
Do Gender Equality Issues Affect Teaching of Physical Education?

It has been claimed that sport plays a relatively minor role in the lives of women, as “women experience a lower level of enjoyment of sport at school and participate in sport less than men”, (SESNI, 2014). According to the findings of their study, men were twice as likely as women to report participating in sport or physical activity within the last year. (SESNI, 2014). In the same study, it was found that 59% of the sample believed that men’s sport is more important than female sport within schools. Consequently, as teachers we need to ensure that gender equality issues in sport do not affect teaching or coaching. Although it is difficult to ignore these issues, I think as teachers we must recognise and understand these equality differences, but not allow them to affect teaching. Throughout this essay I will look at the effects of gender equality issues in a mixed primary school and a same-sex primary school. extra-curricular activities in PE and how schools address gender issues.

Many researchers have looked at gender issues regarding PE within mixed-class environments. It has been claimed that PE is a ‘site for the reproduction of gender-stereotyped beliefs in society’ (Osborne, Baur and Sutlif, 2002). Teachers must implement different strategies to ensure that this is not the case and that gender-stereotyped beliefs are not evident in the classroom. In a primary school setting, PE can be promoted through sporting role models; in today’s society there are many more female sporting role models compared to that in the past, making this a lot easier. During School Experience (SE), I was in an all-boys school and we were completing circuits, a pupil commented that he felt like he was like Conor McGregor while training, highlighting the importance of sporting role models within PE classes.

It could be argued that the consequences of gender-stereotypes may affect teaching of PE. During SE my host teacher expressed how they do not complete Gymnastics or Dance often in school as they are ‘more girly sports’. It has become apparent that in the PE context, “gender appropriateness of physical activities is one of the most important factors that reflect gender-stereotyped beliefs”, (Koca, 2009). Tsolidis and Dobson (2006), found that PE teachers deemed sports such as gymnastics, tennis and volleyball more appropriate for girls, and football, basketball, wrestling and weightlifting as more appropriate for boys.

Furthermore, as boys are genetically stronger than women, the emphasis on biological differences can lead to the discrimination of girls in PE and “this can help denigrate the female body as lacking in physical capabilities”, Shimon (2005). Gender-role stereotyping can be reflected by teachers’ biased behaviours, which can result in unequal sporting opportunities, usually towards girls. Scraton (2006) has described PE as, “overtly reinforcing gender differences in terms of activities offered, and covertly through the attitudes and reactions of those involved in the practice of PE”.

Additionally, during SE last year I was heavily involved with extra-curricular sporting teams and the influence of boys within the teams massively stuck-out; with some teams only being available to boys; (football). Derry and Allen (2004) found that girls in single-sex PE classes had “significantly more engaged skill-learning time and initiated more interactions with teachers”, compared to them in mixed settings, so this might be a way to overcome this issue.

Following on from this, over the years of taking coaching sessions and PE lessons it became clear that the ambience of a lesson was influenced more by boys within the group than girls. More of the teacher's attention goes on boys, and boys have control over most communication amongst the class in a PE setting according to Piotrowski, (2006). Koca (2009) conducted a study, involving a male and a female PE teacher, investigating teacher-student interaction and found that "both female and male PE teachers interacted with boys more often than with girls (76.2% for female PE teacher with boys and 23.8% with girls; 74.2% for male PE teacher with boys and 25.8% with girls)". Consequently, highlighting that gender equality issues do affect teaching as more time is devoted to boys.

In conclusion, through experience and discussion of the points above I think it is clear to see that teachers can comply to allow gender equality issues to affect teaching, however, this has vastly improved over the years and is only to get better within the school setting.

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