.

Name of child (in block capitals):

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendices B

Appendix B1: Sample gymnastics lesson plan

Lesson 3: Symmetry

How do you feel about the activity we are doing today? Why?

Warm Up Activity:

Warm-up game voted on by the students (democratic practice).

Strength Activities

Holding a plank

Holding a squat – 45 seconds

Development:

Symmetry:

- Discuss Symmetry (Democratic practice)
- Experiment with symmetry around the hall.
- Discuss with the children how we can move in a symmetrical manner. Are walking/running symmetrical movements?
- Symmetrical Activities. • Bounce while moving both arms with the same action. • Jump forwards and backwards on two feet. • Balance on hands and feet. Show a symmetrical shape. • Move on hands and feet.
- Using mats • Balance on a large body part, e.g. seat, front, side or back, to show a wide/narrow, curled/stretched and/or symmetrical balance. • Roll forwards/backwards on the mats in a symmetrical way, keeping both sides of the body matching. (Self-assessment – rate the symmetry of your movements).
- Mid-lesson reflection: Before we move into the sequences, How could we improve the quality of our symmetrical movements

Symmetrical Sequences on a bench/mat:

- Children follow balance instruction cards. (PSSI lesson Plan 1) (Children work together to follow sheets)
- Free Station: The children design their own sequence and routines (democratic practice).
- Teaching Station: Backwards Roll (Groups come to teaching station to practice backwards roll).
- Group discussion: What are the important points to remember when doing the backwards roll?

Cool down:

- Gentle rolling back and forth.
- Stretch

Reflective Journal:


Think about the feeling you had at the start of the lesson? Did your feeling change during the lesson?

Is there a gymnastics activity you would like to try?

Appendix B2: PSSI lesson plan station cards

ACTIVITY CARD

SECTION 2
Symmetrical sequences on a bench and a mat

★ 


Sequence 1

Jump to the bench, position arms in symmetrical action, step onto the bench, travel on hands and feet along the bench and stand.

Jump off, making a symmetrical shape in the air. Walk back to the beanbag.

ACTIVITY CARD

SECTION 2
Symmetrical sequences on a bench and a mat

★ 

Sequence 2

Step onto the bench, show a symmetrical balance on the bench, travel along the bench and stand.

Jump off, making a different symmetrical shape in the air and roll on the mat.

Walk back to the beanbag.

ACTIVITY CARD

SECTION 2
Symmetrical sequences on a bench and a mat



Sequence 3

Move to the bench and using the floor and the bench make a symmetrical balance. Step onto the bench. Move along the bench in a symmetrical way. Jump off and roll on the mat.

Appendix B3: MPE lesson plan PowerPoint



The slide features a background image of a red running track with white lane markings. The title "Athletics – Lesson 3" is displayed in white text on the left side. A subtitle box on the right contains the text "Click to add subtitle". Below the image, the acronym "WALT" is followed by four colored boxes containing learning objectives: "Practice our baton passing in a relay." (teal), "Develop our hurdling technique." (green), "Develop the shot put or throw from a standing position using a medium-sized ball." (light green), and "Continue to develop our ability to run continuously." (red).

Athletics – Lesson 3

Click to add subtitle

WALT

- Practice our baton passing in a relay.
- Develop our hurdling technique.
- Develop the shot put or throw from a standing position using a medium-sized ball.
- Continue to develop our ability to run continuously.

Goal Setting

Set a Goal prior to today's lesson. Make it SMART.

Warm Up

- Through the hoop relay.
- Dynamic stretches.

Continuous Running

- Split into threes.
- A and C stand at the bottom goal. B stands at the top goal. As run to top goal. B and Cs rest.
- Bs runs to the bottom goal. A and cs rest.
- Cs run to the top goal. A and Bs rest.

Hurdling



Hurdling



- When hurdling, we want to
- Use the same lead leg over each hurdle.
- Stride pattern – three-stride pattern
- Run over the hurdles as opposed to jumping over them.
- Reflective Question: Are we following these steps

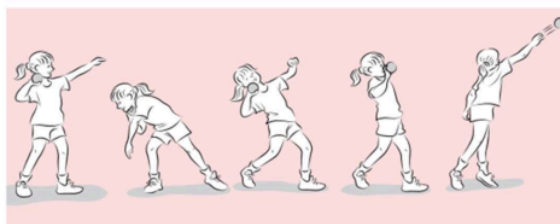
Shot Put

- Free Exploration!

Shot Put

- The ball is held in the hand at the base of the fingers and placed just below the right ear.
- The right elbow and upper arm are parallel to the ground;
- Face the direction of the throw.
- The left arm is outstretched upwards in the direction of the throw.
- Feet shoulder width apart, right foot slightly behind.
- Step back on the right foot twisting the top part of the body away from the target, bending the knees slightly.
- Bring the body forward and push/drive with the legs to push the ball forward.

Shot Put



Cool Down

- Start jogging, slow down and stretch

End of Lesson Reflection

- Imagine you were teaching today's lesson. How would you change it? Draw your version of the lesson and write a three-sentence summary!

Appendices C

Appendix C1: Pre-intervention survey (27th January 2025)

PE Survey: _____ Date: _____
This survey asks for your opinions on PE. There are no right or wrong answers, so just share your honest opinions. Thank you for helping!

1. How much do you enjoy PE lessons now (1 = I don't enjoy PE at all, 5 = I really enjoy PE)

1 2 3 4 5

2. What makes PE fun for you?

3. How much effort do you usually put into PE activities?

I always try my best.

I try hard most of the time.

I put in some effort.

I usually don't try very hard.

4. Are there times when PE feels boring or frustrating? Yes No Not Sure

Why?

5. What do you usually think about after PE lessons?

6. Have you ever reflected on what you've learned in PE before? Yes No Not Sure

7. Do you think reflection could help you improve in PE? Yes No Not Sure

8. What do you think could be good about reflecting on PE lessons? (Rank 1 to 6)

It will help me improve my skills.

I will understand what I'm good at.

It will make PE more fun.

It will give me time to think about how I can do things differently next time.

It will help me remember what I have learned.

It will help me see how my learning connects to real life.

9. Which of these reflection tools sounds most interesting to you? (Rank 1 to 6)

- Having quiet time to think
- Talking with a friend or partner
- Class discussions
- Drawing pictures to show what you learned
- Using a reflective journal
- Self-evaluation

10. Are there any other ways you would like to reflect in PE?

11. What do you think might make reflection in PE hard?

12. Would you like to have more opportunities to reflect and work with others (e.g., group discussions, peer feedback, pair work, teacher feedback) during PE? Yes No Not sure

13. How comfortable do you feel sharing your thoughts or feelings about PE with your teacher or classmates?

- Very comfortable
- Somewhat comfortable
- Not very comfortable
- Not at all comfortable

14. Do you see connections between what you do in PE and your life outside of school?

- Yes, often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

14. Is there anything you would like to see changed in PE?

15. Is there anything else you would like to say?

Appendix C2: Post-cycle one survey (12th March 2025)

PE Survey

This is a brief survey to help me understand how you are finding the PE lessons. I really want to hear what you have to say so please be honest. Thank you!

What is your name?

Your answer _____

What have you enjoyed most about the PE lessons so far?

Your answer _____

Is there anything you want to see changed/ improved/ modified?

Your answer _____

What three reflective activities have you found most beneficial?

- Goal Setting
- Journal Entries in PE copies
- Peer Feedback
- Self-assessment
- Sticky Note Exit Tickets
- Whole Class Discussions
- Reflective Questions during lessons
- Mid Lesson Reflections

Has reflection (group discussions/ goal setting/ peer feedback/ journal writing etc.) helped make PE more enjoyable, challenging, helped you improve, helped you make connections to activities outside of PE?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Is there anything that makes reflecting on PE hard? (It's Hard to know what to write, I don't know what to write, I don't want to etc.)

Your answer

Do you see a connection between what we have done in PE and your life outside of school?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Is there anything else you would like to say?

Your answer

Submit

Clear form

Appendix C3: Post-intervention survey (7th May 2025)

PE Survey

[Sign in to Google](#) to save your progress. [Learn more](#)

What is your name?

Your answer _____

Which Reflective activity did you find most beneficial most? If you can give a reason why?

Your answer _____

Which reflective activity did you find least beneficial? If you can give a reason why?

Your answer _____

Did you enjoy knowing what would happen in the lesson?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Why/ Why not did you enjoy knowing what would happen in the lesson?

Your answer _____

What makes PE meaningful for you?

Your answer _____

Is there anything that has made reflection in PE difficult?

Your answer _____

What have you enjoyed most about the PE lessons?

Your answer

Is there anything that you would like to see changed in PE?

Your answer

Is there anything else you would like to add about what we have done in PE lessons over the past few weeks?

Your answer

Submit

Clear form

Appendices D: Coded data

Appendix D1: Sample of coded data in response to the question “What did you enjoy the most about today’s lesson and why?”

“The most thing that I found fun was the poses because it was really funny watching everyone fall and trip.”

“I enjoyed making up my routine with Alannah, Amy and Shona because it was really fun to make up a dance and having a bit of crack with my friends. I also enjoyed the two-person stunt thing because it was so funny and also kind of challenging.”

“It was really funny once me and Cameron did it, and John thought that I couldn’t lift him but he was wrong.”

“Todays lesson made me happy because me and Stephanie had a great time doing all the partner balances.” “I also liked that I would help Stephanie and she would help me if I needed it.” “I think we should all make a routine in partners and add a little bit on each week.”

“I enjoyed the partner work because it was fun and you get to have a laugh with your friends.”

“I enjoyed today and stuff like this is nice in this to reflect and write this down in a journal.”

“Today I enjoyed a lot about our PE including trying to help my friends and getting to pick who we went in a pair with. It was fun being inside instead of outside in the rain and cold.”

“I enjoyed today’s lesson because we had gymnastics and that’s something that we never do so it’s a lot of fun. Me and Daniel were partners ... and it was funny to see us and others fail.”

Codes

Red = Teamwork

Green = Fun

Blue = Challenge

Purple = Personally relevant

Brown = Value in reflection

Yellow = Spread of sports

Pink = Student voice