Becoming - Activist:

The journeys of two teachers in their enactment of an activist approach in girls' physical education

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Declaration of Authenticity and Author's Rights

This thesis is the result of the author's original research. It has been composed by the author and has not been previously submitted for examination which has led to the award of a degree.

Signed: 

Date: 16th May 2024

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List of Publications and Presentations

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Abstract

This thesis explores the journeys of two teachers in becoming-Activist as they learned to use and enact an activist approach with girls in their physical education programmes. Unlike traditional approaches to teacher professional learning that typically involve short off-site workshops, this study explores the value of on-site learning, where teachers can integrate their learning into their daily professional practice. The four critical elements of an activist approach, student-centred pedagogy, pedagogies of embodiment, inquiry-based education centred *in* action, and listening and responding over time, offer a structure to support teachers in better facilitating girls' motivation, interests and learning in physical education. While this approach has been extended into teacher education, there is limited research exploring the nature of in-service teachers' experiences in becoming-Activist. Conducted over a 9-month period in two Glasgow secondary schools, two teachers were supported to enact an activist approach. Data generation included semi-structured interviews with teachers, group interviews with pupils, debriefing sessions, lesson observations, monthly teacher group meetings, classroom artefacts and debriefing sessions with a mentor. Dialectical thinking was applied to analyse the data, involving versus coding, then concept coding, which were then woven into narratives to represent the challenges teachers encountered in enacting an activist approach. The findings demonstrate the complexities inherent in teachers' journeys toward becoming-Activist, revealing shifts in teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil relationships, heightened visibility of teachers' and pupils' practices, a transition toward more democratic forms of participation for girls, and the benefits and challenges of school-based professional learning. These insights highlight the importance of ongoing critical reflection to help teachers navigate the challenges of becoming-Activist. Furthermore, this study supports the notion of school-based professional learning, emphasising the need to address the challenges posed by school contexts, as well as the professional identities and socialisation of teachers.

This thesis is dedicated to my daughter, Molly.

You have been with me throughout this entire journey.

You bring joy like no other.

I learn from you every day.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Abbreviations

AERA:	American Educational Research Association
BBC:	British Broadcasting Corporation
BERA:	British Educational Research Association
BtF:	Building the Foundation
CFE:	Curriculum for Excellence
CPD:	Continued Professional Development
GCSE:	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GTCS:	General Teaching Council for Scotland
HBSC:	Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children
HIIT:	High Intensity Interval Training
MVPA:	Moderate-to-Vigorous Physical Activity
PETE:	Physical Education Teacher Education
PSTs:	Pre-service Teachers
SCIC:	Student-Centred Inquiry as Curriculum
SERA:	Scottish Educational Research Association
SfLLW:	Skills for Life, Learning and Work
SIMD:	Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation
SQA:	Scottish Qualifications Authority
SWOT:	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
TGFU:	Teaching Games for Understanding
TPL:	Teacher Professional Learning
TPSR:	Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility
WHO:	World Health Organisation
YST:	Youth Sport Trust

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Picture the scene. It's the summer term of 1985. Two 8-year-old children stand poised at the start line, ready to compete in a 50-meter race. These kids weren't just any classmates, they were the undisputed speedsters of their grade. The teacher, sensing excitement bubbling among the third graders, organised a showdown to finish off the lesson. The entire class formed a vibrant crowd along a makeshift track etched onto the playground grass, hedging bets of who would be crowned the winner. The teacher shouted, 'On Your Mark', prompting the children to crouch down low, their eyes focused on the finish line. Then came the command, 'Set', the children tensed, muscles primed for action. And finally with a resounding 'Go', the race erupted into motion.

For the first 20 meters, the runners dashed forward, neck and neck, each determined to maintain pace. But as the race continued, one child surged ahead, leaving the other trailing behind. With each stride, the gap widened until the winner, Greg, crossed the finish line in a burst of triumph, embraced by the jubilant cheers of his friends. Meanwhile, the other child kept running, crossing the finish line with a faint shadow of disappointment on her face, knowing that she had poured her heart and soul into every stride, but victory eluded her. The loser was me.

At first, the gender of these children does not seem to matter. They were the 'best' in the class and this was a time to shine. Yet, this event highlighted how physical education can inadvertently exclude girls. The teacher, unaware of such consequences, failed to acknowledge or address the outcome of the race. To them, it was merely a light-hearted activity. They did not take time to understand my emotions, nor recognise how the outcome of this race would affect me. To this day, I still do not feel comfortable in 'racing' against others, which was evident in my reluctance to participate in the 'parents' race' at my daughter's Sports Day. I refused, citing inappropriate footwear as my excuse.

For the purpose of this study, gender can be understood as a social construct shaped by how individuals perceive themselves in relation to physical activity and physical education. I recognised that the concept of gender is complex, multi-dimensional, and often problematic. Flintoff (2011) describes gender as "the behaviours, attributes and roles associated with being

either a woman or man" (p. 204), differentiating it from 'sex', which refers to biological differences between human beings. A clear distinction exists between sex and gender, with Stanley (2002) questioning whether 'sex' (biological characteristics of 'maleness' and 'femaleness') causes 'gender' (culturally assigned traits of 'femininity' and 'masculinity'). Adding to this complexity, Butler's (1990) *Gender Trouble* introduced the concept of 'gender performativity', arguing that gender is not something we inherently 'are' but something we 'become' through repetitive performance of socially recognised and approved gendered behaviours. Both gender and sex, moreover, are not strictly binary terms, with non-binary identities such as transgender, genderqueer, agender, and pangender emerging in recent years to reflect diverse gender identities.

When considering gender in the context of physical education, the situation becomes increasingly complex. Physical education is historically differentiated by the sex of the individual (Kirk, 1992), creating an environment where girls are often socialised into activities associated with femininity, reinforcing subservient roles, while boys are often socialised into masculine sports, which reinforce dominant masculine physicality (Scraton, 1992; Vertinsky, 1992). Schools contribute to the construction, normalisation, and definition of societal expectations around masculinity and femininity, with dominant discourses of sport, success, ability, masculinity and femininity shaping the norms and practices within physical education (Roberts et al., 2020). Girls, as a result, are often disproportionality underserved by physical education (Vertinsky, 1992; Flintoff & Scraton, 2006; Oliver & Kirk, 2015). Although gender can be understood as fluid (Butler, 1990), in the context of physical education, at least at the time of this study, it was operationalised according to biological sex. Whilst I acknowledge that such binary classifications are problematic, this study focused on the experiences of girls exploring how girls, identified primarily by biological sex and assigned to single-sex lessons, could benefit from teachers' uses of an activist approach, which seeks to challenge barriers to physical activity linked to gender.

My aspiration in embarking on this project is to learn how to support teachers in working with ALL girls in physical education. Not just the 'sporty' ones like me, who are, arguably, easier to please. While I recognise that my experiences of physical education and physical activity were mainly positive throughout my childhood, the times when I felt like I wasn't 'good enough', such as in my race against Greg, are etched in my memories. Indeed, if *my* memories are predominantly positive, what about the experiences of *other* girls? I chose to become a teacher with the intention of supporting young people to find the same love of sport

and physical activity that I had. However, as this thesis will show, doing this is not an easy task.

1.2 Precedent for the study

The issue of girls' engagement in physical education and physical activity is not new. It has been widely reported in the literature, media and government reports for decades. The most recent 2022 Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) report in Scotland highlights this gender disparity, revealing that boys consistently report higher levels of daily physical activity compared to girls. At the onset of their teenage years, 28% of boys reported engaged in at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity per day, while only 17% of girls did so. These figures further decline by age 15, with 22% of boys and 12% of girls meeting the recommended daily physical activity levels (Inchley et al., 2023). Moreover, the latest Girls Active report from the Youth Sport Trust (YST) shows a decline in girls' enjoyment of physical education, with 74% reporting enjoyment in 2016 compared to 64% in 2023 (Youth Sport Trust, 2023). Despite multiple UK government initiatives such as Girls Active (England) and Fit for Girls (Scotland) aimed at addressing barriers to girls' experiences in physical activity, physical education and school sport, there has been minimal impact in girls' experiences in physical education (Scraton, 2018a). My recent interactions with pre-service teachers (PSTs) reinforce this, as they continually report challenges in finding ways to teach 'disengaged' girls.

For decades, the field of physical education has advocated for a more gender-sensitive curriculum, aiming to disrupt gender stereotypes and create an inclusive environment (Vertinsky, 1992, Azzarito et al, 2009). Movement within the research community has led to initiatives such as culturally relevant curriculum models (Ennis, 1999; Sport for Peace model), co-creating curricula *with* girls (Oliver et al, 2009; Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010), and student voice practices centred in action (Oliver, 2010; Fisette, 2013). Notably, this movement no longer places blame on girls themselves but rather considers them as active agents of change (Flintoff & Scraton, 2006; Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010, 2012b; Stride, 2014). Kim Oliver has taken a particular stance with regards to the issue of girls in physical education, and her work over the years has culminated in the creation of an activist approach. Oliver's work, guided by feminist, critical and activist research and pedagogies, aims to

challenge the status quo and imagine new possibilities for girls within physical education (Fine, 1994; Oliver & Kirk, 2015).

I came to use an activist approach from a position of hope and curiosity; hope for a better experience for girls and curious as to different ways I could teach girls in physical education. My journey began when I was a secondary school physical education teacher and responded to a call from David Kirk, subsequently joining Kim and David to learn about this approach, alongside four other teachers. Initially, I did not set out with a clear objective for this thesis as I was in the midst of learning how to enact an activist approach myself during the project's pilot study. However, I was eager to explore whether teachers besides 'test pilots' (Launder, 2001) like Kim Oliver could effectively adopt this approach. Additionally, since Oliver's work was conducted in an American context, I was curious as to its applicability in a Scottish secondary school setting where my experience lay.

Following the pilot study, three teachers expressed interest in continuing to work with us, marking the next phase of our becoming-Activist journeys. One of these teachers, whose activist approach involved an all-boys class, is not included in this thesis's dataset, something I elaborate on in the Methodology chapter. Context played a central role in understanding our becoming-Activist journeys. We recognised the uniqueness of each school environment and aimed to empower teachers to create their own paths toward activist teaching (Armour, 2010; Parker & Patton, 2019), while acknowledging the challenges they faced. To my knowledge, no other studies have approached the enactment of an activist approach in this manner. While previous research has studied the enactment of activist approaches with PSTs and researchers in secondary schools, none have involved in-service teachers leading such approaches within their own school contexts.

This research gap gives rise to three fundamental questions:

1. What is the nature of the teachers' journeys in becoming-Activist as they learn to use an activist approach in their girls-only physical education classes?
2. How do teachers and pupils experience an activist approach to physical education in two secondary schools in Scotland?
3. How do teachers experience school-based professional learning?

1.3 A journey toward becoming-Activist

According to Sachs (2000), becoming an activist teacher is a bold endeavour that requires risk-taking, collective efforts and strategic thinking. It creates new space for action and debate, improving learning opportunities for all involved in education. Moreover, Greene (1995) reminds us to look at the experiences of schooling from multiple vantage points in order to re-imagine the possibilities of *what might be*. Reflecting on their insights, I recognise the evolution of this thesis over a long period of time. Like all activist work, it has required time, patience and creativity (Oliver & Kirk, 2015). I acknowledge that times have changed since I commenced the field work in August 2016, marked by significant events such as the pandemic, anti-racism movements and increasing mental health concerns among young people (Pitchforth et al, 2019). Notably, the prevalence of young people in Scotland feeling left out reached its highest level in 24 years by 2022 (Inchley et al, 2023).

As activists begin their journey from *where they are* (i.e. their current circumstances), the insights generated within this thesis remain relevant, irrespective of the particular details of who, what, where, and how. In our words, any starting point, whether that be the pupils and teachers, educational institutions, or curricula, constantly evolve, allowing us to generate knowledge differently through our actions (Enright & O'Sullivan, 2012c). Therefore, I make no apologies for the extended duration of this thesis, and only have gratitude for all those involved in its completion. The particular focus of this thesis emerged over time and could have taken a number of directions. I suggest this study started as far back as 8-year-old me, losing that race against Greg in front of all my classmates. At the time, I did not notice the impact that event had on my journey, yet I now know that all of our experiences matter. This thesis represents a step forward in positioning myself, along with many others discussed in the following chapters, as contributors to creating different and hopefully better paths in physical education, actively seeking solutions. I am honoured to be part of a community of activists dedicated to effect positive change.

1.4 Outline of Thesis

This thesis explores the transformative journeys of two teachers as they enact an activist approach with their physical education classes. . Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 reviews the literature on teacher professional learning, gender and physical education, and dominant ideologies that have shaped girls' experiences in physical education. Here, I introduce some promising research avenues, including an activist approach, establishing this study's theoretical framework whilst advocating for further exploration of this approach within school contexts to understand teachers' and pupils' experiences.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology within the critical transformative paradigm. I provide the research design, activist methodology, settings, participants, data generation and data analysis. This chapter demonstrates the trustworthiness of the data, providing insights into my own researcher reflexivity, as well as discussing the ethical considerations maintained throughout this study.

The findings are presented in Chapters 4 and 5, each focusing on one teacher's becoming-Activist journey. Chapter 4 explores Kate's journey, revealing how her assumptions about girls and physical education shifted as she attuned to her pupils more consistently through her enactment of an activist approach, thereby putting herself into a different relationship with her pupils. Chapter 5 explores Jess's journey, emphasising how pupils' practices within physical education became more visible to her when using an activist approach, requiring Jess to address the issues that are uncovered. The findings show that by attending to and affirming the differences among their pupils, teachers can create more harmonious relationships in their physical education classes.

Chapter 6 synthesises these findings arguing that an activist approach not only transformed relationships between teachers and pupils, as well as among pupils themselves, but also increased the visibility of teaching and learning practices and fostered democratic forms of participation beyond what is typically found in traditional physical education lessons. This chapter advocates for school-based teacher professional leaning as a promising avenue for helping teachers to learn to use an activist approach within their own school contexts.

Finally, Chapter 7 offers a reflection on the findings of this thesis, acknowledging the ongoing and constantly evolving nature of becoming-Activist. I propose future directions for this line of research to support equitable physical education for girls and other marginalised groups.

Chapter 2: Gender and Physical Education: Problems, Ideologies and Potential Solutions

2.1 Introduction

I open this chapter with a quote from Tizzy, an 18-year-old girl mentioned in a recent British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) article entitled 'Low Confidence and Periods Stop Girls Liking PE' (de Ferrer & Bryson, 2023). Describing her experiences in physical education, Tizzy says:

> *I really didn't like it. It was all of it - getting on the bus, getting changed, getting really sweaty, the competitive people shouting at you for not doing the right thing. The teachers would pick people who were good at sport to do things - and you were left not really knowing what you were doing.*

Tizzy's remarks resonate with the experiences of many girls in physical education. The issues she highlights (such as body confidence, competitiveness, social dynamics, and the preference of 'sporty' pupils by teachers) are not new and, as I will argue, unsurprising given the entrenched traditions within physical education.

Reflecting on Tizzy's remarks in October 2023, I am left wondering why these issues endure, year after year, for what seems like a significant proportion of girls, particularly in the teenage years. However, for me, it extends beyond mere contemplation. As an individual deeply committed to education as a teacher, teacher-educator, woman and mother to a young girl, I am convinced we can do better for our girls. There is a pressing need to support teachers to understand the complex issues affecting girls in physical education. It is crucial to support teachers in envisaging and enacting alternative approaches to engage all girls because, as I will demonstrate, the current system does not seem to be working. Further, it is evident that teachers play a pivotal role in girls' experiences of physical education. To support them in adopting new teaching approaches for girls, however, we need to understand the challenges they may experience whilst learning any new approach. As I explained in the introductory chapter, I am advocating for the use of a specific approach, an activist approach, as a potential way forward for teachers to better engage with all girls in physical education.

2.1.1 Outline of Chapter

In the first section of this chapter, I outline traditional and alternative approaches to teacher professional development in physical education arguing that school-based professional learning offers a promising possibility for teachers to enact change in their own school settings. I discuss how pedagogical models, such as an activist approach, present opportunities for change, despite the challenges of enactment, serving as a means to support teacher professional learning within school settings.

The second section addresses girls' complex relationships with physical education, what Kirk and Oliver (2014) term the 'same old story'. I examine equal opportunities legislation that has contributed to the framing of girls as the 'problem', often labelled as disengaged and the weaker sex, in comparison to their male peers. Drawing on the literature, I highlight factors contributing to this perception of girls and explore some of the more positively received approaches to working with girls in physical education.

The third section examines dominant ideologies in physical education, including persistent discourses around the body, health and traditional pedagogy. I explore how gendered stereotypes, teachers' assumptions about girls, and interpersonal dynamics and relationships shape girls' experiences in physical education.

In the final section, I explore an activist approach as a potential disruptor of these dominant discourses. Emerging from three decades of activist work, this approach is described as a pedagogical model (Oliver and Kirk, 2015) with its main idea, critical elements and learning aspirations that have informed this study. I argue for an activist approach as a starting point to support teachers in working more inclusively with ALL girls in physical education.

2.2 Teacher Professional Learning

As we consider the 'problem' with girls, it's important to consider how teachers can be supported in addressing this problem. Lawson et al. (2020) argue that the professional learning of teachers is of paramount importance if physical education is to 'survive and thrive' in our school systems (p. 148). Indeed, to ensure girls have the opportunity to thrive in physical education, teachers should be provided with appropriate pedagogical tools to support

them. The literature suggests that effective teacher professional learning should be facilitated with care, acknowledging that teachers' individual contexts are a key factor in ensuring that professional development is ongoing and sustained (Parker & Patton, 2017). This section will explore the various trends in teacher professional learning and the influence of this on teachers' enactment of novel approaches in school-based physical education.

2.2.1 Teacher professional learning in physical education

It is widely known that teacher professional learning (TPL) or continued professional development (CPD) is key to supporting teachers with educational reform and in developing their practice to support the diverse needs of young people (Amour et al., 2017; Paton et al., 2013). Indeed, the manner in which TPL is conducted significantly influences how teachers translate what they have learned into practice (Oliver & Kirk, 2016). Traditional approaches to TPL, which are often decontextualized from teachers' daily professional experiences and delivered as 'one-time workshops', have faced criticism for their failure to yield meaningful learning opportunities (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). It is widely accepted that this type of traditional professional development in physical education falls short of meeting teachers' needs, particularly in terms of the lack of focus on pupil learning (Patton et al., 2023). These approaches often emphasise standardised content without considering the specific contexts of physical education, neglecting teachers' professional learning needs (Patton & Parker, 2014). Patton et al. (2013) advocate for sustained, teacher-centred, and physically and mentally active TPL to be effective. Similarly, Goodyear (2017) argued that three characteristics of TPL, individualised (external) support, departmental (internal) support and sustained support, can facilitate teachers' pedagogical fluency.

Armour and Yelling's (2004, 2007) research proposed a departure from traditional and widespread off-site professional learning courses, arguing that a radical change was necessary in physical education if we are to deepen teachers' learning and its application within school settings. The authors, along with scholars like Parker and Patton (2017), Goodyear and Casey (2015), and Oliver et al. (2018), suggest that professional learning communities and networks play a pivotal role in challenging the traditional off-site professional learning courses (Armour & Yelling, 2004, 2007). However, the evolution of learning communities, or communities of practice, is both unpredictable and non-linear,

which poses challenges in their development and sustainability (Atencio et al., 2012; Parker & Patton, 2017).

Through their research with professional learning communities, Patton et al., (2013) advocate for three teacher-centred strategies for facilitating TPL. Firstly, 'learning by doing' involves facilitators structuring the learning experience without dictating specific actions for teachers, often occurring in a workshop format with discussions, critical reflections, and active learning opportunities. Secondly, 'learning by trying' is when participants and facilitators operate separately, allowing teachers to create and test new ideas in their unique contexts and then critically reflect on the outcomes. The third strategy, 'learning by sharing', entails participants sharing their work with other teachers, including through more formal presentations. Patton et al. (2013) observed that these strategies promote independent learning, empowering teachers to make meaning of their learning in relation to their contexts.

If one of the aims of TPL is for teachers to advance and evolve professionally throughout their careers, it is crucial to provide them with supportive professional learning experiences that foster growth (Armour et al., 2012). Moreover, in physical education, a goal of TPL is to empower teachers as 'active' learners (Armour, 2010). While integrating TPL within the context of their working environment offers the evident advantage of ecological validity (Kirk et al., 2017), it also comes with challenges. On the one hand, school-based professional learning shows promise in improving teaching practices and subsequently benefiting pupil learning. It provides teachers with CPD experiences that they can contextualise within their own schools, whilst appreciating the variations and specificity of each setting (Parker & Patton, 2017; Lawson et al., 2020). In other words, the school site offers a space for teachers to translate new ideas into practice, extending beyond a traditional off-site approach. On the other hand, it is important to proceed with caution given the unique nature of each school site. School environments are complex with physical education teachers encountering competing demands from policy requirements, the CPD needs of the teachers, and development of local networks (Lawson et al., 2020). Timperley et al. (2008) agrees that school-based TPL is heavily influenced by its specific context.

Currently, there is no universally accepted solution or a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to TPL and, indeed, scholars such as Lieberman (1995) and Armour et al. (2017) argue against this. Kirk et al., (2017) argue that school based TPL is a personalised and multi-faceted process that is both deeply individualised and challenging. Moreover, introducing a novel pedagogical model, such as an activist approach, requires teachers to challenge the status quo of traditional physical education, disrupting their previously successful socialisation and

confidence-building in that context (Kirk et al., 2017). To date, little is known about physical education teachers' professional learning experiences in school settings, and none that focuses on teachers learning to use an activist approach in their own schools. This study seeks to make a contribution to this gap in our knowledge.

2.2.2 Pedagogical models in physical education

A pedagogical model involves the tight alignment of learning aspirations, teaching, curriculum and assessment (Kirk, 2013). Additionally, models guide both teachers and pupils in their learning and decisions made about their learning. In addition to benefiting pupils' learning, pedagogical models can also be a medium for teacher professional learning (Casey, 2014).

According to Casey and Kirk (2021), pedagogical models are specifications for practice rather than prescriptions. They are considered provisional 'blueprints' (Metzler, 2005) that necessitate regular and ongoing adjustments to accommodate the contextual factors of schools and learners (Casey & Kirk, 2021). Moreover, since pedagogical models are design specifications for practice rather than prescriptive programmes, they are inherently flexible and adaptable (Casey & Kirk, 2021). Consequently, when teachers enact pedagogical models, it's foreseeable that adaptations will occur as they consider what is best for their context, their pupils and themselves. Indeed, as the 'Iron Law' of curriculum innovation suggests, "teachers play a decisive and inevitable part in the translation of educational ideas into practice." (Casey & Kirk, 2021, p. 31).

While Landi et al. (2016) criticised the enactment of pedagogical models in practice, contending that teachers had limited flexibility in adapting models to their context and that they did not adequately address the broader discourse on the purpose of physical education, Casey and Kirk (2021) distance themselves from such views. Instead, they argue, "Models are not one thing. They are 'spaces for manoeuvre' where transformation and innovative ideas during the process of implementation are both inevitable and desirable." (p.33).

2.2.3 Enactment of pedagogical models

The literature reveals that the enactment of pedagogical models in practice presents both benefits and challenges (see Fernandez-Rio & Iglesias, 2022, for a recent review). There

are some examples that demonstrate the potential of pedagogical models in physical education as a medium to transform teachers' practices (Casey & MacPhail, 2018). Through his enactment of pedagogical models, Casey asserted that his 'whole pedagogy changed' (p. 306), leading to a new perspective of his pupils. Yet, he encountered challenges in relinquishing his explicitly traditional teacher role to facilitate more pupil ownership of learning (Casey & MacPhail, 2018).

Extensive research into the cooperative learning model in physical education (e.g., Dyson, 2002; Goodyear & Casey, 2015; Goodyear et al., 2014) highlights significant shifts in teachers' practice. Dyson (2002) notes a conceptual change in how teachers organise teaching, while Goodyear and Casey (2015) emphasise the impact of cooperative learning on pupil learning, prompting teachers to view the model as more than a 'one-off' intervention. Moreover, the implementation of cooperative learning in two secondary girls' physical education classes by Goodyear et al. (2014) not only encouraged greater responsibility among the girls but also resulted in their increased engagement. Like Casey (2012), this study further exemplifies a transformation in Goodyear's teaching from teacher-centred to pupil-centred (Goodyear et al., 2014).

There are, however, several challenges with enacting pedagogical models in practice. One challenge is how teachers choose to enact the model into practice. This can include the 'full version', a 'watered-down' version or a 'cafeteria approach' (Curtner-Smith et al., 2008; Curtner-Smith et al., 2021). This line of research found that both professional and organisational socialisation shape how teachers enact new ideas into practice. Casey and Kirk (2021) argue that pedagogical models, however, should be regarded as specifications for practice:

> As a specification for practice, a pedagogical model is always to be viewed as provisional, in the sense that regular and ongoing adaptation of plans and programs will be necessary at local level to meet new contingencies and sets of circumstances. (…) Curriculum is a specification for practice rather than a prescription, because teachers will experiment with, and try out, different teaching and learning strategies and assessment practices over the course of a physical education program. What worked with one class may not work with another.
>
> (Casey & Kirk, 2021, p. 10)

Another challenge is maintaining fidelity to the model (Hastie & Casey, 2014). When teachers attempt to 'test' out a new model, they may not adhere to the original concept as

intended by the model's creator. Additionally, as argued by Goodyear & Casey (2015), maintaining a model's implementation beyond the 'honeymoon period' poses challenges to the sustainability of a model over time. Launder (2001) further notes the complexities inherent within models, suggesting that only the teaching equivalent of 'test pilots' are capable of using them in practice. In other words, enacting pedagogical models may be too difficult for 'ordinary' teachers. Nevertheless, Kirk (2016) argues that most teachers are capable of enacting pedagogical models, providing we address the underlying factors that may potentially impede their enactment in practice.

As teachers grapple with new ideas on their enactment of pedagogical models, it's important to recognised that modifications are not only expected, but they can be complex (Kirk & MacDonald, 2001). As such, understanding how to support teachers in making conceptual shifts (i.e. from traditional methods to the enactment of pedagogical models) becomes paramount (Casey, 2014). Moreover, as argued by Casey (2017), pedagogical models should not be seen as a 'finished article'; rather, they should evolve with the support of teachers and researchers through ongoing processes of refinement and reimagining in practice.

2.2.4 Summary: Pedagogical models as a medium for teacher professional learning

Research on pedagogical models and TPL learning is not limited to the studies cited in this section. Nonetheless, these studies offer insights into how the enactment of pedagogical models in physical education can lead to positive changes in teachers' practices. In this line of research, transformational shifts in teaching were facilitated by engaging in reflection, redefining the goals of physical education, and including pupils in decision-making about their learning. There are, however, several challenges noted concerning TPL and the enactment of pedagogical models in practice. Challenges include maintaining model fidelity, teachers' conceptualisation of the model, and the ability to move beyond the initial implementation phase. Furthermore, the complexities of school contexts provide challenges for teachers who are willing to adopt new teaching approaches and push on the status quo of physical education.

Nevertheless, it is worth exploring the potential of a novel pedagogical model (an activist approach) as a medium for teacher professional learning. By understanding the challenges inherent with the enactment of this approach into practice, we may find

opportunities to better support teachers in learning to use this approach in supporting girls to thrive in physical education. Whilst this section has argued for pedagogical models as a means to support teachers in their professional learning, it is equally important to understand the factors that may influence their journey, particularly concerning girls in physical education.

2.3 The Same Old Story: Girls in Physical Education

This section will explore the main issues surrounding girls in physical education. In order to support teachers in effectively engaging with girls, it's important to understand the current and previous research on this topic. The scholarly work on girls in physical education is extensive and has contributed to this narrative, often attributing blame to the girls themselves. According to Kirk & Oliver (2014), the 'same old story' continues to be reproduced in research, the media and government interventions aimed at addressing the perceived 'problem' with girls. Yet, this work has done little in questioning whether the context, environment or teaching approaches are the key issues in engaging girls in physical education. This section provides an overview of the historical background to the 'same old story' and the factors that have led to constructing girls as the 'problem' in physical education. Additionally, I will offer insights into the more recent research that has showed promise in providing girls more equitable experiences in physical education.

2.3.1 (Un)Equal opportunities: equality issues

One of the pivotal moments in addressing inequalities for girls in physical education and sport came to the forefront during the legislation and implementation of an equal opportunities law in the United States during the 1970s that still has resounding influence today: Title IX of the Education Amendments in 1972. This federal civil rights law was intended to eradicate gender-based discrimination in educational programmes and activities with a specific focus in admissions criteria for universities. In other words, the law was not developed with sport or physical education in mind. Yet, the driving force behind applying Title IX to physical education was rooted in the belief that if girls were exposed to the same instructions and performance standards as boys, it would lead to an enhancement in their skill level and physical aspirations, ultimately closing a gap in achievement (Nilges, 1998). Thus,

a result of the enforcement of Title IX was that physical education shifted from a gender-based subject to co-educational (mixed gender). Yet, the simple assumption that putting boys and girls in the same class would close an achievement gap was overly optimistic.

On the one hand, the introduction of co-educational physical education sought to expose girls to sports and physical activities traditionally reserved for their male counterparts. Further, there was an overarching belief, aligned to a liberal notion of equal access, that equality (or receiving the same instructions and performance standards) was necessary because males held exclusive opportunities within society (Flintoff, 1990). Thus, there was an assumption that if girls had equal opportunities and access to the same classes, they would develop physically at a similar level as boys. On the other hand, the actual practices of co-educational physical education in schools remained heavily male-dominated, and girls frequently displayed non-assertive participation patterns during game play (Griffin, 1984; Flintoff & Scraton, 2006). Consequently, even though girls were permitted entry into the same classes as boys, they were frequently marginalised and perceived as having the 'wrong attitude' for not taking advantage of the opportunities they were being provided with (Vertinsky, 1992). As noted by Nilges (1998) and other scholars such as Vertinsky (1992) and Wright (1995), girls continued to experience a subordinate status within physical education settings, perhaps even leading to a reduction of opportunities when compared to the opportunities they were afforded in the single-sex classes pre-Title IX. In other words, and as Vertinsky (1992) emphasised, "equal access did not ensure equal participation" (p. 378).

In an effort to scrutinise the effectiveness of Title IX in physical education, Nilges (1998) conducted a study of a fourth-grade co-educational class. In it, she found that the gender-integrated mandate of Title IX did little to disrupt the deeply ingrained power structures of patriarchy, a nod to Vertinsky's earlier assertion. This disheartening result was reinforced by several researchers. For example, Griffin (1984) found that gender-based stereotypes frequently infiltrated the gymnasium settings limiting opportunities for girls. Other notable observations were that activities traditionally offered to girls tended to emphasise cooperation over competition (Vertinsky, 1992). Yet, under the combined co-educational curriculum, the curriculum aligned to male traditions around multi-activity, team sports, and competition. Even when girls wanted to participate in these activities, their male teachers and peers often denied them this opportunity by, for example, not passing the ball to them, excluding them from other aspects of a game, and shouting at them if they made mistakes (Ennis et al., 1997).

In light of these more complex challenges faced by girls, Wright's (1995) research affirmed that female pupils were frequently perceived as the 'problem' in the context of physical education. According to Wright (1995), both male and female physical educators often viewed girls as "far less enthusiastic than the boys, much harder to motivate, slower to change, far less skilled, and more resistant to being influenced by the discourses and practices of physical education" (p. 15). Further, teachers are often ill-equipped to implement equitable approaches in physical education (Ennis et al., 1997). Instead, teachers believed that merely tweaking the rules to accommodate girls' lower levels of strength and speed was a sufficient way to fulfil their duty of providing co-educational physical education (Ennis et al., 1997). Such an approach reinforces that girls are the 'weaker sex' and cannot participate in the game itself

In the United Kingdom, the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 was legislation that ostensibly supported co-educational physical education but was formulated in a manner that allowed single-sex programmes to persist. Although this act does not mention physical education explicitly, it provides an exception to sports, games or other activities of "a competitive nature where the physical strength, stamina or physique of the average woman puts her at a disadvantage to the average man" (p.28). In this regard, the option of mixed or single-sex groupings in physical education was expected to be based on educational justifications (Scraton, 1993). Moreover, consideration had to be given to the circumstances in which this choice of grouping was made (Scraton, 1993). As a result, this approach generated frustration among feminist scholars who were apprehensive about the potential impact of co-education on girls' experiences in physical education, particularly considering the historical separation of girls and boys in physical education (Scraton, 1992). Indeed, as noted by Vertinsky (1992), there was some optimism in the belief that teachers would effectively implement this reform. However, in practice, during this particular time period, teachers struggled to ensure equal treatment for all students (Wright, 1997; Griffin, 1985; Kirk & Oliver, 2014). Thus, despite the undoubtedly well-intentioned nature of various legislation, aimed at providing girls with equal opportunities, it has been the subject of substantial scrutiny and criticism (see Evans et al., 1987; Flintoff, 1996; Griffin, 1981; Hannon & Williams, 2008). Consequently, the outcome of the legislation referred to resulted in the persistence of single-sex lessons in the UK, while certain feminists perceived that girls were being disadvantaged (Scraton, 1992).

2.3.2 Girls' (dis)engagement in physical education: the influence of the media

Multiple studies highlight the factors hindering girls' participation in physical education, with teachers often encountering difficulties engaging girls (see Flintoff & Scraton, 2006). This issue is not new and has, arguably, been over-reported in the academic literature. Indeed, according to Scraton (2018a), little seems to have changed for girls in physical education, with studies continually citing the same factors that contribute to girls' disengagement, including lack of confidence in physical abilities, body image concerns, the dominance of boys, teachers' attention to 'sporty' girls, and unwelcomed mandatory uniforms (Oliver et al., 2009; Stride, 2014; Mitchell et al.,2015)

One factor that seems to reproduce this narrative surrounding girls' disengagement in physical education is the media. Earlier in this chapter I introduced Tizzy, an 18-year-old girl who never found enjoyment in physical education. Tizzy, who was introduced to us as 'not naturally sporty', often felt excluded in physical education because the 'sporty' people dominated the lesson (de Ferrer & Bryson, 2023). For physical educators, this should come as no surprise. These classroom dynamics have been noted by physical education scholars for years (e.g., Vertinsky, 1992; Oliver & Kirk, 2014; Scraton, 1992). Yet, it is the replication year on year of these types of articles that continue to reproduce this narrative about girls. That is, girls do not enjoy physical education, they have body confidence issues, and they do not want to participate in competitive activities. Such constructions of girls in the media, as at-risk in physical education, persist today.

Newspapers, social media, and other media outlets play a large role in the construction of girls at the intersection of health, the body, and gender. The BBC's article title from 2023 is *not new*. Just two years previously (October 2021), the BBC had another article headline: 'Periods and low confidence put some girls off sport' (Long, 2021). In other words, these 'click bait' headlines claim to shine a light on issues in physical education. Yet, they also play a role in re-producing (rather than challenging) the idea that girls do not seem to 'fit' into sport and physical education spaces. In 2017, the BBC produced an article titled, 'How fear puts girls off PE' (Burns, 2017), whilst the same year had a Huffington Post article titled 'I Hated PE at School – Let's change the story for girls' (Holdaway, 2017). Indeed, these outlets are arguing for better situations for girls and I do not doubt their well-meaning

intentions. Yet, many of these stories are not well researched and actually do more to produce traditional narratives of what it is to be a girl, as well as the dominant forms of physical education.

This is not to say that these reporters are not genuine. Rather, they are making attempts to address the negative landscape on the situation for girls in physical education. Jane Hughes (2012) for the BBC wrote, 'Schools urged to make PE more attractive to girls'. Here, there is an important distinction that it is the school's responsibility to make physical education an inclusive space. For example, Times writer Helen Puttick (2023) highlighted that Scotland's oldest all-girls school has attempted to encourage participation by requiring sport bras as part of the mandatory physical education kit. Yet, these suggestions and opinions often stem from normative beliefs about what girls *ought* to do and what constitutes appropriate physical education. Rather than transform physical education practices to be better for girls, these writers inevitably reproduce a narrative that gets recycled about girls, their bodies, as well as the field of physical education.

Kirk and Oliver (2014) refer to this repetitive narrative in the media as 'the same old story', a topic I will explore later in this chapter. Indeed, they state that the issues discussed in these media articles have remained largely unchanged, persisting from the early 2000s (or even earlier). Yet, by recycling these same stories over and over again, there is common belief that girls are a problem in physical education. Unfortunately, media outlets continue to recycle stories about the challenges girls face in physical education without nuance or any recognition that gender is a complex issue in schools and society more broadly. For example, Guardian journalist Kessell opened her article with the following statement, 'Another day, another report concluding that girls are not engaging with PE and physical activity compared to their male peers' (Kessell, 2017). Indeed, Kessell's point remains as true in 2024 as it was in 2017. In other words, the lack of girls' engagement in physical education remains a problem.

2.3.3 Government initiatives: success or not?

Beyond media articles about girls in physical education, there have been multiple publicly funded initiatives to address the 'problem' with girls. Ironically, it is these initiatives that often get picked up by the media outlets given their ease of accessibility to the general public. One notable example of a government initiative is the UK study titled 'Girls in Sport',

which received funding through a collaboration between Nike and the Youth Sport Trust (YST) at Loughborough University. In the Girls in Sport project, researchers collaborated with teachers to develop strategies aimed at enhancing girls' involvement in physical education for a more 'girl-friendly' environment. The report further emphasised that for sustained change to occur, the focus should shift towards challenging traditional curriculum and pedagogical practices in physical education, rather than placing the responsibility on the girls themselves (Kirk et al., 2000).

Other examples from Scotland, 'Girls on the Move' (2005) and 'Fit for Girls' (2008-2011), were aimed at contributing to the Scottish government objective to 'increase and maintain the proportion of physically active people in Scotland' (Scottish Executive, 2003, p. 22). Taylor et al.'s (2013) study of Girls on the Move reported some positive though mainly mixed results in terms of maintaining moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) over and beyond the six months intervention. In the case of Fit for Girls, Mitchell et al. (2015) noted that providing some choice of activity including non-competitive, non-traditional activities was well-received by girls. Whilst these initiatives, on the face of it, appear to support the work teachers do in schools, they do not alleviate the 'problem'.

Since 2016, the YST began conducting the Girls Active Survey to understand girls' attitudes toward physical activity and sports, both in and out of school, compared to boys. The latest July 2023 survey with over 18,000 girls, reported that there was a decline in the percentage of girls who enjoyed physical education, from 74% in 2016 to 64% in 2023. The report lists the top barriers for secondary girls as: having their period, lack of confidence, discomfort with others watching and concerns about appearance (Youth Sport Trust, 2023). What is rather remarkable about this very recent survey is that it further emphasises the recycled narrative of what Kirk and Oliver (2014) call the 'same old story', so much so that the 2023 report may have almost been a carbon copy of a previous one. In the 2019 YST report, the top barriers for secondary girls' participation in physical education were confidence levels, not liking it when other people are watching them and when they had their period (Youth Sport Trust, 2019). Multiple campaigns (for example, This Girl Can, Sport England, 2015 and #ActiveGirls, Sport Scotland, 2016) have continued to 'fight the equality fight' for girls. However, according to Scraton (2018b), the positive experiences of the 'can do' girl seem not to be very evident in school physical education lessons.

The problem with this recycled narrative, according to Kirk and Oliver (2014), is that many of these reports claim their findings are *new* research offering a *fresh start* in the process of understanding girls' perspectives on physical activity. However, they neglect to

reference scholarly work or even draw upon their own reports (as seen in the YST reports mentioned earlier). While constructing their argument for the perpetuation of the same old story, Kirk and Oliver (2014) point to various concerns that have surfaced over the past two decades regarding girls and physical education. The authors argue that the same old story is maintained and reproduced by many researchers who study the topic (citing among others, Casey et al., 2013; Grieser et al., 2006; Shen et al., 2012b; Taylor et al., 2008), arguing that much of the research that has called for reform, which I will mention shortly, goes unacknowledged in more recent literature. This failure to cite new work has contributed very little in the way of new insights (Kirk & Oliver, 2014).

2.3.4 Girls as the 'problem'

Girls being viewed as the 'problem' in physical education cannot be solely attributed to the equal opportunities legislation, the media and government initiatives. In 2006, Flintoff and Scraton conducted a comprehensive review of studies concerning girls and physical education. Drawing from various empirical studies from the Anglophone literature during the 1980s and 1990s, the authors argued that girls remain constructed as the 'other' in physical education. Notably, this 'other' position was a homogenous group that was viewed as inferior to the traditional masculine values espoused in physical education. This belief remains in many cases, despite significant contributions by researchers who have challenged these dominant discourses about girls in physical education. Indeed, there is little evidence indicating a shift in patriarchal power dynamics or the absence of dominant gender discourse influencing physical education curriculum and pedagogy (Scraton, 2018a).

Rich (2003) worked with ten newly qualified female physical education teachers in order to understand how the 'problem' of girls gets constructed in physical education. She found that teachers constructed girls as 'their own worse enemies' for not taking advantage of the opportunities provided to them (Rich, 2003). Furthermore, female teachers readily placed blame on the girls themselves. One teacher participant even stated:

> *"The thing is that even if you give the girls an option, they don't want to do things, like cricket, I tried… but for some reason it's just not in their nature."*
>
> (Rich, 2003, p. 49)

The teacher's statement above reinforces the belief that girls are hesitant to try new activities, like cricket, because it's perceived as being outside of their usual interests or comfort zone. Despite being a female physical education teacher, the participant in this study believed that there are natural, and arguably biomedical, justifications for girls to not participate in physical activity. This is striking because such a deterministic belief calls into question that girls participating in physical education goes against nature itself. Thus, the construction of girls as 'other' in physical education is partially based on a (false) belief that there is a biological superiority of boys (and men) over girls (and women).

In contrast, Scraton's (1992) research illustrated that many girls lobbied to participate in activities traditionally labelled as masculine like football (soccer) but were often denied this opportunity by teachers. Rich (2004) also uncovered that the teachers, who ironically blamed girls, felt that the perceived solution to solve girls' low participation was to *change* the girls themselves. In other words, the teachers in Rich's study believed that they should alter the girls' attitudes and behaviours as a way to motivate and assimilate them into the existing patriarchal system. Such an approach works to change girls in order to conform to a masculine hegemonic system which ultimately serves to perpetuate gender inequalities (Rich, 2003). The teachers did not, however, think about addressing the unequal gender-related disparities in physical education in order to make it more inclusive for girls.

In the 2000s, researchers continued to develop projects aimed at increasing girls' engagement in order to solve 'the problem' in physical education, even though these were well-documented in the literature (as an example, see Slater & Tiggemann, 2010).

2.3.5 Potential solutions to the 'problem'

Rather than constructing 'girls as the problem', several scholars explored how physical education settings produced barriers and limited young women and girls. Cockburn and Clarke (2002), for example, found that teenage girls who actively participated in physical activity faced a dilemma of having to adopt a 'double identity'. They were expected to either be a masculine 'doer' of physical education (akin to a 'tomboy') or a feminised ('girly') non-participant in physical education. In this case girls were forced to choose between these identities to gain social acceptance. Thus, Cockburn and Clarke (2002) argued that the social and cultural expectations around traditional forms of femininity and masculinity limited girls in sport and physical education and therefore should be resisted.

Oliver and Lalik (2004a) aligned with the call to interrogate gendered stereotypes in physical education. Their research engaged *with* girls (rather than did research *on* girls) and worked to foster a critical perspective on how girl's bodies are constructed in culture. Such an approach not only interrogates traditional forms of masculinities and femininities that limit girls, but it also expands the definition of 'health' and 'physical education' to be inclusive of a range of bodies. In other words, rather than changing girls to assimilate into traditional physical education systems, Oliver and Lalik saw the girls themselves as a powerful source that could transform their experiences in physical activity and physical education. Many others built on Oliver's original work. For example, Azzarito et al. (2006) illustrated that some girls (and teachers) actively resist gender stereotypes in physical education in order to promote gender equity. Azzarito et al. (2006) claimed this approach reinforced the belief that 'physical education should not be restricted by gender' (p. 228). Further work by Enright and O'Sullivan (2010), as well as Stride (2014), constructed girls not as a 'problem' but rather as proactive agents of change who actively negotiate, resist, and persist in physical education as a way to facilitate their engagement in physical education.

What is important here is that the 2000s saw a wave of research that shifted away from constructing girls as the 'problem' in physical education and shifted it toward seeing girls as 'potential solutions' to make physical education a better (more inclusive) space. This wave of research, spurred originally by Oliver's path-finding work, started from the assumption that physical educators should collaborate *with* girls rather than 'on girls'. In so doing, the girls were better positioned to address the complex issues that affected their participation in physical education. Despite a quarter-century of these scholarly efforts, it seems that the situation for girls in most physical education settings has not significantly improved. Indeed, Stride and Flintoff (2018) claimed that "feminist knowledge appears to have had little impact upon everyday practices of PE" (p. 855).

2.3.6 Summary: the same old story

In this section, I illustrated how the 'same old story' about girls in physical education has been established, with dominant narratives from research, media, and government initiatives often placing blame on the girls themselves, constructing them as the 'problem'. I argued that despite scholarly calls to challenge gender stereotypes, avoid 'othering' girls, and to engage *with* girls as active agents of change, this research has had limited impact on

everyday practices in physical education. As the recent July 2023 BBC headline suggests, this ‘same old story’ remains a pressing and ongoing issue today.

2.4 Dominant Ideologies in Physical Education

Physical education, as a field, is not isolated from the wider social and political world. It is influenced by dominant ideologies and social trends (Hawkins, 2008) that often shape what happens in gymnasia across the world. Unlike other school subjects, physical education sits at a unique intersection between physical culture (and sport), health, as well as education (Lawson, 2017). Thus, not only is physical education affected by the dominant norms of schools, but also those ideologies that shape health and the body. In this section, I outline three specific ideologies that have influenced the field of physical education. The first ideology continues from the previous section and outlines how gendered beliefs about the body (in physical culture) have come to matter in physical education. I then discuss how ideologies about ‘promoting biomedical health’ (in health and wellbeing) can often dominate physical education practices. Following this, I consider how normative ideals about teacher and pupil relationships and relationships among pupils have also shaped physical education. At the end of the section, I discuss how these three ideologies help to reproduce the ‘same old story’ around girls as a ‘problem’ in physical education spaces.

2.4.1 Gendered ideologies: masculinities and femininities

Physical education as a field is influenced by physical culture and sport, leading to the reproduction of gender and body ideologies within physical education settings. As noted previously, these gendered ideologies often construct girls as a ‘problem’ in physical education. In most cases, teachers have well-meaning intentions to improve this ‘problem’ for girls (Rich, 2004). Nevertheless, teachers often harbour deeply rooted assumptions and ideologies about teenage girls, which are firmly entrenched within dominant beliefs about gender and the body (Oliver et al., 2018). Indeed, when girls join boys in co-educational physical education settings, they become part of a ‘male preserve’ where traditional forms of masculinity are performed and celebrated, and *in that context*, girls are marginalised and inferiorized (Theberge, 1985; Matthews & Channon, 2020). Thus, if teachers’ assumptions about gender are unchallenged, then the daily practices of physical education, namely a

traditional multi-activity, team-sport programme, will inevitably reproduce the limited representation and mistreatment of girls' sport and physical education practices (Ennis, 1999).

Stride and colleagues (2022) recently argued that teachers have a belief in sex-based differentiation in physical education. The teachers believed men are seen as more suitable for teaching boys and women are deemed more appropriate for teaching girls. According to Stride et al. (2022), some teachers in their study claimed that "girls were different" and thus required a more empathetic approach, particularly when dealing with "women's issues" (p. 252). In thinking about Rich's (2003) study discussed previously, it seems that some teachers still believe that there is a 'biological', and therefore 'natural', reason why girls (as a homogenous group) should be treated differently than boys in physical education. Yet, this was not true of *all* teachers from Stride and colleague's (2022) study. In contrast, they also found that some female teachers often challenged the 'naturalness' of sex differentiation. These female teachers felt more than competent to teach male-oriented sports such as rugby and football (soccer). Thus, beliefs around gender at the intersection of physical education and sport are complex, revealing a range of perspectives amongst teachers (Stride et al., 2022). Yet, when teachers do assume 'natural' gender differences, they may reinforce and reproduce socially constructed beliefs about gender that often limit girls (Flintoff & Scranton, 2006; Vertinsky, 1992).

These assumptions about gender influence the instructional and curricular decisions that teachers make. In other words, teachers may believe that certain activities and sports are more appropriate for boys or girls, or gender-appropriate activities that emphasise feminine and masculine habitus (Gorley et al., 2003). Ennis (1997) highlights the belief that team-based concepts in physical education are primarily geared towards highly skilled players, predominantly boys. Building on this work, Nilges (1998) noted that 'boys sports' were activities such as soccer, football and baseball, where competition was a key feature of these games. In contrast, a typical 'girls sport' is gymnastics, or an aesthetic-based activity (Griffin, 1984). Nilges referred to a male pupil who stated, "Girls are more graceful and can do cartwheels and stuff" (p. 182). This pupil firmly associated soccer, baseball and football as boys' sports, believing girls would be more *graceful* when doing gymnastics. However, he overlooked the graceful movements inherent in soccer. Not only do teachers perceive this we/they dichotomy between what sports are appropriate for girls and boys, but pupils (both boys and girls) also contribute to the gendered nature of physical education (Kirk, 1992;

Nilges, 1998). In other words, pupils and teachers assumptions are part of the historical discourse of physical education.

These assumptions may also influence the way teachers think about and justify boys' behaviours. For example, Ennis (1999) illustrated that teachers often let boys monopolise sports in physical education and rationalised it by stating they were just 'more competitive'. Yet, these teachers were essentially justifying the behaviours that limited girls' participation in physical education by 'not letting them play' (Ennis, 1999; Martinnen et al. 2021; Oliver et al., 2009). Such beliefs about boys are prevalent in physical education, often producing a hierarchy of behaviours and expectations (Garrett, 2004). Considering that girls are often constructed as inferior to boys, those activities that are labelled as 'girl-friendly' are usually those in which girls assume passive roles (Vertinsky, 1992), involve less competitive elements (Mitchell et al., 2015), and do not entail sweating, messing hair, or risking broken nails (Oliver et al., 2009). In other words, 'girly' activities promote a sense of femininity for teenage girls and if they opt to participate in sports labelled as traditionally masculine, their femininity and/or sexual orientation might come under question (Cockburn & Clarke, 2002; Garrett, 2004; Larsson et al., 2011; Paechter, 2010).

Despite the above consequences, many girls are interested and actually want to play competitive team games. For example, Bracco and colleagues (2019) found that using Teaching Games for Understanding (TGFU) in a class of 'disengaged girls' increased participation, motivation, and enjoyment. They argued that TGFU lessons created a more comfortable environment compared to the pressure they felt during traditional physical education classes. Although the authors state a limitation of the study is that they used non-traditional games (e.g., team handball, ultimate disc, and tjoukball) in the TGFU lessons, it was not necessarily a disinterest in team-based games that deterred the girls from participating (Bracco et al., 2019). Similarly, primary-aged girls in Garrett's (2004) study resisted being portrayed as inferior and asserted that their skills and abilities were on par with the boys in their class. Several other scholarly works (see Clark & Paechter, 2007; Hills & Croston, 2012; Paechter, 2010; With-Nielson & Pfister, 2011) also show girls' resistance to the prevailing discourse of heteronormative femininity and view physical education as a site to challenge passive constructs of femininity (Garrett, 2004).

In addition to the assumptions concerning appropriate activities for girls, teachers often hold preconceived notions about the capabilities of girls (Larsson et al., 2011). As outlined previously, girls are frequently perceived by teachers as the 'weaker sex' in physical education settings (Wright, 1995). Consequently, teachers may assume that boys 'naturally'

possess higher abilities than girls when it comes to certain physical activities, especially related to muscular strength, cardiovascular fitness, and power (Larsson et al., 2009). Indeed, these characteristics are also highly valued in competitive team sports and reinforce traditional constructs of masculinities. Within traditional forms of masculinities, muscularity serves as a key signifier of the body, along with the forceful occupation of space and skilful manipulation of objects (Connell, 1987). Indeed, girls who display these characteristics sometimes are perceived as too masculine, thus, exposing them to accusations that they have been masculinised through sport.

Larsson et al.'s (2009) research found that teachers were cognisant of the prevailing gender order in their physical education classrooms, where males were considered dominant and girls were meant to be subordinate to them. Larsson and colleagues, however, also noted that the teachers did little to disrupt this gender hierarchy during teaching despite knowing they exist. Further, Stride's (2014) analysis of Muslim girls' experiences of physical education revealed that teachers' perceptions of girls' capabilities reinforced the assumption that physical education is a masculine domain. In Stride's study, some girls were labelled as incapable of playing football and this was attributed to the media's portrayal of the sport as predominantly male. Indeed, some girls were discouraged by their teachers from pursuing GCSE[1] physical education because they did not align to traditional forms of masculinities that often shape the field.

Several researchers positioned their work to challenge and counteract gendered stereotypes in physical education that may influence teachers' assumptions. For instance, in a study on tomboy identities (see Clark & Paechter, 2007), the school made significant efforts to encourage girls to participate in playground football. Yet, even among the girls who played regularly, they were not fully included by the boys. The boys were hesitant to acknowledge the girls' right to play, doubted their skill in the sport, and consequently, were unwilling to pass the ball to them (Paechter, 2013). Consequently, girls remained 'at the margins' of the school football playground, despite being eager to engage in the game. Expanding on this line of research, Azzarito and Katzew (2010) found that girls cannot be typecasted into a singular form of femininity. Rather, girls move across and perform different forms of femininities within physical education. One participant from their study embodied and transitioned between different performances of femininity that included "the aggressive lacrosse player,

[1] GCSE (General Certificates of Secondary Education) are typically taken at school-leaving age, after two years of study. Several subjects, including physical education, offer qualifications at GCSE level.

the happy girl, the ambitious girl, and the slender girl" (p. 30). In other words, being 'feminine' or 'masculine' was not a stable subject position, but rather is constantly shifting, is dynamic, and regularly changes.

2.4.2 Health(y) ideologies: physical education as-health-promotion

The field of physical education also sits at an intersection with the field of health. Indeed, Kirk (2020) has outlined the historical relationship between health promotion and physical education. In so doing, he stated the field has gone through several phases that include 'scientific functionalism', the 'new health consciousness', 'exercise as medicine' and others (Kirk, 2020). Currently, there has been a push to transition toward a salutogenic approach to health and physical education which often constructs health as more holistic and supports a curriculum that is 'strengths-based' (Quennerstedt & Öhman, 2014). Despite this push to a more holistic approach, there is still a residual and dominant belief amongst educators that physical education can and should address physical health outcomes (see Landi et al., 2016). Given this commitment to 'health promotion', many of the pedagogical practices within physical education are often aimed at health-related practices rather than learning. Consequently, many physical education teachers feel that the promotion of physical activity for health is one of their primary responsibilities (Gray et al., 2015; Horrell et al., 2012)

One particular 'health promotion practice' that permeates physical education is a commitment to maintaining high levels of moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) (McKenzie et al., 2016). This ideology is rooted in a belief that physical education is an ideal place to promote regular physical activity because of its access to young people in schools (Sallis & McKenzie, 1991). Such an approach, however, assumes that the main purpose of physical education is for pupils to maintain high levels of MVPA in their lessons, and this, in turn, will be able to solve highly complex health issues that exist in society. This perspective, however, has a complete commitment to public health goals and, arguably, neglects other educational aims of physical education such as developing knowledge, positive attitudes, and movement for pleasure (Cale & Harris, 2013; Kirk, 2020; McEvilly et al., 2014). Moreover, there are even some evaluations of physical education that measure the amount of MVPA that pupils engage in, and therefore becomes the benchmark, or 'gold standard', of a successful lesson (McKenzie et al., 2004).

In addition to the promotion of physical activity, there is also a discourse around promoting physical fitness. This is one reason why physical fitness testing remains a popular practice in schools (Cale et al., 2014; Cale, 2021). Moreover, there is an assumption amongst many educators that the 'appropriate use' of fitness tests in physical education can lead to reducing negative health outcomes amongst students (Keating et al., 2020; Silverman et al., 2008). This dominant belief about fitness still persists despite pupils reporting poor experiences of testing, including those most marginalised like girls (Wrench & Garrett, 2008), Black and Latina/o young people (Safron & Landi, 2022), and LGBTQ+ young people (Alfrey & Landi, 2023). Not to mention, there are many issues with the validity and reliability of the tests (Cale & Harris, 2009) and policy research illustrating that requirements around fitness testing do not effect health outcomes (Landi et al., 2021). Despite the above evidence illustrating the multifarious and ineffective nature of fitness testing, many teachers still believe it brings 'credibility' to the field and are committed to using them in schools (Alfrey & Gard, 2014). Subsequently, such dominant health ideologies influence everyday physical education practices.

The beliefs about maintaining MVPA and fitness testing to promote healthy lifestyles are evident for both boys and girls, regardless of their motivating factors (Harris & Cale, 2019). Notably, however, these tests and the standards for physical activity are also differentiated where girls are expected to be less 'physically fit' then boys (Safron & Landi, 2021). Moreover, there is an argument made by some scholars that suggests collaboration between education and public health experts, along with policymakers, is essential to maximize the impact of physical education on public health outcomes (Sallis et al., 2012), despite clear evidence that physical education policies, on their own, have not been able to improve health outcomes (Landi et al., 2021). Consequently, numerous interventions (see, for example, McKenzie et al., 2001; Sallis et al., 1997) have been designed with the purpose of promoting MVPA-centred physical education, with proponents advocating it as the "pill not taken" to address physical inactivity (McKenzie & Lounsbery, 2009, p. 223), highlighting the view that exercise-is-medicine (Vertinsky, 2016)

The attempts to align physical education with public health outcomes have not affected all young people equally. Indeed, many of the researchers within this paradigm often target 'low participation' groups such as diverse ethnicities, low social class, and specific to this study, girls. Despite well-meaning intentions, these public health approaches to physical education have failed to bring about genuine changes that sustain teachers' efforts in (re)engaging girls (see Barr-Anderson et al., 2008; Eime et al., 2013; and McKenzie et al.,

2004). Although McKenzie, Sallis, and other scholars have remained consistent throughout their extensive careers, emphasising that "public health is everybody's business." (McKenzie & Lounsbery, 2016, p. 291). For example, McKenzie and colleagues (2004) proposed the need for alternative intervention strategies specifically tailored to girls, including single-activity options, activities preferred by girls, and different motivational and instructional techniques. Yet, many of these attempts often conduct research and interventions *on* girls rather than working *with* girls. Thus, a Public Health perspective in physical education does not necessarily construct young people (especially girls) as agents that can bring about change. Rather, they are seen as 'at-risk' and passive subjects that require intervention in order to be changed.

In considering the ongoing connection between physical education and Public Health ideologies, Quennerstedt (2008) argued that "physical education stands at a crossroads with regards to health" (p. 280). Here, Quennerstedt is concerned with the field's direction of moving away from education (i.e. learning about health). In other words, by prioritising public health promotion over learning, the field is consistently subjected to destabilisation and re-defined by the prevailing public health trends. Consequently, physical education not only shifts from its core educational purpose but it also becomes vulnerable to external forces (e.g., Landi, 2023a). Quennerstedt (2008) exemplified this by arguing if physical education is tasked with addressing public health outcomes (like obesity and more recently mental health) through a focus in lessons on MVPA, the learning (and educative) aspects of physical education become a secondary aim. Yet, if physical education is viewed as a subject that encompasses a broader spectrum of knowledge with education at its core, then aerobic training and obesity prevention are possible side effects (Quennerstedt, 2008). Thus, there are some risks when physical educators believe their primary role is to "get children fit" (Corbin, 2002, p. 134), especially for girls. This is because, teachers who align to this belief solely are likely to prioritise elevated levels of physical activity during their lessons and those girls that choose not to engage with traditional forms of physical activity are then re-constructed as 'a problem' yet again. Thus, not only are girls constructed as 'at-risk' in a Public Health dominated programme, but they are also seen as a 'problem' for physical education to 'solve'.

2.4.3 Education discourses: The role of relationships

Good relationships between teachers and pupils are fundamental in supporting pupils to be successful in their learning (Hamre & Pianta, 2006). According to Wentzel (2016) "effective teachers are typically described as those who develop relationships with students that are emotionally close, safe, and trusting (…) and (…) foster a more general ethos of community and caring in the classroom" (p. 211). Likewise, in physical education, pupils' motivation and engagement in the subject can be enhanced when they feel a sense of connectedness and relatedness to their teacher; feel valued by their teacher, and when teachers prioritise relationship-building as an explicit pedagogical concern rather than a taken-for-granted assumption. (Lamb et al., 2021, Shen et al., 2012a; Teraoka & Kirk, 2022; Lamb et al., 2018). Arguably, the significance of relationships influences how pupils' experience physical education. Yet, despite this positive image of a caring, trusting and supporting teacher, dominant beliefs about pupil-teacher relationships can shape how young people engage in physical education (Cothran & Ennis, 1997).

The traditional view of the teacher as the primary source of knowledge in the classroom has long underpinned our understanding of school structures. For instance, Chanan and Gilchrist, in their 1974 book *What School Is For*, noted the prevailing image of a teacher at that time was someone who stands at the front of the class, delivering information, and dominating the classroom discourse. This perception aligns with Freire's (1996) characterization of a traditional classroom, where "the teacher teaches and the students are taught", "the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing"; "the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects", and so on (p. 54). Thus, the teacher is in a position of authority, both as an expert in their subject and as the one who knows what is best for their pupils. (Cothran & Ennis, 1997).

Arguably, the 'traditional' teacher as the all-knowing provider of knowledge continues to be a dominant belief in today's classrooms, and it is commonly evident in physical education lessons. For example, in their study, Cothran and Ennis (1997) found that despite teachers claiming to consider pupils' interests, a majority of pupils perceived themselves as lacking influence and agency in their physical education classes. More recently, Howley and O'Sullivan (2020) indicated that relinquishing control to pupils in physical education remains a tough challenge for teachers. This suggests that teacher-directed learning remains a dominant model in teaching physical education (Gray et al., 2018).

The prevailing image of teachers as an 'all-knowing' authority figure may inhibit the development of positive relationships between teachers and teenage girls. This could stem from teachers' favouritism towards 'sporty' girls (Mitchell et al., 2015) or their attempts to replicate their own success in sports (Rich, 2004). Indeed, this line of research showed that many girls felt marginalised as their teachers imposed their own perspectives of physical education onto them, rather than considering the perspectives of the girls. A breadth of research has established that teachers struggle to teach all pupils the same; there is no 'homogenous' girl who will have the same experience as all of her peers; and there are misconceptions between what teachers assume and the actual barriers reported by pupils are with regards to their participation (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001, 2006; Oliver & Kirk, 2015; Rich, 2004; Johnson et al., 2013; Mitchell et al., 2015).

Multiple studies, however, have challenged the traditional pupil-teacher power relations, favourably received by physical educators. In contrast to the traditional teacher-centred, skill-focused approaches to games teaching, alternative teaching models like Games Sense (Light, 2013), the Tactical Games Approach (Griffin, Mitchell & Oslin, 1997), and TGFU (Bunker & Thorpe, 1982) have sought to place the pupil at the centre of physical education lessons, focussing more on the learner in the learning process (Gray et al., 2018). Moreover, there has been a growing body of research that has been dedicated to disrupting power imbalances between pupils and teachers. These studies have, for example, involved pupil voice practices (e.g., Cardiff et al., 2023; Enright & O'Sullivan, 2012a; Fitzgerald et al., 2003; Howley & O'Sullivan, 2021); democratic curriculum making (e.g., Lynch & Curtner-Smith, 2019); meaningful physical education (e.g., Beni et al., 2019; Fletcher et al., 2021) and cooperative learning (Dyson & Casey, 2016; Bjørke & Mordal Moen, 2020). This line of research aims to create a more inclusive, participatory physical education environment by challenging traditional power dynamics. Indeed, disrupting power relations between girls and their teachers is crucial, particularly when challenging traditional physical education curricula (Enright & O'Sullivan, 2012b; Fisette, 2011b; Johnson et al., 2013).

A distinct body of research has particularly focused on disrupting power relations between teenage girls and their teachers. As I noted earlier in this chapter, Goodyear et al. (2014) introduced cooperative learning, which improved girls' engagement by temporarily shifting away from the physical aspect of learning by using more social activities. Likewise, Mitchell et al. (2015) implemented the Fit for Girls intervention, offering girls meaningful choices, resulting in an increase in participation levels. These participatory approaches

challenged traditional teacher-led perspectives and reshaped how physical education is viewed by involving girls in decision-making.

Furthermore, activist research, which will be discussed more thoroughly in the next section, has been purposefully developed to disrupt existing power relations between girls and teachers in physical education. For example, Oliver and Lalik (2004b) advocated for providing girls space for reflection on their participation in physical education. Additionally, Oliver et al. (2009) worked *with* the girls to name and negotiate their self-identified barriers to physical education and physical activity. Fisette (2011b, 2013) and Fisette and Walton (2014) sought to empower girls' voices through action research projects, while Enright and O'Sullivan (2010) worked *with* girls to co-construct their curriculum. This positively received line of research shifted from assuming teachers held the solutions to issues of girls' engagement to trusting that girls themselves had crucial insights into what better facilitated their participation in physical education (Oliver & Kirk, 2015).

Girls' engagement in physical education is not only influenced by their relationships with their teachers, but also through their relationships with their peers (both boys and girls). Given that physical education can be represented as a social space where skill development is rewarded, girls may view this as an intimidating space, marked by public performative displays (Hills, 2007). It is not surprising that feeling comfortable within their social environment significantly influences girls' overall experience of physical education (Walseth et al., 2018). For example, Mitchell et al. (2015) reported that the secondary school girls in their study, in Scotland, preferred being in a single-sex class due to heightened embarrassment and intimidation in mixed-sex classes, primarily due to their perceived ability levels and competitiveness of boys. Other studies by Cockburn and Clarke (2002), Flintoff and Scraton (2006), and Azzarito et al. (2006) echoed these sentiments, highlighting gender barriers hindering girls' engagement. Likewise, Oliver et al. (2009) noted girls' reluctance to play with competitive, aggressive boys, and Kirk et al. (2016) observed discomfort among girls performing in front of boys because they just 'laughed at ye' (p. 13).

Reflecting similar findings, Hill's (2015) study of ethnically diverse 13–14-year-old girls in a U.K. secondary school suggested that single-sex classes might offer some girls a sense of safety. However, Hill also observed that such segregation could reinforce gender stereotypes, potentially leading to the policing of feminine behaviours and creating unsafe environments. Nonetheless, the influence of peer culture in shaping social norms in physical education is significant. Addressing power imbalances contributing to gender dynamics could disrupt dominant adolescent cultures in physical education classes (O'Donovan, 2003).

The impact of boys on girls' participation in physical education is noteworthy, but equally significant is the influence of girls' relationships with their female peers. These connections play a crucial role in shaping girls' confidence, concentration, and overall enjoyment in the subject, thereby preventing feelings of marginalisation (Stride, 2014). While physical education offers a space for girls to cultivate meaningful friendships, allowing for group work and teamwork (O'Donovan and Kirk, 2008), Slater and Tiggemann (2010) found that among 13–15-year-old Australian young people, boys tend to socialise through sports and physical activities, while girls prefer activities like shopping, highlighting a stereotypical view of gendered socialisation. Additionally, girls reported the reasons for their disengagement in physical education was due to interpersonal conflicts and 'bitchiness' among peers outside their social circles. Several scholarly works confirm that trusting relationships with classmates is important in determining girls' emotional satisfaction within their class groups (Kirk et al., 2016; Mitchell et al., 2015, Stride, 2016; Walseth et al., 2018).

Class grouping and peer dynamics can significantly influence pupils' engagement in class activities. Evans (1989) emphasised the need for flexible class grouping approaches in physical education to address the negative attitudes and gender stereotypes, warning that failure to do so could widen disparities between boys and girls. Furthermore, Griffin's (1984) research explored various roles (e.g. athletes, cheerleaders, lost souls and system beaters) assigned to girls within their physical classes, stressing that these categorisations of girls significantly impact power dynamics and create distinctions among girls. Likewise, Stride (2014) found that girls who identify as 'non-sporty', as opposed to 'sporty', face more challenges in daily social contexts within physical education, where their identity conflicts with dominant discourses that construct and constitute that environment. Additionally, girls facing rejection by their peer groups or experiencing isolation and loneliness in their physical education classes are more likely to express disaffection with physical education as a whole (Shen et al., 2012a). In contrast, girls fully immersed in their peer culture, actively promoting their 'active' identities, more easily find acceptance within the school environment (Knowles et al., 2014).

The literature emphasises the importance of teachers in challenging peer relationships by intentionally fostering connections among pupils (Kirk et al., 2016). This involves adapting practices to promote inclusive and positive peer interactions (O'Donovan, 2003). The Sport Education model exemplifies this approach, emphasising team affiliation as one of its key features (Siedentop, 1992). O'Donovan (2003) found that employing this model challenged dominant social structures in co-educational classes, providing opportunities for

both genders to navigate their positions within the social hierarchy. Similarly, Ennis (1999) demonstrated positive social relations with a spin-off of Sport Education, called Sport for Peace, emphasising conflict negotiation and social responsibility. This model prioritises developing constructive peer relationships, offering an alternative to competitive settings, particularly beneficial for girls who felt affiliation with their team, likening it to a family.

Sport Education and Sport for Peace are just two examples of pedagogical models that share a commitment to reshaping peer dynamics and fostering more inclusive and supportive environments in physical education. Other pedagogical practices, such as those involving student voice, co-constructing curricula, learning partnerships, and challenging power imbalances, already discussed in this section, instil optimism for the positive transformation of girls' experiences in physical education. This encouraging body of literature aligns with Kirk's (2020) view of pedagogies of affect, where "valuing, interest, motivation, resilience, caring, responsibility, and cooperation, among many other affective learning matters, are leading concerns of the teacher-scholars who practice these pedagogies" (p. 178).

2.4.4 Summary: The role of ideologies

In this section, I discussed three dominant ideologies shaping physical education practices, influencing how teachers approach the subject and how pupils experience it. I emphasised how these ideologies impact girls, often positioning them as the 'problem' and reinforcing the 'same old story'. I argued that gender discourses, sex discrimination and teachers' beliefs frequently situate girls as 'the other' within physical education. Additionally, health ideologies, such as health promotion and fitness testing, prioritise high levels of physical activity, which can marginalise girls. I highlighted that teacher-pupil and peer relationships are necessary for creating inclusive, equitable experiences in physical education, noting that their absence may push girls to 'the margins'.

Throughout this section, I pointed to positive lines of research aimed at disrupting dominant discourses around gender, health and relationships, highlighting an activist approach as a promising model for supporting girls in physical education.

2.5 An Activist Approach: Disrupting Normative Physical Education

An activist approach has been built on the foundation of Kim Oliver's work with girls over a 30-year period. It was created as a way to engage girls in physical education and physical activity, with a focus on those who were more 'at-risk' or marginalised. The learning aspirations for an activist approach are that girls learn how to name, critique, negotiate, and transform barriers to their physical activity engagement, enjoyment, and learning (Oliver & Kirk, 2015).

An activist approach rests upon three fundamental assumptions, as outlined by Oliver & Kirk (2015). The first posits that activist research is grounded in the belief that knowledge is inherently tied to social relations and becomes most powerful when produced collaboratively in action (Fine et al., 2001). In other words, knowledge is produced in collaboration among teachers *and* girls, and *among* girls themselves. The second assumption asserts that simply understanding the current state of affairs, the 'what is', is no longer adequate. Activist scholars actively engage in intentional collaboration *with* participants to envision and work towards a transformative 'what might be'. For instance, while there is a need to understand the nature of girls' experiences of a multi-activity, technique-based approach to physical education *(what is)*, it is not sufficient to change that experience. Instead, the focus should shift towards cultivating a pedagogy of possibilities *(what might be)* (Casey & Kirk, 2021; Oliver et al., 2009). The third assumption is based on the desired context for social transformation to occur. By starting at a localised and micro-level, activist scholars can determine how change is possible including the disruption of the dominant gender order (Weis & Fine, 2004).

In this section, I will outline the emergence of an activist approach, starting from Oliver's early work and extending to other scholars' activist research, ultimately culminating in the development of a pedagogical model. Next, I will explain the critical elements of an activist approach, and then discuss challenges of using an activist approach, with a focus on the scholarly work that has influenced this study. Lastly, I will summarise this section and rationalise the selection of an activist approach for this study as a means to challenge traditional norms in physical education.

2.5.1 The emergence of an activist approach

As discussed earlier, an activist approach to physical education developed from Kim Oliver's immersive fieldwork with girls in the United States. Initially focusing on body narratives and the meanings girls attributed to their bodies, Oliver's research involved activities such as magazine exploration, free writing exercises, and journaling, not specifically related to physical education or activity contexts (see Oliver, 1999, 2001; Oliver & Lalik, 2001). Oliver (1999, 2001) argued that educators should spend more time listening to understand girls' perspectives deeply and support them in critiquing societal messages and (mis)representations of their bodies. Significantly, in the reporting of these studies, Oliver ensured the foregrounding of the girls' voices, acknowledging her own position as an adult-outsider.

In the next phase of Oliver's activist research, with literacy scholar Rosary Lalik, they gained a deeper understanding of critical inquiry *with* girls (see Oliver & Lalik, 2004a/b). The initial part of this critical inquiry work focused on a small-scale project with eighth grade girls, involving two separate groups of four girls critiquing 'The Beauty Walk', a fund-raising beauty contest for girls. The subsequent phase transitioned their work into a more realistic physical education setting with three high school girls' classes. This was an important transition as although Oliver had previously gained insights into girls' experiences of the body as curriculum, she found it lacked authentic experiences with 'normal' classes (Oliver & Lalik, 2004b). In this study, the aim was to make physical education curricula more meaningful for girls, through implementing a curriculum strand that focused on girls' bodies and physical activity. Additionally, critical literacy was incorporated into planning, providing space for reflection, inquiry, and artistic representation in order to help girls articulate the discourses shaping their lives and bodies (Oliver & Lalik, 2004b). Oliver and Lalik (2004b) found that although the girls expressed an interest in many aspects of their curriculum, some girls struggled with literacy tasks. This led Oliver and her colleagues to explore ways to assist girls in envisioning new possibilities.

The next phase of Oliver's work saw her act on her self-criticism of her work (i.e., to support girls in articulating the possibilities for their engagement in physical education and physical activity). Here, Oliver collaborated with colleagues (see Oliver et al., 2009) to explore self-identified barriers to physical activity among 5th-grade girls and worked *with* the girls to name and negotiate these barriers, ultimately aiming to enhance their participation in

physical activity. This research found that the emergence of the 'girly-girl' identity was a barrier to participation. Consequently, Oliver and colleagues shifted their focus to explore a 'curriculum of possibilities', acknowledging the girls' desire to embrace a 'girly-girl' identity. By inviting the girls to create games tailored to such preferences, the identified barriers (e.g., breaking a nail, messing hair, and getting sweaty) were reframed in relation to their engagement in physical activity. They stated:

> When we began focusing on *what could be*, by acknowledging the girls' desires to be girly girl, and invited them to create games that girly girls would enjoy playing, the barriers they identified were no longer the problem (…) It was as if the moment we acknowledged their desire to be girly girl and worked *with* them to co-create games *for* them that the content of the games they created actually contradicted many of their self-identified girly girl barriers (...)Had we pushed the girls to critique or resist being girly girl, we believe they would not have responded favorably because they showed no signs of not wanting to be girly girl.
>
> (Oliver et al., 2009, p. 107)

Recognising this 'curriculum of possibilities' was significant in the development of Oliver's activist work. In a subsequent phase of this research, Oliver and Hamzeh (2010) discovered the importance of not imposing 'adult-driven' solutions while introducing girls to new possibilities. Additionally, this study revealed that the girls' lack of physical activity was not due to a lack of enjoyment but stemmed from the need to negotiate and challenge sexism and racism that restricted their opportunities to be active (Oliver & Hamzeh, 2010).

The next phase of Oliver's activist work was her collaboration with scholar Heather Oesterreich (2013), which resulted in the development of the Student-Centred Inquiry as Curriculum (SCIC) framework (see Figure 2.1). In this research Oliver and Oesterreich worked with pre-service teachers (PSTs) as part of a university field-based methods course, aiming to enhance the PSTs ability to respond to pupils' needs, by better facilitating their interests, motivation, and learning in physical education. Oliver and Oesterreich (2013) argued that despite PSTs learning about the significance of pupil voice in Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) courses, they often struggle to implement it in practice. The SCIC framework offers a potential disruption to both traditional PETE and school physical education programmes. Aligned with the activist principles described earlier, the SCIC structure focused on exploring possibilities in the field-based methods course and empowered PSTs to listen and respond to the pupils they taught in school physical education lessons.

The development of the SCIC framework was an important step in Oliver's activist work as although she had used both student-centred and inquiry-based approaches in her teaching, she had never merged them together in one approach. Notably, the SCIC framework shifted the focus away from using preset content (or sports) as the organising centre for physical education programmes, which is commonplace in traditional physical education (Metzler, 2011). Instead, using pupils' responses drove how teachers planned the content they taught. The SCIC framework, a four-phase cyclical process, guides all curricular and pedagogical decisions, emphasising building the foundation to understand pupils' needs and interests, planning content based on that knowledge, teaching and reflecting on lessons, debriefing with pupils and PSTs, and analysing responses for relevant changes (Oliver & Oesterreich, 2013).

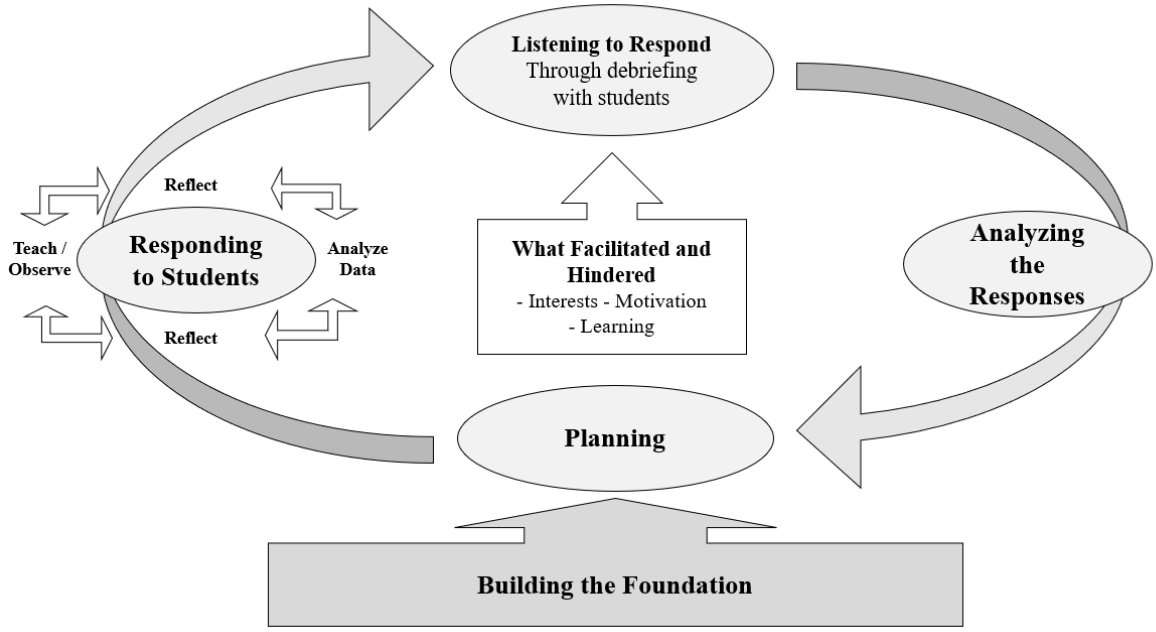

Figure 2.1: Diagram of student-centred inquiry as curriculum from Oliver & Oesterreich (2013)

2.5.2 The expansion of Oliver's activist approach for girls

Oliver's work paved the way for the emergence of a subsequent wave of activist research conducted by other scholars. Fisette (2011a) and Fisette and Walton (2014) also in the United States, specifically focused on the construction of embodied identities by teenage girls. These studies empowered girls to vocalise their concerns and take action regarding issues related to embodiment within school settings. Additionally, Fisette's (2013) research aimed to capture girls' authentic voices and create space for them to resist gender

expectations typically imposed upon them by their teachers. In Fisette's study, girls resisted the male-dominated structure of the physical education curriculum by either 'blending in' or abstaining from participation altogether. Further activist research by Enright & O'Sullivan (2012b, 2010), in Ireland, positioned girls as agents of change in both their physical education curriculum and physical activity outside of school. By opting to co-construct physical education and physical activity experiences *with* girls, these studies were consistent with the aspirations of Oliver's work, asserting that "co-constructing physical education and physical activity experiences with students can result in meaningful, connected, and safe learning environments" (Enright & O'Sullivan, 2012b, p. 265).

Activist work with girls has also extended to Scotland and Norway. It's worth noting that these research projects were conducted after the development of the pedagogical model to be discussed in the next section. Unlike the research projects from Fisette and Enright, this work did not influence the development of the model, but they did influence this study due to these projects being carried out in secondary school settings.

In Scotland, the pilot phase of this study (see subsection 3.3.1) explored teachers' experiences with this approach and girls' responses to it. Kirk et al. (2018) reported that enacting an activist approach provided teachers with spaces for manoeuvre within the Curriculum for Excellence (CFE - Scotland's National Curriculum) to authorise pupil voice. This allowed the teachers to re-think the traditional multi-activity curriculum. Lamb et al.'s (2018) study revealed that enacting an activist approach opened up new possibilities for girls' experiences of physical education. This was achieved through increased variety and choice, the co-creation of the curriculum with their teachers, and the establishment of strong relationships among girls and between girls and their teachers. In Norway, Walseth et al.'s (2018) study, conducted in a co-educational class, used 'learning partnerships' (mainly sex-separated) and 'learning groups' (mainly mixed-sex) to address the girls' desire for a safer and more comfortable environment. The results showed that girls exhibited heightened enthusiasm for participation in physical education when they were actively involved in co-creating the curriculum. Significantly, those girls who typically found physical education 'uncomfortable', primarily due to the competitive atmosphere it fostered, showed the most notable progress in terms of developing a sense of meaningfulness in physical education (Walseth et al., 2018).

Central to the referenced body of work aimed at transforming and challenging power dynamics between girls and their teachers is a departure from portraying the girls themselves as 'the problem' with regards to their engagement in physical education. Indeed, according to

Kirk et al. (2000), "'The problem' is the ways in which gender is socially constructed and the role of physical activity in the process" (p. 4). This more constructive strand of research, focused on disrupting power imbalances, strives to empower girls through deliberate actions (Kirk, 2020) and positions teachers and pupils in a space that allows for girls' perspectives to be central to the process of discovering *what might be* in physical education (Oliver & Kirk, 2015).

2.5.3 An activist approach as a pedagogical model

Drawing on the experience of other activist scholars (e.g., Fisette and Enright) mentioned in the previous section, Oliver's activist work progressed to the development of a pedagogical model, crystallised during her collaboration with David Kirk, an advocate of pedagogical models since the 2010s (Kirk, 2010, 2013). While Oliver had informally embraced this approach in her earlier work, it was with Kirk that it was formally recognised as a 'pedagogical model', articulated in the book *Girls, gender and physical education: An activist approach* (Routledge, 2015).

Casey and Kirk (2021) outline four elements of a pedagogical model, including the main idea, critical elements, learning aspirations, and assessment (see Figure 2.2). The main idea is the central purpose and character of the model, while critical elements define its distinctive features. Learning aspirations, aligned with the main idea, are embedded within the critical elements.

An activist approach for girls in physical education			
MAIN IDEA: ***Girls learning to value the physically active life***			
CRITICAL ELEMENTS			
Student – centred pedagogy	Pedagogies of embodiment	Inquiry-based education centred in action	Listening and responding over time
LEARNING ASPIRATIONS			
Teachers and pupils co-constructing the curriculum	Co-construction of a safe, nurturing learning environment	Analyse and deconstruct damaging health myths and ideologies	Learning to trust, respect and communicate with peers and teachers
Girls name, critique and negotiate their barriers to participation in physical activity	Confidence, perseverance and resilience while engaging in movement culture	Generate, analyse and collate information relating to barriers in PA	Teachers continued attention to authorise all students' voices

Figure 2.2: The main idea, critical elements, and learning aspirations of an activist approach for girls in physical education

Guided by the three fundamental assumptions previously outlined, the main idea of an activist approach is *girls learning to value the physically active life*, a concept borrowed from Siedentop (1996). According to Oliver and Kirk (2015), physical educators have a "limited impact on girls' understanding of the barriers they face to valuing the physically active life" (p. 6). They advocate for purposeful and meaningful physical activity for girls, positioning the notion of valuing the physically active life as a pragmatic goal to strive for. Fitzpatrick (2019) is critical of this main idea, arguing that this emphasis aligns to healthy lifestyles goals rather than addressing existing power imbalances within physical education practices. Moreover, Fitzpatrick suggests that the overarching theme of an activist approach may inadvertently reinforce the notion of health and wellness as a primary issue for physical education to solve. Meanwhile, Kirk (2020), building on Fitzpatrick's critique, acknowledges that the potential pathogenic discourse surrounding the 'main idea' of an activist approach was not adequately addressed by Oliver and Kirk (2015). Conversely, Kirk (2020) argues that, in this context, a physically active life is situated within a salutogenic perspective. This perspective implies that a physically active life is a resource that supports us maintaining health, rather than merely preventing illness.

The first critical element, student-centred pedagogy, disrupts traditional pupil-teacher power relations by challenging assumptions about the 'problem' with girls. Drawing on the work of Cook-Sather (2002) on authorising pupils' voices, student-centred pedagogy involves intentional collaboration *with* girls to imagine a possibility for that *which might be* (Oliver & Kirk, 2016). Oliver & Kirk (2015) emphasise that being student-centred is not just about doing what the girls want nor only listening to the loudest voices. Rather, it is teachers' willingness and openness to change with a genuine trust that girls have crucial insights into what better facilitates their participation in physical activity.

Pedagogies of embodiment, the second critical element, asserts that recognising embodied intersectionality is essential for social justice-oriented educational reform (Oliver & Kirk, 2015). Grounded in Vertinsky's (1992) seminal work, attentiveness to issues of embodiment challenges the mind-body dualism that privileges the mind over the body and pervades the discourse of physical education. Through emphasis on embodiment, physical educators can disrupt the objectification of the body, providing girls with opportunities to explore how embodiment influences their enjoyment and participation in physical activity (Oliver & Kirk, 2016). This involves encouraging girls to nurture a sense of physicality in movement, and supporting girls in naming the experiences of their bodies that are often at a preconscious level (Oliver & Kirk, 2015). Moreover, focusing on embodied learning helps

teachers understand factors influencing girls' motivation and engagement, while girls gain insights into envisioning a physically active life (Oliver & Kirk, 2016).

The third critical element, inquiry-based education centred *in* action, addresses the repeated calls from critical and feminist activist scholars to move beyond theory and critique to engaging in active inquiry in pursuit of *what might be* (Oliver & Kirk, 2015). Rooted in Cochran-Smith and Lytle's (2009) concept of inquiry-based learning, this critical element challenges traditional physical education by collaborating *with* girls to address inequities. Here, teachers and pupils create spaces to take action that is directed at improving physical activity opportunities for girls, with girls themselves at the centre of negotiating their physical education curricula (Oliver & Kirk, 2015). It guides teachers not only in what they have their students do, but also in pedagogical decisions they make, constantly inquiring into factors that affect girls' engagement (Oliver & Oesterreich, 2013). This critical element not only empowers girls to drive change, but also re-conceptualises physical education, shifting the organising centre from content to inquiry-based pedagogy (Oliver & Kirk, 2015).

The fourth critical element involves teachers' listening to respond over time, emphasising long-term commitment and intentional responses. This formulation is important and intentional because it affirms that merely listening is not enough. Listening to respond over time goes beyond understanding barriers to girls' engagement; it involves continuous action based on that understanding. Oliver & Kirk (2015) emphasise the time-intensive nature of this process; which involves supporting girls' in communicating how they feel; developing relationships where girls are willing to tell teachers how they feel; and collaboratively addressing their self-identified barriers to physical education and physical activity engagement. Utilising the SCIC framework, teachers consistently seek input from pupils, avoiding a one-time only approach, and create spaces where girls' voices are valued. This ongoing process allows teachers to adapt their responses based on the evolving needs of the girls (Cook-Sather, 2009; Oliver & Kirk, 2015, 2016).

All four critical elements are interlinked and interactive. For instance, while enacting an activist approach and engaging in sustained listening to respond, teachers will inherently integrate aspects of the other critical elements. Similarly, when applying the SCIC framework, teachers can effectively incorporate all four elements. According to Oliver & Kirk (2016), the presence of these critical elements is essential to help girls recognise, articulate, and negotiate barriers to their involvement in physical education and active lifestyles.

2.5.4 Challenges of enacting an activist approach

At the time of this study, the enactment of an activist approach had not expanded beyond the earlier works from Oliver, Fisette, Enright and their colleagues. Since then, this approach has continued to evolve. This has included Oliver's ongoing work in PETE settings (see Oliver et al., 2015, 2018; Luguetti & Oliver, 2021), in after-school settings (see Marttinen et al., 2021; Nuñez Enriquez & Oliver, 2022) and in dance settings (see Shilcutt et al., 2022, 2023, in press). Furthermore, Carla Luguetti has developed a reconceptualised activist approach for socially vulnerable youth, emerging from Oliver and Kirk's (2015) original activist approach (see Luguetti et al., 2015, 2017a/b,). While a detailed review of these studies isn't necessary here, it's important to acknowledge some of the challenges highlighted in enacting an activist approach, which will be further discussed in Chapter 6.

The first challenge pertains to time: time required to construct a comfortable and supportive learning environment (Walseth et al., 2018); time needed for teachers to understand gender dynamics within the class (Oliver et al., 2018); and time necessary to address observed gender inequities (Luguetti et al., 2019). Indeed, these studies collectively affirm that in the process of learning to use an activist approach, there is 'no quick fix', emphasising the need for a substantial time commitment to foster a comfortable and trusting environment (Oliver & Kirk, 2015).

The second notable challenge to enacting an activist approach involves negotiating professional identities. This involved integrating personal cultural norms into teaching practices whilst grappling with relinquishing traditional authoritative roles (Nuñez Enriquez & Oliver, 2021); and the difficulties teachers face in transitioning to an activist teacher role, initially prioritising classroom control (Luguetti & Oliver, 2020). Indeed, through these studies, it is evident that teachers often had to let go of their 'traditional' roles when becoming activist teachers as they began to value the knowledge young people could offer them.

Another challenge identified in the literature involves entrenched assumptions about physical education, that is, as discussed earlier, the notion of traditional physical education structured around a multi-activity sport-technique approach. This included teachers' perception of an activist approach as lacking structure, which required a reframing of understanding and curriculum negotiation with pupils (Kirk et al, 2018). Similarly, Oliver et al. (2018) noted teachers' struggles in moving away from traditional physical education

practices, such as incorporating writing tasks, while Shilcutt et al. (2022) reinforced the impact of contextual traditions on the enactment of an activist approach. These studies highlight the challenges of departing from traditional norms in physical education.

Challenges also emerged regarding assumptions about student-centred pedagogy. This has included prioritising pupils' preferences rather than their learning needs and the use of 'voting' as an assumed democratic practice (Luguetti & Oliver, 2020). Furthermore, Oliver et al. (2018) noted teachers' struggles in utilising meaningful data for pedagogical decisions, emphasising the importance of amplifying all voices. Embracing a student-centred approach is not easy and entails a gradual process, requiring time, reflection, and discussions with fellow practitioners utilising an activist approach, as well as a willingness to relinquish traditional teaching structures.

Research on an activist approach denotes some trends with regards to the challenges teachers have experienced. Indeed, it is important to explore these challenges further in multiple contexts. This thesis seeks to consider how teachers in school settings in Scotland experience and negotiate some of the challenges they endured during their enactment of an activist approach.

2.6 Chapter Summary

In the review of literature in this chapter, I identified several promising avenues of research with girls in physical education, notably focusing on the use of a novel pedagogical model, an activist approach. However, there is a lack of empirical studies that investigate how in-service teachers enact this approach within their unique educational contexts. This thesis explores the journeys of two teachers as they enact this approach in their respective physical education classes within their schools.

To achieve this, the literature suggests that an activist approach can serve as a medium for professional learning, offering a framework (such as the main idea, critical elements, and learning aspirations), ecological validity, and flexibility for teachers to make necessary adaptations. These notions address the first research question concerning the nature of teachers' journeys as they learn to enact an activist approach. Concurrently, the literature also emphasised the challenges associated with enacting pedagogical models in practice. Recognising that the situation with girls in physical education remains challenging, it is crucial to gain a better understanding of how the enactment of an activist approach influences

both teachers' and pupils' experiences of physical education, including aspects such as pupil learning and participation levels, teachers' assumptions and beliefs, and class dynamics. Examining the experiences of both pupils and teachers addresses the second research question. A unique feature of this study is that the learning journeys in enacting an activist approach occur within the school settings of experienced in-service teachers. Further exploration in this area will provide a clearer understanding of how teachers experience school-based professional learning. This is reflected in the third research question.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will outline the research methodology intended to generate data for addressing the research questions. I begin with the research paradigm and genre, including a rationale for a qualitative research project aligned to the critical transformative paradigm. Following this, I will provide a comprehensive description of the research design, activist methodology, settings, participants, data generation and methods of data analysis. As a final note, I will demonstrate the trustworthiness of the data, including reflections on my own researcher reflexivity, as well as the ethical considerations of the research process.

3.2 Research Paradigm and Genre

This qualitative research project explores teachers' professional learning of an activist approach within their own school contexts. In qualitative research, understanding the social meaning individuals attribute to their experiences, circumstances and situations is fundamental (Hisse-Biber & Nagy, 2011). Creswell and Creswell (2018) emphasise that qualitative methods reveal the nuances of individual experiences within complex social environments, such as schools. Indeed, throughout this study, the focus was on understanding experiences, perspectives, and meanings of teachers' becoming-Activist journeys as they navigated the complexities inherent within school environments.

Given this study used a transformative approach to teaching physical education (i.e. an activist approach), it shares some similarities with action research in its critical examination and transformative influence on practice (Kemmis, 2006). Kemmis suggests that education should provide hope for pupils for a greater justice for all and a better use of our resources. Furthermore, marginalised groups, such as girls in physical education, have the potential to reshape their realities through education, research, action, and reflection (Fine, 2007). It is important to note that such a transformative process is intricate and non-linear, rendering the enactment of this type of research both iterative and inherently 'messy'.

This study aligns with a critical and transformative paradigm within qualitative research in physical education (Landi, 2023). Unlike merely critiquing existing social inequities, this paradigm seeks to actively transform them. The activist approach adopted in this study aims to support teachers to create a more equitable space for girls in physical

education, whilst simultaneously critically examining the prevailing traditional practices that dominate the field. While certain elements of this study, such as the collaborative efforts between the researcher and teacher participants, share some resemblance to participatory action research, an activist research design was chosen. This decision reflects unique insights teachers and pupils have into their own contexts, perspectives that are often not visible to outside researchers (Oliver & Shilcutt, 2023). Although teachers in this study gathered data to support their pedagogical decisions with their classes (see section 3.6), they were not involved in the project's primary data collection or design phases. Previous activist research projects (see for example, Oliver et al., 2009; Oliver et al., 2018; and Nuñez-Enriquez & Oliver, 2022) have similarly adopted an activist research design, which this study follows. Thus, the purpose of this activist research project, as aligned to a critical transformative paradigm, is to support teachers in understanding their pupils' physical and social worlds within physical education, and to work *with* them to transform these worlds to better meet their needs and interests.

3.3 Design

This research project was comprised of two distinct parts. Part 1, referred to as the pilot study, was carried out during the 2015-16 school year. The ongoing (present) study (Part 2) was conducted in the subsequent school year, 2016-2017, and constitutes the primary dataset for this thesis. While the data from the pilot study is not directly incorporated into this thesis, its significance lies in shaping the understanding of becoming-Activist for myself and the two participating teachers, due to our initial exposure to an activist approach during the pilot year. Two peer-reviewed publications (see Kirk et al., 2018 and Lamb et al., 2018) and three conference papers (BERA, SERA and AERA 2016 conferences) were written from the pilot study.

Across both Part 1 and Part 2 of this project, the teacher-participants enacted the two phases of an activist approach: *Building the Foundation* (BtF) and *Co-creating a Thematic Unit* (see section 3.3.3). For the purpose of this thesis, I have described these phases focusing on what each phase looked like for each teacher during the present study. It's important to note that the teachers may have made changes or 'tweaked' what they had done the previous year based on what they felt was best for their current class.

3.3.1 Part 1: Pilot Study

During the pilot study, we tested the prototype activist pedagogical model published in Oliver & Kirk (2015) with five teachers across four publicly funded secondary schools in Glasgow, Scotland over a 10-month intervention period. Teachers were recruited to the pilot study via a callout from Professor David Kirk of the School of Education at the University of Strathclyde. Around twenty teachers responded to the callout and attended a briefing session led by Professor Kirk. Five of these teachers chose to participate in the pilot study.

All five teachers had at least ten years' experience of teaching physical education, qualifying within four years of one another. Jess, Kate and I were three of the teachers on this project. Liana and Laura were the other two teachers who were part of the initial project. During the pilot study, each teacher (apart from me) enacted an activist approach with one of their timetabled physical education classes chosen by themselves. My class, composed of 12 girls aged 12-13 labelled by the head of department as 'disengaged', was especially composed for me as I had formerly worked at the school and was now located at the University. The other four intervention classes consisted of around 25 pupils aged 13-15 years old and were girls-only classes.

The five teacher-participants attended three one-day workshops led by Professor Kim Oliver, held at the University of Strathclyde in September 2015, January 2016 and May 2016. These workshops were both training sessions for the teachers in enacting an activist approach, opportunities to reflect on and discuss experiences, and included school visits to generate data. Kim taught two sample lessons from BtF in the schools in September and also sent the teachers recorded videos of herself and her PETE students teaching some activist lessons for reference. Throughout the pilot study, the teachers had opportunities to network on a closed social media platform and via email correspondence to exchange ideas and share examples of lessons they had implemented. I conducted approximately four visits to each teacher during the pilot study, which involved recording lesson observations and conducting brief informal interviews with the teachers.

Upon completion of the pilot project at the end of the 2015-2016 school year, I approached Jess, Kate, Liana, and Laura to gauge their interest in continuing their work using an activist approach as participants in my doctoral study. Laura, due to pregnancy, would be on maternity leave and unable to participate. However, Jess, Kate, and Liana expressed their willingness to be part of the follow-up project. Each teacher agreed to consider which

class(es) they would like to work with using an activist approach in the upcoming school year, constituting the focus of the present study.

3.3.2 Part 2: Present Study

For the 2016-17 school year, Liana, Jess, and Kate selected classes to be part of the ongoing study. Liana opted for an all-boys class she had expressed difficulty teaching since they started secondary school, now in their third year. Liana and her boys' class actively participated in the fieldwork. In analysing the findings for this thesis, it was decided to retain Liana and the boys' dataset for future research, acknowledging that this thesis primarily focuses on work with girls in physical education. This decision does not negate the possibility of applying an activist approach in all-boys classes or mixed settings, as demonstrated in research by Walseth et al. (2018). Liana's unique experience with an activist approach significantly contributed to this study, offering insights distinct from Jess and Kate. Her reflections undoubtedly influenced how Kate, Jess, and I approached and reflected on enacting an activist approach in physical education.

Kate chose to work with one all-girls class in their fourth year (S4) of secondary school. Notably, these girls were two years older than the class Kate worked with during the pilot study. Kate justified her decision by stating that the girls were at a crucial stage in their schooling, having recently transitioned into the Senior Phase (S4-S6). She elaborated, emphasising that this phase often witnesses a decline in girls' participation levels due to factors such as age, body image, and other interests (Kate, Teacher profile questionnaire). Kate taught her fourth year class twice each week in what is known in Scotland as 'core' physical education.

Core physical education are the mandatory lessons required by the Scottish government for every pupil, involving a minimum of two periods per week in secondary schools. In the Senior Phase, core physical education lacks clear definition in Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (CFE) and it is typically delivered in the form of games and fitness, with participation as the primary objective of these lessons. The absence of structured programmes for these 'core' physical education lessons is notable, with lack of guidelines and mixed policy messages not helping matters (Thorburn, 2010; Thorburn & Horrell, 2011). In contrast to 'core' physical education, Senior Phase pupils have the option to pursue national qualifications in physical education certified by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA).

These qualifications are graded by external and internal assessments, with Higher Physical Education recognised as a university entrant grade (Kirk et al., 2018).

Similar to Kate, Jess opted to work with two S4 'core' all-girls physical classes for the present study. The first class, referred to as Class 4M throughout this thesis, was the same class Jess taught using an activist approach in the pilot study during their S3 year. The second class, named 4T, was new to the activist approach but had questioned Jess about the activities of the 4M class in the previous year. This influenced Jess's decision to work with both classes in the present study, as she felt that this project was a 'perfect tool to listen to the pupils and hear their ideas and reasons why they don't feel comfortable taking part in physical activity' (Jess, Teacher profile questionnaire). Both classes were taught by Jess two times per week. Several of the pupils in both Kate's and Jess's core physical education class were also enrolled in SQA physical education, potentially resulting in some pupils having physical education lessons up to six times per week.

3.4 Setting 1: Holy Trinity Secondary School

Holy Trinity Secondary School is a six-year Roman Catholic state-funded secondary school within Glasgow City Council, located in a busy area of the city, with good transport links. The school roll in August 2016 was approximately 2040 pupils. Over 90% of the pupils live in an urban area, with a significant number of pupils enrolling in the school via placing request, meaning they live outside of the school catchment area. The school serves areas of multiple deprivation, with 44% of its pupils living in the 20% most deprived postcodes according to the 2016 Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD). Free school meal entitlement, an indicator of socioeconomic status, is 24% of the school population. Around 41% of pupils have English as an additional language with over 40 languages being listed as first languages at home. Urdu (native to India, Pakistan, and other South Asian countries) is the most common language. Around 60% of pupils at Holy Trinity Secondary progress to further or higher education.

In 2016, the physical education department, led by Kate as the principal teacher since 2013, comprised eight full-time teachers. At Holy Trinity Secondary, all physical education classes from S1 to S4 are single-sex. The class formation involves merging two form/registration classes, which are then divided by sex. For instance, 4A and 4B combine to create 4AB girls and 4AB boys. Traditionally, the physical education programme followed a

multi-activity approach with six-week (two lessons per week) blocks for all S1-S6 pupils. After her involvement in the pilot project, Kate opted to transform S3 physical education into three-week short units. Each class was assigned a specific area (e.g., gym hall, outdoor pitch) for these three weeks to introduce more activity variety and allow for increased pupil choice. The intention was for teachers to consult pupils when selecting activities for the unit. Except for Kate and one other teacher, the remaining staff continued with the traditional multi-activity approach for their S3 classes.

3.4.1 Kate

Kate, age 34 at the time of the study, is the Principal Teacher of Physical Education at Holy Trinity Secondary School and has held this position for three years. Before this role, she taught for 11 years in other Glasgow-area schools after completing her undergraduate degree (BEd, Scottish University). Kate had some experience of using pedagogical models in physical education (Sport Education) and she also has been involved with the Fit for Girls initiative. During the 2016-17 school year, Kate's classes in S1-S2 followed a multi-activity programme; she did not teach an S3 class, and her S4 class was her activist class. Additionally, she taught one National 5 and one Higher Physical Education class[2].

Growing up in Scotland, sports played a significant role in Kate's life. She was a competitive long-distance runner for her local athletics club, participating in training and weekly competitions at district and national levels. Kate joined the athletics team and the girls' football team in secondary school, and she also joined a dance school, continuing until her mid-twenties. From an early age, Kate was actively involved in various sports and outdoor activities, encouraged by her parents and siblings.

Physical education was Kate's favourite subject in school, and her enjoyment of working with young people motivated her to become a physical education teacher. Her philosophy emphasises encouraging and supporting as many children as possible to participate in physical activity. Kate believes that introducing the enjoyment of the subject first allows competitiveness and skill development to follow. Throughout her late twenties and early thirties, Kate remained active, continuing to dance, run, and participate in various fitness classes such as Spin, Metafit, and Body Pump at the gym.

[2] National 5 and Higher Physical Education are courses offered by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) during the Senior Phase (S4-6) in secondary schools. Pupils choose to enrol in these courses, which include assessments covering both practical and written elements.

3.4.2 Kate's Pupils

Prior to the 2016-17 academic year, Kate had not taught her S4 core physical education class, although she was familiar with many of the girls from various school interactions. The majority of girls in Kate's class identified as White British/Scottish, with approximately five girls that self-identified as a non-White ethnic background. All girls in the class were fluent in English. Additionally, six girls from Kate's core class were concurrently enrolled in the National 5 Physical Education course.

Kate's S4 core physical education class comprised 25 girls aged 15-16, each exhibiting varying levels of motivation towards physical education and physical activity. Among them, some actively engaged in sports days and events, while others openly expressed their disinterest in physical education. Kate characterised her S4 class as a 'mixed bag' featuring individuals with distinct personalities, some exuding confidence and enjoyment in PE, while others appeared more reserved. She noted that despite their differences, the girls actively participated, with varying degrees of effort. Additionally, Kate felt there seemed to be a collective desire among them to enhance their health, fitness, and body toning. Kate speculated that this shared motivation might be influenced by their current stage of adolescence.

Some of the girls in Kate's class feature in Chapter 4 are noted in the table below. These girls were selected as they are shown to be an integral part of Kate's becoming-Activist journey. For example, Jenny and Maeve challenged Kate's assumptions about girls in physical education, while Rachel and Chloe helped Kate understand that there is no such thing as a homogenous girl. This chapter primarily explores Kate's personal development, thus individual girls are not highlighted as prominently as they are in Chapter 5. Nevertheless, the profiles of the girls outlined in Table 3.1 represent the wider experiences of the various 'types' of pupils Kate taught in her activist class.

Table 3.1 Brief profiles of some girls in Kate's activist class

Jenny	Kate referred to Jenny as the 'girl with attitude'. Jenny is unreserved in expressing her opinions and doesn't hesitate to share her thoughts about physical education with her teachers. She occasionally disrupts lessons and, on some occasions, fails to bring appropriate clothing for participation.
Maeve	Maeve, who is a good friend of Jenny's, typically aligned herself with Jenny's viewpoints while also extending from her own perspective. Maeve disliked being compared to her classmates. Unlike Jenny, she wasn't as assertive, yet she believed she put forth her best effort during physical education classes, even though her efforts weren't always acknowledged by her teachers.
Rachel	Rachel can be characterised as a 'sporty' girl who enjoys trying new activities in PE. She was part of the National 5 SQA class and liked the challenge of learning more about the performance aspects of PE. Rachel preferred working in an all-girls class, as she felt that in her mixed-sex SQA class, the boys tended to dominate the environment.
Chloe	Chloe, according to Kate, is a girl who might not typically enjoy PE because of her size. Her body size doesn't conform to the conventional standards of an 'ideal female body' in society. She often felt uncomfortable during PE lessons and struggles with self-confidence. Nevertheless, with support and encouragement, Chloe demonstrated a willingness to engage and participate in her PE lessons.

3.5 Setting 2: St Mary's High School

St Mary's High School is a six-year all-girls publicly funded Roman Catholic secondary school within Glasgow City Council. The location of the school is in an affluent area of the city, however, due to its unique setting as an all-girls school, placing requests are significant with many pupils using public transport from all areas of the city to access the school. In 2016, the school roll was approximately 700 pupils. The school serves areas of multiple deprivation, with around 36% of its pupils living in the 20% most deprived postcodes according to the 2016 SIMD. Around 32% of pupils are in receipt of free school meals. St Mary's is a diverse and multicultural school, with 53% of pupils having diverse ethnic backgrounds, including a significant Muslim population, despite being a

denominational school. Wearing of hijabs is commonplace in the school, with the school's uniform policy mentioning that hijabs should be plain, in a colour to match the school uniform. In 2017, 69% of pupils left school with 3 or more Higher qualifications, with 51% achieving 5 or more awards at this level.

The physical education department is part of the Faculty of Health and Wellbeing, along with home economics. Jess is the Head of this faculty, leading four other full-time teachers (three physical education and one home economics). In 2016, all pupils in S1-S4 attended for two periods of physical education per week. The curriculum for these year groups traditionally consisted of six-week multi-activity units, with some periods of choice woven throughout the blocks. Until 2016-17, there were no 'core' periods of physical education for S5-S6 pupils, with Jess managing to source one period per week for these year groups. The focus for the S5-S6 pupils was on participation and choice, with Jess introducing a 'choice' programme for these year groups based on their activity interests. In S4, pupils can choose National 5 Physical Education (four lessons per week) in addition to their two 'core' physical education lessons. S5-S6 pupils can opt for Higher Physical Education.

3.5.1 Jess

Jess, age 40 at the time of the study, is the Faculty Head of Health and Wellbeing at St Mary's High School and had held this position for five years. She has taught physical education for 18 years in Scotland, England, Ireland and Australia, following the completion of her undergraduate degree (BA, English University). Jess had some previous experience with cooperative learning and student-centred pedagogy. During the 2016-17 school year, Jess taught an S1 and S3 class following a multi-activity approach; she taught two S4 classes that followed an activist approach; and one S5 core class who were participating in the choice programme. Additionally, she taught one Higher Physical Education class.

Growing up in Ireland, Jess had many opportunities to be involved in sport, with her parents actively encouraging her to participate in various activities, including attending sports camps during school summer holidays. Throughout both primary and secondary school, Jess developed a passion for sports and physical education. In primary school, she was introduced to a diverse range of activities by motivating teachers, enjoying participation with friends during school and on Saturdays. During secondary school, Jess also joined extracurricular sports, with her basketball coach, a former NBA player, serving as a significant inspiration to

her. In her final year of secondary school, Jess was honoured as the sports captain of her school.

Jess's philosophy behind physical education aligns with encouraging all pupils to be physically active, recognising the value of physical activity for overall wellbeing. Despite the challenges of juggling responsibilities after having two children, Jess found time to participate in exercise and fitness classes. More recently, she has developed a newfound love for cycling and engages in it regularly.

3.5.2 Jess's Pupils

There were 15 girls aged 15-16 years old in each of Jess's S4 classes. Culturally, they came from a varied background, with around 50% of the girls in each class representing minority ethnicities. Four girls in class 4M and six girls in 4T were Muslim and wore hijabs. The girls in both classes had different motivation levels for physical activity and physical education. In Class 4M, most pupils participated in lessons, although there were some occasions where one or two pupils sat out for medical reasons. In Class 4T, most lessons saw one or two pupils sitting out. This was not usually questioned by Jess or other pupils, and Jess got the pupils involved in other ways, such as scorekeeping.

Jess taught both classes in their previous school year when they were in S3. She described class 4M as having a strong inclination to be 'very active' with several expressing the desire to feel like they had 'worked hard' during physical education lessons. The more athletically inclined girls in this class tended to dominate during games and fitness activities, and three of them actively participated in competitive sports outside of school. Notably, two girls in the class held roles as school sport ambassadors, actively supporting various events within the school. While approximately four girls in 4M displayed a somewhat timid demeanour, they generally participated in all lessons. Interestingly, Jess observed that the timid girls in 4M often followed the lead of others. Additionally, discussions within this class frequently revolved around body-related topics, as exemplified by conversations about the 'thigh gap' among the girls (see subsection 5.5.3).

The girls in 4T were a diverse cohort with varying interests in physical education and physical activity. Among them, three girls regularly participated in physical activities beyond school, and one of them received recognition as a school sports ambassador. These particular individuals, along with a few others, asserted themselves with strong, influential voices,

consistently seeking to have their voices heard. Conversely, around four girls in 4T displayed a more reserved disposition, seldom expressing themselves or contributing to group discussions. The range of differing perspectives among the class led to occasional conflicts when making decisions. Notably, friendship groups played a significant role in the class's social dynamics, with girls often preferring to work within their established social circles during physical education.

Some of the girls in Jess's classes you will meet in Chapter 5 are noted in Table 3.2. These girls were chosen for their pivotal role in Jess's journey in understanding how class dynamics influenced her activist teaching. The descriptions provided offer insights into the pupil behaviours that became more visible as Jess enacted an activist approach. Chapter 5 will explore deeper into these classroom dynamics and pupil practices.

Table 3.2 Brief profiles of some girls in Jess's activist classes

Class 4M		**Class 4T**	
Rebecca	Rebecca, a 'sporty girl', views PE as an opportunity for physical activity. She excels in sports, particularly rugby, outside of school, thriving on the competitive aspects of PE. Supported by her parents, who encourage sports participation, she sees sport as integral to PE. A Sky Sports ambassador, Rebecca confidently expresses her opinions on PE.	Kristina	Confident and assertive, Kristina actively engages in class, volunteering for picking teams and assuming extra responsibilities in PE. Unreserved in expressing her opinions, she occasionally clashes with peers, though not maliciously. However, her assertiveness can lead to the dismissal of other girls' viewpoints in discussions.
Olivia	While Olivia has an overall affinity for PE, it's clear she dislikes certain activities that she doesn't feel confident at (like fitness). She enjoys gymnastics, feeling confident in leading others. Despite her family's lack of encouragement of PE, they support Olivia's autonomy. In group interviews, she is eager to speak up, yet often perceives dominant voices overshadowing her contributions.	Sammi	Sammi is a reserved and polite pupil who tends to stay inconspicuous in class. While she actively participates in PE, she generally aligns with the majority and lacks confidence in expressing opinions in large groups or class discussions. Nonetheless, she feels at ease communicating with her teacher.

Mariam	Mariam engages in PE with a casual approach, particularly enjoying basketball. While she participates, enthusiasm is lacking. She follows the crowd and is most comfortable in PE when surrounded by supportive friends who add a fun element. Mariam isn't fond of excessive competition in PE activities.	Alana	Alana enjoys most aspects of PE but has struggled to fit into a social circle. Frequently working independently, she often ends up with the last partner in the class. Disliking the compulsory PE uniform, Alana advocated for a more comfortable alternative that suited her preferences and made her feel more comfortable participating.
Claire	Claire recently enrolled at St Mary's for the 2016-17 school year. Claire disliked PE in her previous school in England, often spending time on the pitch chatting with friends. Claire referred to herself as someone who wasn't 'good' at PE. Appreciating the social aspect of PE, Claire prefers when decisions involve more pupils in the process.	Paula	Paula referred to herself as a 'natural leader' and someone who is quite loud with her opinions. She has a strong passion for PE, feeling self-assured in variety of activities. However, Paula becomes frustrated when classmates show a lack of effort during games, prompting her to often take charge.

3.6 Activist Methodology

There are two phases within an activist approach that the teachers enacted in both the pilot and present study. In this section, I provide an account of the enactment of these phases for the teachers, emphasising some of the modifications they made during the present study.

3.6.1 Phase 1: Building the Foundation

The first phase of an activist approach, *Building the Foundation (*Btf), runs for around ten to twelve weeks. Kate and Jess taught the BtF phase from August to December 2016. The foundation lessons allowed the teachers to co-create an environment that demonstrates mutual understanding, respect and learning among the pupils and between the pupils and their teacher. Using the activist methodology of student-centred inquiry *as* curriculum (see Figure 2.1), the four critical elements (see subsection 2.5.3) are embedded throughout the BtF lessons.

The start of BtF phase consisted of three initial foundation lessons that were essentially classroom-based or sit-down lessons, meaning they did not require any level of

physical activity. Each of the three lessons had an overarching theme: pupil perceptions on physical education; co-creating a class environment; and curricular learning outcomes. Detailed lesson plan examples for lessons one and two can be found in Appendix H and I.

The goal of lesson one is to gain insights into pupils' perceptions of physical education through various activities, including individual writing, small group discussions, and larger group sharing. Teachers have the flexibility to adapt tasks to suit their classes. One task involves pupils expressing their feelings about physical education using notecards, addressing aspects like their wishes, feelings of success, and sources of frustration. Additional tasks explore pupils' desired changes in the physical education programme and discussions about peer interactions during lessons. Kate taught lesson one with her class in a classroom. A small part of this lesson is described in Chapter 4. Jess used a similar approach with Class 4T, however with Class 4M, Jess opted to 'start where she left off', as they had covered this lesson in the previous school year. Realising that the girls had changed since S3, Jess revisited their responses with them, re-evaluating their perceptions around physical activity and physical education. Jess's decision to initially 'skip' the initial BtF lessons takes on significance in light of the findings presented in Chapter 5.

Lesson two focused on co-creating a class environment. The goal of this lesson is two-fold. First is to understand what pupils believe a physically and emotionally safe class environment entails. Secondly, it involves working together with pupils to co-create ways of working (or class rules) that everyone agrees will facilitate the creation and maintenance of a safe class environment. Both Kate and Jess chose to teach lesson two in the gymnasium for their respective classes. Kate integrated team-building exercises into lesson two, finding that this approach effectively provided her with the desired information without requiring a classroom setting. In contrast, Jess found a need to revisit lesson two with Class 4T, as she felt the girls were not working well together. Following discussions with me about Kate's team-building approach, Jess also utilised this with Class 4T. By the end of lesson two, both teachers co-created a class code with their classes outlining how they were to work together over the course of the school year.

The objective of the third lesson was to help teachers grasp their pupils' interests in relation to the curriculum. Pupils ranked statements based on importance to their learning interests, which led to further discussions with their teacher. For example, under the heading of 'Movement Skills, Competencies and Concepts', some of the statements on the pupil worksheet were as follows:

I want to learn…

- ☐ how to get better at the skills I need in sports and physical activities I like.
- ☐ how to develop the ability to improve movement skills without help from others.
- ☐ how to develop a fitness programme for an activity I'd like to engage in for life.
- ☐ how to develop realistic short-term and long-term fitness goals.

The curriculum matching exercise for the 'core' physical education classes that Jess and Kate taught during the present study was more challenging. The absence of specific curricular objectives beyond the SQA framework for Skills for Learning, Skills for Life, and Skills for Work (SfLLW) posed a difficulty. The SfLLW framework identifies health and wellbeing as one of the five key organisers of broad generic skills essential for qualification development (Scottish Qualifications Authority, n.d.). This framework highlights the role of physical wellbeing in acknowledging the importance and advantages of leading a healthy and active lifestyle, while also practicing skills to maximise the positive aspects of activities, such as enjoyment and challenge. Consequently, the teachers tended to focus on identifying key skills to develop, drawing insights from pupils' responses gathered during the foundation lessons.

The next part of BtF aimed to broaden pupils' perspectives of what is possible in physical education. Teachers utilised their pupils' responses from the initial lessons to inform their subsequent activity lessons, their pedagogical practices and how they related to their pupils. Teachers taught a series of one-off taster lessons where pupils could sample new and novel activities that were not what they had previously experienced in physical education. New and novel activities were important during BtF, since this allowed teachers to challenge the status quo of physical education, which was organised around a multi-activity, sport technique-based programme (Kirk, 2010) in all of the schools. After each taster lesson, teachers debriefed with their classes and listened to their views about the session so that they could respond to it in subsequent lessons, following the SCIC framework (Oliver & Oesterreich, 2013).

Kate's taster programme consisted of ten lessons of different activities that were chosen by her and the girls. The activities included a spin class, Body Pump, HIIT workouts, Zumba, boxercise, aqua aerobics, hula hoop class and football (soccer). Despite football being considered a traditional sport in school physical education in Scotland, it was a novel experience for these girls. Jess's taster programme differed slightly due to facility constraints, often necessitating the use of the school's assembly hall for physical education lessons, limiting her choices. Jess typically focused on mini-games and fitness-type taster lessons and

included a taster session of tae-kwon do for each class. Additionally, she introduced a short trampolining block, considering it a new activity for the girls. Due to health and safety concerns and limited trampolines (only two available), Jess felt the need to dedicate more than one lesson to this activity.

3.6.2 Phase 2: Co-constructing a Thematic Unit

The second phase of an activist approach involved the co-construction of a thematic unit of work (see Appendix J for a sample). A thematic unit, unlike traditional multi-activity units organised by content (e.g., athletics, basketball, or aerobics), focuses on learning around a central theme. Drawing on pupils' responses from the foundation lessons, teachers used a variety of physical activities and other subject matter as a media for teaching and learning of this theme across a longer time period (around 10-12 weeks) than is usual in more traditional programmes. Kate and Jess taught their thematic unit from January to April 2016.

Kate's thematic unit was based around *'learning different ways to benefit my health and fitness to stay active for life'*. Embedded within this theme were the key aspects of health and fitness and building social relationships to benefit pupils' participation. Kate continued to teach using a variety of activities in each lesson structuring her lessons around the central theme. In the final six weeks, Kate integrated her class into the 'choice' programme for one of their weekly lessons, a topic I elaborate on in Chapter 4. This decision was made to prevent her pupils from 'missing out' on opportunities available to their peers and to facilitate different social interactions during physical education. However, Kate continued to work with her class solely during the other period in the week, and the majority of the girls in her class chose to work with Kate during their 'choice' period.

Both of Jess's classes co-constructed a thematic unit which focused on leadership. In Class 4M, the theme centred on pupils assuming leadership roles in physical education to enhance confidence and leadership capabilities. Pupils with varying confidence levels led different aspects of physical activities, with options to lead in groups or specific parts of a session (e.g., a warm-up). More confident pupils led entire lessons based on activities they were familiar with. Throughout the unit, girls had time to plan their activities and seek guidance from their teacher and peers. Jess also demonstrated leadership by guiding the class in various sports and fitness activities, offering opportunities for pupils to take on different roles, such as coach or captain.

In Class 4T, the theme aimed to develop pupils' communication skills to support the growth of their leadership and confidence. Jess structured lessons around mixing different groups and incorporated team-building activities. Similar to Class 4M's thematic unit, Jess used various physical activities, such as blind football, fitness-type lessons and mini-games to teach different communication approaches.

The fieldwork for this study concluded in late March 2017. Following the birth of my daughter in early April 2017, I was unable to make subsequent visits to the school. It's worth noting that Jess and Kate's classes only had two more weeks of school in April, as all pupils were on study leave during the May/June exam period. Thus, the project came to a natural conclusion.

3.7 Data Generation

Data were generated over a nine-month period, from August 2016 until April 2017. In December of 2017, I completed a final follow-up interview with the teachers, due to beginning maternity leave earlier than expected in April 2017. Data were generated through lesson observations and field notes (Emerson et al., 2011), semi-structed individual interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 2012) with the teachers, group interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) with pupils, monthly working sessions with teachers, informal debriefing, teacher and pupil classroom artefacts (Marshall & Rossman, 2012), and debriefing meetings with an activist expert, Kim. The debriefing sessions with Kim were done using an online platform, Skype. All interviews were voice recorded and transcribed. All names of pupils and teachers were changed to pseudonyms.

Figure 3.1 provides an overview of the data generation.

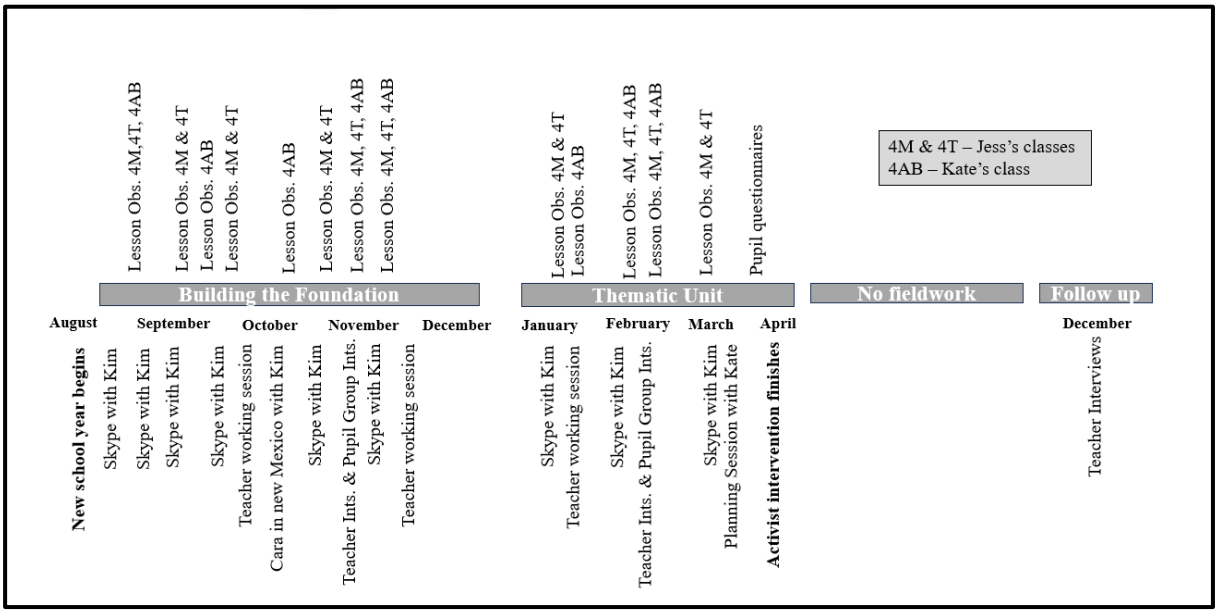

Figure 3.1 Data generation timeline

3.7.1 Lesson observations and field notes

Each teacher was observed enacting an activist approach during the two phases, with observations occurring approximately every other week. A total of 39 lesson observations were made, with around 10 observations for each class, including Liana's class. The observations were unstructured and varied in approach. In some instances, I just observed, documenting all aspects of the lesson, including teacher-pupil dialogue, pupil-pupil interaction, pupil responses, and body language. In other cases, I participated as an observer, assisting the teacher as needed and taking notes throughout the lesson. This was based on prior discussions with the teacher. To capture specific dialogues, I recorded audio in certain lessons and reviewed the recording post-lesson. Weekly overviews for each teacher were compiled after each lesson, incorporating observation notes, audio recordings, and informal conversations with teachers and pupils, all documented in my field journal.

3.7.2 Individual teacher interviews

Formal, semi-structured interviews with each teacher took place on three occasions during the fieldwork. This provided a consistent approach with each teacher whilst offering

some flexibility in enabling their experiences to be shared (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The first interview was at the end of the Building the Foundation phase in November 2016; the second interview was midway through the implementation of a thematic unit in February 2017; and the final interview was after the conclusion of the intervention in December 2017. The interviews were approximately 60 minutes in length and were conducted at each teacher's school. The questions asked during the interviews were developed by Kim and me during our debriefing sessions and can be found in Appendices A, B and C. The first two interviews also served as a learning space. As we discussed different challenges Kate and Jess were experiencing, we were able to discuss potential ways forward.

The first interview was structured into four parts. Part one focused on understanding the enactment of the critical elements of an activist approach, with teachers providing examples of what they did, the challenges they faced and how they negotiated these challenges. The second part explored how pupils responded to the enactment of an activist approach, comparing it to the pilot study experience. The third part of the interview investigated teacher learning, inquiring into changes teachers made, and contextual and structural influences on the BtF phase implementation. The final part addressed scaling up an activist approach for other teachers, seeking advice, collaboration ideas, and strategies for potential adoption in a Scottish context.

The second individual teacher interviews were conducted in February 2017, as teachers were enacting a thematic unit with their activist classes. The questions in this interview were based on how teachers structured their class and their utilisation of pupil data in co-constructing the thematic unit. Additionally, I was interested to learn how pupils responded to this approach, comparing it to the pilot study's outcomes. Furthermore, I aimed to gain insights into teacher professional learning related to an activist approach, considering content inclusions, anticipated challenges, and identifying the most beneficial aspects for teachers in learning this approach.

The final teacher interviews occurred approximately six months post the activist intervention's conclusion. My focus was on understanding whether the teachers continued with an activist approach and, if so, in what manner. We explored previously identified barriers such as structure, timetabling, facilities, and the influence of colleagues, reflecting on the influence of these barriers on teachers' journeys in becoming-Activist. Furthermore, discussions centred around the feasibility of scaling up this approach and whether the teachers would recommend it to others. I explored the impact of their involvement in the

study on their teaching practices and extracted insights into their key takeaways and learning moments throughout their journeys.

3.7.3 Group interviews with pupils

Group interviews took place on the same day as the first two individual teacher interviews at the school premises, one in November 2017 and the other in February 2017. On these dates, I interviewed the teacher, observed the class, and conducted two group interviews for each class. There were around five pupils in each group, meaning I interviewed about ten pupils from each class (30 pupils) on two occasions. Teachers deliberately chose participants for these groups to encompass diverse friendship circles and varying levels of motivation in physical education. The teachers, being mindful of the group dynamics, made selections to ensure the harmonious interaction within each group remained undisturbed. The girls in each of the groups were familiar with me as I had interacted with them and observed their physical education lessons since August. I tried to keep the discussions conversational and light-hearted so pupils would feel at ease with me and each other.

The first set of group interviews occurred in November 2017, coinciding with the BtF phase's conclusion. At the start of the interview, I provided an overview of the project to the girls, encouraging honesty in their responses, whilst emphasising that their responses may help make physical education better for them, their peers and girls in other schools. Questions focused on their experiences in physical education, the highs and lows since August, notable stories, and observations of changes in teachers, peers, and class dynamics.

The second set of group interviews took place in February 2017, during the thematic unit. Using the same groups, I inquired about class structure, teacher strategies for motivation, the girls' advice to their teacher, and changes in themselves and their classmates with regards to their attitude, engagement, motivation, participation and their ability to work with others during physical education. Additionally, I explored favourite and least favourite aspects of physical education and sought advice for peers if their teacher were to adopt an activist approach.

Both interviews used semi-structured questions that were reviewed with Kim for guidance on understanding how the pupils were experiencing an activist approach. Probing and clarifying phrases were employed for in-depth responses. The interview questions are detailed in Appendix D and E. Following the group interviews, I debriefed with teachers,

summarising the main points and providing a written SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis for teachers to reflect on. The SWOT analysis was suggested by Kate during one of our discussions. Teachers found the debriefing helpful for planning next steps, appreciating the extended discussion time I had with pupils. An example SWOT analysis for Kate is included in Appendix K.

3.7.4 Informal debriefing

Following each lesson observation, I had an informal conversation with each teacher for a duration of 10 minutes on average. On most occasions these conversations were audio-recorded, then transcribed and added to my field journal. However, in a few cases, when teachers had immediate class commitments, the discussions were brief and key points were noted in my field journal. These conversations focused on significant aspects observed during the lesson, with inquiries aimed at understanding the teacher's rationale. For instance, a common question posed was, 'I observed that during the lesson you did (this); could you elaborate on your reasoning behind it?'

Throughout the fieldwork, I had informal pre-lesson conversations with the teachers during my school visits. These primarily served as 'catch-up' discussions, allowing teachers to update me on activities of their activist class. Additionally, these conversations provided a platform for me to share my reflections following debriefing sessions with Kim. They also offered an opportunity to discuss ideas from other teachers that I had observed during my school visits.

3.7.5 Monthly work sessions with teachers

There was a total of four group working sessions with teachers, scheduled in October, November, January, and March. Each meeting served as a collaborative working session, focusing on the enactment of an activist approach and addressing encountered challenges. The initial session in October 2016, organised by Kim and me, aimed at understanding the variations in teachers' approaches compared to the pilot project. We discussed challenges faced during BtF and collectively brainstormed solutions.

The second session in November 2016 centred around the critical elements of an activist approach. Teachers shared their practices; for instance, Jess discussed team-building lessons with Class 4T, and Kate detailed her taster programme informed by pupil responses.

We also used this session to compile lesson ideas and explored some of the pupils' responses that could be used in developing a thematic unit.

The January working session was an extension of the previous session, focussing on the thematic unit. We discussed ways in which teachers incorporated feedback from BtF to co-construct the thematic unit. We collectively planned aspects of the teachers' thematic units, sharing ideas and rationale. Additionally, this session offered an opportunity for teachers to propose questions they'd like me to include in the upcoming February group interview with pupils.

The final working session in March 2016 aimed to provide a comprehensive view of what an activist approach might look like in school settings in Scotland. Regrettably, only Kate and I were present at this meeting. We brainstormed ideas, using flip charts and curricular materials to consider the structure of this approach, particularly envisioning its enactment in a traditional school setting in Scotland for those who are learning to use it.

3.7.6 Teacher and pupil artefacts

Throughout the study, multiple artefacts were gathered from both teachers and pupils. These included communication artefacts such as email and text exchanges between the teachers and I, instructional materials created by teachers, response sheets and questionnaires (see Appendix F) completed by pupils, the thematic units of work, materials used during working sessions, and photographs capturing whiteboard content utilised in lessons. For instance, a text exchange between Jess and me before a school visit highlighted challenges she faced during the present study. This conversation is incorporated into the preamble of Chapter 5, marking the start of our exploration into the class dynamics of her activist classes, the chapter's focus. Similarly, during a lesson observation with Kate, I captured a photo of her whiteboard notes in a Body Pump class (see subsection 4.4.3). This image contributed to my analysis of how Kate's practice was shaped by her biomedical perspectives on physical education.

3.7.7 Debriefing with expert

Throughout the fieldwork, Kim and I conducted nine debriefing sessions via Skype. These sessions, lasting between 20 and 60 minutes, were recorded and transcribed. Given

Kim's 25+ years of experience of developing an activist approach and her involvement in the pilot study with the teachers, these sessions were crucial for obtaining advice and feedback. In each session, I provided Kim with updates on the fieldwork, discussing key observations and insights from interactions with teachers and pupils. This also served as an integral part of the ongoing data analysis, which generated insights into the data that appear in the findings chapters.

During a conversation with Kim, I mentioned Jess's use of 'voting' in her classes, a narrative that is featured in Chapter 5. Kim encouraged me to explore deeper into why Jess employed this method, citing similar practices among other teachers she had worked with. Additionally, I discussed Kate's modification to a foundational lesson mentioned in Chapter 4 with Kim, who emphasised the importance of these lessons in challenging the status quo in physical education. This dialogue prompted further discussion with Kate and Jess, leading to their decisions to implement more team-building exercises during the BtF phase.

3.8 Data Analysis

After generating and transcribing the complete dataset, I compiled a document for each teacher, outlining a chronological sequence depicting their enactment of an activist approach. This compilation served as the primary dataset. The data analysis comprised three stages: examining modes of thinking (Freeman, 2017), coding (Saldaña, 2021), and narrative analysis (Oliver, 1998; Dowling, 2012). I collaborated with Dillon, my second supervisor, throughout these stages, engaging in reflective discussions. David, my first supervisor, also assisted in refining the 'big ideas' and narratives derived from the data.

Figure 3.2 provides an overview of the approach to data analysis, as detailed in the subsequent sections (3.8.1, 3.8.2, and 3.8.3). This figure represents the findings discussed in Chapter 4 (Kate's becoming-Activist journey), with a similar process applied in Chapter 5 (Jess's becoming-journey). Appendices L through P offer samples that illustrate and support the data analysis process. In developing these narratives, I considered various potential stories to represent each teacher's journey, ultimately selecting those that appeared most meaningful in the data and that could contribute valuable insights to the field. The themes shown in Figure 3.2 (e.g., *when meaningful intentions do not play out the way we planned*) appear as written in Chapter 4, though subthemes are integrated to provide additional data and nuance to the main narrative points.

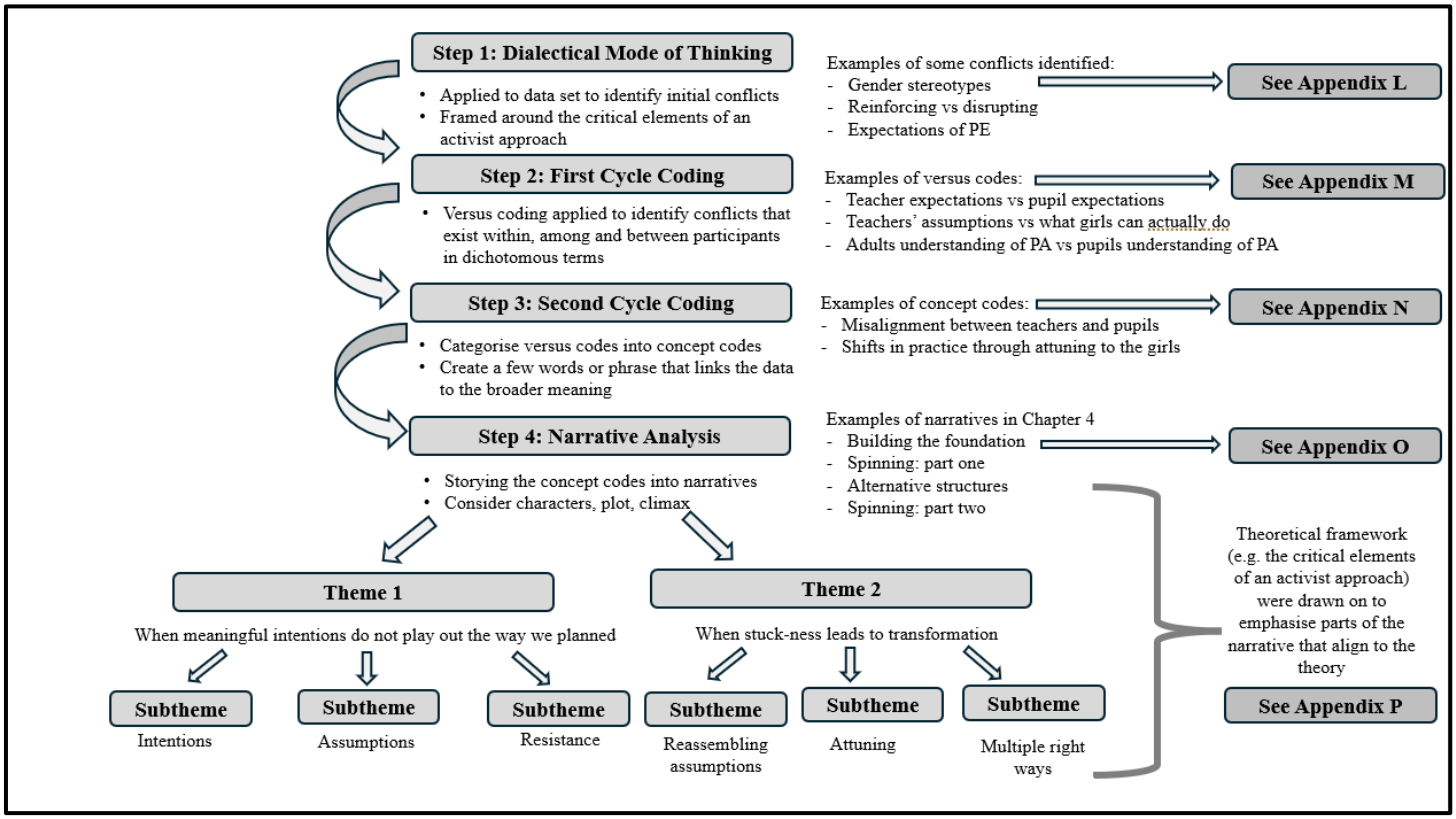

Figure 3.2 Data analysis overview

3.8.1 Modes of Thinking

The first stage of data analysis was to undertake different 'modes of thinking' for qualitative research (Freeman, 2017). I considered the different modes of thinking that aligned with the critical transformative paradigm and activist methodology (see Appendix L). Dialectical thinking, which revolves around the conflict of tension between two opposing parts, was chosen as the analytical approach. It is when we position our research within these tensions, or what Fine (1994) calls 'working the hyphens', that transformation is likely to occur (Freeman, 2017). This study applied dialectical thinking by critically evaluating current practices in engaging girls in physical education and exploring ways to enhance and transform these practices for the benefit of girls.

Dialectical thinking draws on the work of Freire and Foucault. Freire (1996) argues for transforming structures so that marginalised individuals can assert their own agency. In other words, transformative practices should emanate from within, particularly from the girls themselves. Foucault (1972) posits that new knowledge emerges through historical disruption, requiring the challenging of power discourses. If we are to find new ways of

working with girls in physical education, it is crucial to disrupt power dynamics between teachers and pupils and among pupils. Indeed, critiquing traditional practices that marginalise girls is essential in improving their current situation in physical education. Historical practices, dominant discourses, past experiences, and contextual factors all play a role in influencing this process. Researchers seeking change face the challenge that dialectical strategies are viewed both as an integral part of transformative action (Freire, 1993) and a potent force that must be broken for transformation to take place (Foucault, 1972; Freeman, 2017).

3.8.2 First and Second Cycle Coding

I explored seven coding types based on Saldaña's (2021) *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. In selecting the initial cycle coding methods, I carefully considered the nature and goals of my study. According to Saldaña (2021), "affective coding methods investigate the subjective qualities of human experience (e.g., emotions, values, conflicts, judgments) by directly acknowledging and naming those experiences" (p. 159). Among the affective coding methods, versus coding emerged as the most fitting choice for aligning with a critical transformative paradigm and a dialectical thinking approach. Versus coding involves identifying dichotomous or binary terms that are in conflict with each other (Saldaña, 2021), making it particularly relevant for gender and critical studies that focus on power dynamics. In critical research, discerning conflicting power issues among individuals and groups becomes crucial for facilitating positive social change (Altrichter et al., 1993). As a result, versus coding was selected as the primary coding method for the first cycle, given its alignment with the tensions and dominant power structures that influence girls in physical education.

In the first cycle coding, I started with tagging the data as dichotomous terms that produced a conflict for teachers, for the girls or for the overall learning environment in the class (see Appendix M). For example, in Kate's dataset *teacher assumptions vs pupil expectations*; *participation for health vs participation for enjoyment*; and *teacher stereotypes vs disrupting gendered stereotypes* emerged as versus codes. Similarly, Jess's data featured codes like *dominant vs quiet girls*; *traditional practices vs reform*; and the dissonance between *what girls think they want vs what their bodies are capable of*. Subsequently, these codes underwent a thorough review and discussion with Dillon, serving as a critical friend, to

assist me in identifying the primary tensions evident in the data. Concurrently with data tagging, I began to interpret or make sense of the codes, about how they contributed to a broader conceptual dichotomy.

After versus coding took place, these codes were then considered in relation to concept coding (Saldaña, 2021), as the second cycle coding. Concept coding enables researchers to move beyond the specifics of individual participants in fieldwork and progress towards the *ideas* suggested by the study (Saldaña, 2021). In the application of concept codes, I took the original versus codes and data from the first coding cycle, comparing them to 'big ideas' and broader meanings. Consequently, phrases were crafted to symbolically represent the suggested broader meaning derived from the data. Concept codes function to 'lump' together larger units of data that align with the overarching theme rather than merely capturing observable behaviours (Saldaña, 2021). In this case, several 'big ideas' were developed such as *'structural restrictions in relation to pupil needs'* (see Appendix N for further examples). The concept codes helped generate the main themes that are represented in Chapters 4 and 5. These codes underwent multiple iterations, with thorough reviews conducted in collaboration with David and Dillon.

Once the data was made into concept codes, I began to write analytical notes around the bigger concept. These analytical notes formed the narratives of each of the Findings chapters.

3.8.3 Narrative Analysis

> It is through stories that we can begin to understand human experience as lived, interpreted, and expressed, for the subject matter of narrative is human action. And as we come to better understand students' and teachers' stories, their interpretations of experiences, we may be able to better understand what we need or ought to do, and as teacher educators and researchers that is our moral obligation.
> (Oliver, 1998, p.247)

We all live our lives through stories or narratives, which offer insights into our professional worlds (Dowling, 2012). Narratives, written accounts of events and actions from personal experience (Muller, 1999), were employed by Oliver (1998) in her early activist efforts, illustrating the power of narrative analysis using diverse data sources. I was further inspired by Landi's (2018) work in which he constructed narratives about his experience as a queer physical educator. Upon reading narratives in the literature, I was profoundly moved by

the stories, and it became my aspiration to similarly portray the journeys of teachers in their transformation toward becoming-Activist (see Appendix O and P for an overview of this process).

The process of writing narratives was intricate and complex, rich with nuance. Despite the intricacies, I didn't always fully grasp this subtlety until I commenced crafting (and re-crafting) these stories. The act of storytelling, however, served as a revelation, bringing to life the intricate complexities and nuances inherent in the teachers' journeys (Fitzgerald et al., 2022). The use of narratives in research "have been criticised for merely reflecting a participant's lived social reality at a particular moment in time" (Fitzgerald et al., 2022, p. 1835). It is also argued that narratives are confined to the experiences foregrounded by the researcher. Whilst I acknowledge such limitations of the use of narratives, they also served as a space to articulate the lived, expressed, and nuanced experiences of both teachers and pupils engaging in an activist approach.

Narratives help people make meaning of significant moments (Saldaña, 2021) by guiding interpretation through context and plot (Brooks, 1984). They reflect human inclination to connect events meaningfully (Freeman, 2017), generating discourse (Polkinghorne, 1988). I selected the narratives presented in Chapters 4 and 5 to portray the journey of each teacher. While there were other stories I could have chosen, these particular narratives stood out to me as significant and memorable, highlighting the challenges and complexities inherent in the teachers' path toward becoming-Activists. Through the construction of narratives, Kate and Jess were written as the protagonists of the stories, with the pupils written as characters to help ground the story in the girls' experiences.

The narratives were crafted with vivid descriptions and emotional nuances, aiming to immerse the reader in the classroom setting and encourage them to interpret the stories in relation to their own needs or those of their pupils (Oliver, 1998). Smith and Sparkes (2009) suggest that stories can speak for themselves, allowing readers to interpret them from their unique vantage point.

In re-presenting these narratives, I recognise my unique place as the storyteller. The narratives essentially transformed into my own interpretations of the data. For instance, in Chapter 4, I mention observing the 'spin lesson' from the sidelines, meticulously recording everything I could see at that moment. Initially, I wasn't necessarily critical of the lesson, nor did I fully grasp all its nuances. However, as I engaged in rewriting, redrafting, and injecting emotions into the text, the narrative transformed, placing emphasis on my own emotions and those of the pupils.

Through crafting these narratives, I began to recognise myself and others within each teacher. Naturally, as these stories wove together, I found myself reflected in each teacher, at times causing discomfort as I had a desire to reverse and change aspects of my past teaching experiences that perpetuated gendered stereotypes. The narratives intertwined personal and professional stories (Freeman, 2017), reflecting my evolving understanding of girls' experiences of an activist approach in physical education.

3.9 Reflexivity and Trustworthiness

3.9.1 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was assured in multiple ways. All teachers, including myself, received training in an activist approach from its originator, Kim Oliver. Prior to completing the group interviews, I assisted Kim in conducting the interviews with the pupils during the pilot study and also observed her application of an activist approach with PETE students in school settings during a visit to New Mexico in October 2016. Additionally, credibility was strengthened through my established relationships with the participants. Professional connections with the teachers, coupled with personal interests discussed in our conversations, fostered a level of rapport that facilitated honest responses. When interviewing pupils, I assured them I sought to understand their experiences rather than seek 'right' answers. The personal qualities and skills I developed as a teacher catered for a relaxed and safe environment for open dialogue.

The dataset's initial coding underwent discussions and reviews by myself, David, and Dillon. Interpretations were later deliberated during supervision meetings. Peer debriefing also ensured the trustworthiness of my research. The construction of the narratives was an iterative process refined through discussions with David and Dillon. Debriefing meetings with Kim involved discussions about teachers' activist enactments, with her expert feedback relayed to the teachers. Multiple data generation methods, including a timeline, study contexts, and detailed descriptions of these methods has made this research transparent. The data excerpts and narratives presented in Chapters 4 and 5 promotes the transferability of research by enabling readers to visualise and apply findings in their own contexts, through what Stenhouse (1975) characterises as a 'surrogate experience'.

3.9.2 Researcher Reflexivity

Throughout this project, my position on the insider-outsider researcher continuum (Hellawell, 2006) evolved. Initially, joining the study in August 2015 after transitioning from a schoolteacher position to teacher educator, I felt like an 'insider' on par with other teachers, possessing knowledge of my participants and contemporary physical education (Merton, 1972). As my experience in teacher education and commitment to my doctoral work grew, so did my understanding of physical education, revealing aspects unknown during my time as a physical education teacher. My role with PETE students involved assessment and feedback, shaping my perspective as a 'knowledgeable outsider' (Milligan, 2016). I tended to approach the fieldwork for the present study from a teacher educator perspective, at times, critiquing what teachers did in practice. Despite my participants' expertise in teaching physical education, an activist approach was novel, and initially, I sought to ensure we got it 'right'. In hindsight, I recognise there is no singular correct way to enact an activist approach, as the 'becoming-Activist' concept suggests.

At the completion of my fieldwork, I went on maternity leave, distancing myself from the project for approximately six months. Upon my return, I moved back into teaching in a secondary school in February 2017. This was where I regained the 'insider' perspective as I began enacting an activist approach with my own classes, drawing on the knowledge accumulated in the previous two years. This reconnection inspired me, aligning my teaching role in school with the ongoing data analysis. While this insider perspective influenced my initial interpretations, it also posed a challenge as I tended to struggle with taking a broader, bird's eye view, often feeling like an 'in-betweener' (Milligan, 2016). Another layer of complexity arose as the onset of COVID-19 coincided with my return to teacher education the month before lockdown, leading to a start-stop research approach that hindered momentum and adversely influenced how I approached my data. I found it difficult to make sense of my large data set, and the task, at times, became overwhelming during a pandemic.

All teachers involved in both the pilot and present studies knew each other in a professional capacity. Our collective goal was to enhance physical education for girls in our respective schools, fostering a mutual desire to learn from Kim and exchange our experiences. We were dedicated to implementing the activist approach outlined by Oliver and Kirk (2015). However, it is important to recognise the influence of my own biography and assumptions on the research process.

Growing up in Canada, I had a positive influence from sports and physical education, similar to Kate and Jess. Engaging in games like volleyball, basketball, and soccer, I was active on school teams and played soccer at club and district levels. During junior high, I participated in sports nearly every day, often attending weekend tournaments. The competitiveness and social aspect of sports appealed to me. Being on a school team meant automatic inclusion in the 'popular' group, though I didn't perceive any stigma against girls in sports. It was my norm, and I surrounded myself with like-minded individuals. While some of my female friends weren't as enthusiastic about sports, I regrettably viewed it as their 'problem' for not being 'good enough' to be selected for a school team.

During my undergraduate studies, I had a strong interest in sports injuries and performance, but I did not pursue a career in that field. After graduation, I worked as a personal trainer and continued coaching soccer, discovering the challenges many individuals face in sports and physical activity. When I moved to the UK, I established the first all-girls football (soccer) team in my local village in Wales, igniting my decision to pursue a teaching qualification.

I did not become a physical education teacher until the age of 27. While sharing a similar philosophy with Kate and Jess, aiming to instil a love of sport and physical activity in all young people, I initially struggled teaching teenage girls. Although some were a joy to teach, I found it challenging to connect with others, who weren't like the 'sporty' girl I was. Over time, I realised it was my approach that needed adjustment, not the girls. This realisation marked the beginning of a shift in my perspective, albeit accompanied by errors in judgment, assumptions, and occasional moments of 'giving up' in the face of challenges to engage girls.

As I now reflect on this project, I acknowledge the influence of my biography on my interactions with teachers and girls. I tended to gravitate toward the 'sporty' girls, akin to me. With teachers, my focus often fixated on challenges rather than seeing the bigger picture. In writing this thesis, I struggled to situate myself outside of my own writing (Hellawell, 2006), a challenge that has evolved with guidance from my supervision team. Recognising my novice status in enacting an activist approach, my discussions with teachers reflected my own learning process. Over the years of this study, I have realised that I, too, have been on a journey of becoming-Activist.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

The research activities in this project adhered to the University of Strathclyde Ethics Code of Practice (Code_of_Practice_eighth_Feb17.pdf (strath.ac.uk)). The School of Education Ethics Committee approved the pilot study in February 2015, and an extension for the present study was granted in August 2016 (see Appendix G for ethical approval). Prior to fieldwork, approval was obtained from the local authority, headteachers, and written consent from the five teachers who participated in the pilot study. Verbal consent to extend the study for another school year was obtained from each teacher at the end of the pilot study.

At the project's outset, all pupils received a letter outlining the project. While opting out of physical education was not possible since the study was conducted during regular physical education classes, pupils could decline participation in discussions with me during lesson observations. All pupils willingly participated in all aspects of the project. Parental consent for group interviews was obtained through an 'opt-out' letter, but no parents opted out. Pupils had the option to refuse their teacher's selection for group interviews, although this did not occur, and an assent form was provided before each group interview which pupils signed prior to the interview. The pupil assent form outlined the interview details and informed pupils that feedback would be shared with their teacher to help enhance their physical education experiences. Interviews were conducted in a comfortable school setting with the interview questions shared, and pupils were not pressured to answer all questions. Audio recordings were made with assurance of anonymity.

Pseudonyms were assigned to the pupils that feature in Chapters 4 and 5. Kate and Jess chose their own pseudonyms during the pilot study, and all schools were also given pseudonyms.

Personal challenges (such as my work commitments, family pressures during the pandemic, and resuming research after an extended break) and those faced by teachers (including health issues, career changes, family challenges, and the birth of children) limited my ability to verify the narratives in Chapters 4 and 5. However, member checking does not align with the critical transformative paradigm of this study, which views knowledge as subjective and created within the person/researcher. To address data representation, I engaged in critical reflexivity, repeatedly questioning and refining my interpretations. I also sought feedback from my supervisors, David and Dillon. Through our regular discussion in this process, I ensured the narratives were a good representation of the data.

3.11 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has provided a justification for employing qualitative research methods within the critical transformative paradigm. Within this paradigm, researchers actively seek to transform social inequities. Given this study's aim to explore the transformative journeys of two teachers as they learn to enact an activist approach in their own physical education setting with the goal of improving the situation for girls in physical education, the strategies embedded within this methodology are expected to yield appropriate data for addressing the research questions. Furthermore, as activist researchers actively collaborate *with* their participants in working towards transformation, the extensive data generation should support us in envisaging a future of *'what might be'*. In the following two chapters, I present the findings that offer responses to the research questions.

Chapter 4: Becoming-Activist: Kate's journey

4.1 Introduction

Building on the data analysis (see Section 3.8 and Figure 3.2), the next two chapters present this study's findings in relation to the research questions, with each chapter focusing on a different teacher. Each chapter portrays significant moments in the teachers' journeys, offering insights into the complexities inherent in the process of becoming-Activist. While each of the three research questions will be addressed across the chapters, organising the findings under these specific headings was not straightforward. For instance, both chapters reveal the nuanced nature of the teachers' journeys, marked by moments of hesitation, realisation, and transformation. To reflect this complexity, I used narratives based on coding methods to illustrate the tensions observed in the data, encompassing all research questions.

As I considered the emergence of the overall findings depicted in Figure 3.2, I could have selected several 'stories' to represent the teachers' becoming-Activist journeys. I chose to emphasise the stories that appeared to most significantly influence their enactment of an activist approach.

This chapter will explore the journey of one teacher, Kate, who I introduced in the previous chapter. Kate embarked on an activist approach with one of her fourth-year core physical education classes. As I noted in Chapter 2, dominant discourses around gender and the body, as well as our assumptions about teenage girls, shape the structure and delivery of physical education programmes. Furthermore, I argued that beliefs around the place and purpose of physical education, often conceptualised as 'health promotion', 'physical fitness', and 'exercise-as-medicine', influence teachers' practice (Gray et al., 2022; Kirk, 2020). At the time of conducting this study, current dominant discourse emphasised that physical education should address physical health outcomes (Landi et al., 2016). This chapter explores Kate's becoming-Activist journey with a specific focus on how this dominant discourse influenced her journey.

The findings presented in this chapter are organised into two main themes: when meaningful intentions do not play out the way we planned and when stuck-ness leads to transformation. The first theme, presented in narrative form, focused on insights generated during the Building the Foundation phase of an activist approach. The second theme, also

presented through the use of narratives, illustrated the shifts in Kate's practice that occurred through reflections and discussions over the course of her becoming-Activist journey.

4.2 A preamble: Kate's modifications

In Chapter 2, I explored how the use of an activist approach requires teachers to know their pupils differently from their relationships within traditional approaches. During the BtF phase, the knowledge teachers gain from their pupils about their perspectives and feelings toward physical education is hugely valuable, as teachers work *with* pupils to co-construct their learning experiences in activist physical education. Yet, as argued by Oliver and Kirk (2015), the process of better understanding your pupils takes time and teachers need to be willing to invest this time while genuinely trusting that girls have crucial insights into what facilitates their engagement in physical education. Moreover, the activities and tasks of BtF (see Appendix H and I for examples) significantly diverge from the traditional structure of physical education programmes. Thus, working within an activist approach is a novel experience for both teachers and pupils and requires them to think about and 'do' physical education differently.

During Kate's enactment of an activist approach, there were two main modifications that emerged. The first modification occurred during lesson two of the BtF phase. Kate modified her approach for lesson two that differed from what she had done during the pilot study (refer to Appendix I for an example of lesson two). Instead of teaching this lesson in a classroom setting, she taught the lesson in the gymnasium while incorporating team building activities. As detailed in Chapter 3, this lesson had two objectives: to understand pupils' perceptions of an emotionally safe classroom environment and to collaboratively establish guidelines for working together (or 'class rules'). Kate opted for these slight adjustments for several reasons. Firstly, she believed that 'sitting in a classroom' didn't align well with the goals of the activist project. When questioned about this decision, she explained, '*I'm trying to encourage them to participate and I'm trying to get them to like PE and I didn't feel as if I could do that sitting in a classroom, so I wanted to get them in the gym, I wanted to get them moving'*. Secondly, Kate was confident that despite the change in setting, she effectively covered all necessary topics to meet the lesson's goals. She remarked, *'We still had the same*

conversations and I still got the responses I needed from them to then plan the taster sessions' (Teacher Int, Holy Trinity Sec, Nov 2016).

The significance of Kate's reflections on the initial BtF lessons and the seemingly minor adjustments she made cannot be overstated. These changes were driven by Kate's intuition about what she felt would be most effective. It became evident that Kate was uncomfortable teaching her physical education classes in a traditional classroom setting when the goal, as she saw it, was to get the girls moving. It's not that Kate did not teach physical education in a classroom setting, but this was reserved for her certificated SQA classes. More importantly, these insights reveal that Kate seemed, at this time, to prioritise the physical aspects of physical education over the social or affective outcomes. This decision was made at the very beginning of the activist intervention (in the second lesson). Given that this was the first school year Kate had taught many of these girls, she was only just getting to know them. Kate acknowledged that she would approach the foundation lessons similarly in the future, stating, *'One classroom session right at the very beginning just to introduce the project... building the foundation and to get the feedback from them but then I think practical after that.'* (Teacher Interview, Holy Trinity Sec, Nov 2016).

The second modification occurred during the Thematic Unit. As discussed in Chapter 3, in the final six weeks of the unit, Kate integrated her class into the 'choice' programme that the rest of the year group was participating in. This meant that Kate taught her class for one lesson per week rather than the usual two lessons for the remainder of the school year. Kate explained the reasons for making this modification:

> *Kate - So the way that our current fourth year programme works…from January onwards is always options… so (all pupils) select what activity they want to do for a six-week rotation and then they change to something else or they can continue doing the same activity for a further six weeks. So I didn't want them missing out on that, we came up with an agreement that one period of the week when I see them we will base the lesson on health and fitness… and the other period in the week they will join in a game… Cos a big part that came out of the last SWOT …was that they liked the team building thing and they liked that they know how to build relationships with people so they'd quite like to keep doing that in a sense*
>
> *Cara -… yeah am I right in saying that they wanted to kind of build relationships outwith their class sometimes.*

Kate – And that happened because when they choose their option, they are not always going to the same activity so when they go into a new activity, they will have to socialise with new people that they might not necessarily know, so that's been quite good fun for them.

(Teacher Interview, Holy Trinity Sec, February 2017)

Similar to Kate's early modifications to the initial foundation lessons, her adaptations during the thematic unit warrant further exploration. Throughout her becoming-Activist journey, Kate had to consider the goings-on of her workplace; that is, all other pupils in fourth year were participating in an options programme, and Kate did not want her pupils to 'miss out'. Despite this, Kate found a way to include the social aspects of the choice programme into her thematic unit. Emphasising the importance of '*building relationships'* as a focus of the thematic unit, alongside health and fitness, Kate explained that if her pupils weren't participating in the choice programme, she would have simply '*rotated different games during that lesson'*. Kate added, *'the fact they get to play games and socialise with other people is better.'* (Teacher Interview, Holy Trinity Sec, February 2017). This illustrates the need for Kate to adapt to her specific context. For her, integrating this programme into her thematic unit was a worthwhile decision, as it aligned to the school's tradition for fourth year pupils leading up to the National 5 examination period. Kate did not feel comfortable in diverting her class away from these traditions. Understanding Kate's personal biography regarding physical education and the contextual forces at work provides insights into the rationale behind her instructional decisions in the lessons that are featured in the upcoming narratives.

4.3 When meaningful intentions do not play out the way we planned

I provide two short narratives of two of Kate's lessons within the BtF phase of her activist journey here to show how meaningful intentions didn't work out as she had planned. As mentioned earlier, Kate was using this approach for one of her fourth-year girls' core physical education classes, and started this approach in a similar way as she did in the pilot study. The first narrative recounts a classroom-based lesson aimed at understanding pupils' perspectives on physical education, with an extract of the discussion during the lesson presented in the story. In the second narrative, occurring approximately three weeks after the initial lesson, Kate led a taster session (Spin) to broaden pupils' perspectives of the possibilities within physical education. This story provides some insights into Kate's teaching methods during that particular time of the ten-lesson taster session programme she co-created with her class.

4.3.1 Building the Foundation: understanding pupils' perspective

The school term had been back in session for two weeks, drawing pupils back from their summer holiday break. For Kate, this meant the beginning of her activist intervention with her fourth-year girls class, a class she felt would be difficult to motivate in physical education. Leading her pupils into the classroom felt like stepping onto uncharted territory, both for Kate and the girls. Gone were the leisurely moments of changing into sports gear, the slow walk to the sports hall, and the comfort of settling in with their preferred friends awaiting the announcement of the activity they would do for the next six weeks. Instead, they found themselves seated in small groups around tables.

Kate started the lesson by explaining the activist project. As I observed from the side, she introduced me to the girls, emphasising our shared mission, to understand their perceptions of and feelings towards physical education. Our ultimate aim: to work together to transform their PE experiences for the better. There were several group tasks during this lesson but one particular exercise stood out, the free-writing session where the girls wrote about their feelings of PE, guided by Kate's prompts. My attention was captivated by a discussion unfolding within one of the groups. I detected a resistance brewing among the girls, as they challenged the notion that the teacher always 'knows what's best'.

It was Jenny's voice that cut through the air, as I sensed resentment in her words, 'I really don't like it *when teachers keep telling you to work harder but you're doing the best you can'*. Initially, her comment left me puzzled, but then my mind was consumed with memories, as I pictured myself standing beside a 400m track shouting at pupils to *go harder, go faster*. I thought I was motivating them. So did Jenny's teachers. And then came Maeve's response, subtle frustration in her voice, 'Yeah, like when you're running with someone who is faster than you, and you can't keep up and the teacher tells you to keep going but *you can't go any faster as you are trying your hardest'*. Jenny and Maeve's statements hit me and Kate hard.

It was a sobering realisation. I couldn't help but want to berate those teachers for making those girls feel like that. Kate, too, realised that she had been guilty of doing the same thing. And so, when the time came to address the class, Kate spoke from a place of understanding and compassion. 'Maybe', she said, her voice gentle yet firm, 'it's about the teacher *being more aware* of what your individual strengths and weaknesses are, rather than just grouping you all together.'

4.3.2 Spinning: part one

A few weeks had passed, it was mid-September and the girls were getting ready for the next brand-new activity for their Tuesday afternoon lesson. Kate was now a few lessons into the 'taster programme' as part of Building the Foundation phase. Today's agenda: introducing the class to the world of Spin. This ten-lesson programme, co-constructed by Kate and the girls, aimed to broaden their horizons about what was possible in physical education within their school and community. Spin, with its allure of novelty, promised an exhilarating journey for all involved. This included Kate herself, an avid participant at Spin classes at her local gym. In that moment she was completely in the zone.

As the lesson commenced, Kate's voice rang out with enthusiasm, emphasising the importance of pacing oneself and going as *'hard as you can'*. She stressed to the girls that they were to judge their own ability and exertion. Yet, as the wheels of the Spin bikes began to turn, a subtle shift transpired. Kate, positioned at the front of the class, found herself swept up in the momentum, issuing commands with a sense of urgency:

'*Keep pushing hard on the pedals!'*

'It's getting hard now so keep pushing!'

'Girls you should be going at the same pace as me!'

'If you are not going as fast a pace as I am, then turn your red handle to the left!'

'Last wee bit, keep pushing!'

As Kate closed one of the intervals, she directed the girls to find the pulse on their neck and count how many beats they felt. The girls' foreheads were dripping with sweat, cheeks flushed with exertion. Struggling to find their pulse, Kate instructed them how to count and multiply the numbers to estimate their pulse rate. She then said:

Your pulse should be around 140 beats per minute. If you are not there, then you are not working hard enough. So, you need to go a bit harder. 140 beats per minute is the minimum.

In that moment, the objective of the lesson seemed to shift, changing from an individual journey of self-discovery to a group fitness goal. It wasn't just about personal effort anymore; it was about everyone striving to meet that number.

4.3.3 Assumptions and Resistance

The narratives above show how Kate's assumptions about girls and beliefs about the purposes of physical education became more visible as she enacted an activist approach. These assumptions and beliefs mattered when we consider Kate's journey in becoming-Activist.

Firstly, in the 'building the foundation' narrative, girls were invited to express their feelings about physical education in an open forum with their teacher, an exercise that neither Kate nor the girls were used to in their routine practice. This ostensibly simple exercise revealed some of the assumptions that Kate and other physical education teachers held. In other words, Jenny and Maeve exposed that teachers often assumed they weren't working hard enough, but, according to the girls, they were trying as hard as they could. Kate reflected on how hard teachers felt pupils should work during lessons, making reference to Jenny:

> *The girl that spoke about that, Jenny, her, ehm, maybe I don't know if behaviour is the right word but her attitude maybe in the department for the past three years hasn't been great. So, I think, and I'm guilty of it as well. We assume that they're not doing their best because they've always been, you know, the girls who misbehave, or the girls that don't bring their kit. So then when they actually do something, you still have that assumption that they're not working hard enough. And I'm guilty of it as well, but it was interesting for her to point that out.*
>
> (Kate, Informal Discussion, August 2016)

As discussed earlier, and explored further in Chapter 2, for many physical educators, there is an assumption for physical education to have purpose then we must uphold a certain 'gold standard' of physical exertion during lessons. Yet, when we reflect on Jenny's and Maeve's comments from the foundation lesson, and Kate's subsequent comment, we see how these girls challenged this belief and showed that the assumptions teachers make about the value of physical education may not reflect the pupils' needs. For these girls, participating in physical activities at their 'own level' was not always enough for some of their teachers. The task during the foundation lesson, and the discussion that ensued not only uncovered these assumptions, but led to Kate to reflect on and question some of the things that she was guilty of.

As we consider the practice that transpired during the Spin lesson, a high level of exertion was clearly prioritised by Kate. In the lesson, Kate prioritised increasing her pupils' heart rates over learning about how Spin itself could be an activity that they may find enjoyment in. Kate's actions during the spin lesson not only contradicted the objective of the BtF taster lessons, which was to broaden pupils' perspectives on possibilities within physical education, but also worked in contrast to what the pupils had told her. Kate served as the all-knowing provider of 'correct knowledge' and the girls simply received instructions and tried to keep up the pace with their teacher (or, as it seemed, their Spin instructor).

There was a misalignment of Kate's intentions and what transpired in the lesson for two reasons. Firstly, introducing a conventional adult-version of a Spin class would give the girls a taste of what highly intense exercise felt like, but it was not adapted to their levels, nor did it demonstrate how Spin could be accessible to them as teenage girls. Secondly, Kate's continuous commands of '*keep pushing hard'*, '*you are not working hard enough'*, and '*you should be going at the same pace as me'* reinforced exactly what Jenny and Maeve told Kate demotivated them. In other words, whilst her intentions were positive, it was a challenge to translate these intentions into practice. Thus, in Kate's journey of becoming-Activist, she was heavily influenced by her past practices and the ways in which she personally experienced physical activity. There was no way to escape this.

It is important to point out that whilst I was observing the Spin lesson, I did not necessarily notice how Kate's language and actions reinforced this notion of pushing the girls too hard. As mentioned in the foundation lesson narrative, I often saw myself reflected in Kate's actions. It had become ingrained in both of us that pupils should be highly active during physical education lessons and it was our responsibility to maximise their physical activity levels. Measuring heart rates, shouting commands to push harder and the general desire to encourage pupils to 'move more' was commonplace in our years of teaching physical education. Our assumptions were that pupils, too, were motivated by these types of practices.

The girls in Kate's class frequently spoke about their teachers pushing them beyond their comfort zones. During a group interview conducted around six weeks after the Spin lesson, Rachel spoke about how her *teachers were always shouting at them telling them what to do.* Gillian added that *most of her teachers told them to do it (exercise) as high as possible.* In contrast to their feelings about other teachers, both girls agreed that Kate understands their pace and tells them to *do what they feel is best for them.* Safa further explained that she felt

Kate *knows what their best is and they just have to do that.* Additionally, Gillian added that Kate *discussed with them what they wanted to do in PE… and that she took (their responses) on board (which) has made it much better* (FG, St Mary's HS, Nov 2016).

As we consider the comments from Rachel, Gillian and Safa, it's difficult to understand some of Kate's actions in the Spin lesson. As I noted, these comments were made around six weeks after the Spin lesson, indicating that, at least during this time period, the girls perceived that Kate was attentive to their individual needs. Moreover, at the beginning of the Spin lesson, Kate did encourage the girls to *work at their own pace,* demonstrating her responsiveness to Jenny and Maeve's individual needs. However, there were other times later in the school year where Kate hinted at the girls not working hard enough:

> *'I think they all have a bit of enjoyment now when they come to PE and I would say they are active. Would I say they are pushing themselves at any point, probably not…'*
>
> *'Maybe there's other issues going on there you know… they're going to get sweaty, their make-up's going to run, all that kinda thing. But they're here, they're more active than what they were which is a good start… but I would still probably prefer them to be pushing themselves a wee bit further.'*
> *'I mean they are active and they do participate. You know they are great in the class and all the rest of it. But I just sometimes think come on, a bit of ummphhh.'*
>
> (Teacher interview, Holy Trinity Sec, February 2017)

Kate struggled to let go of the dominant discourses that inform traditional forms of physical education, more specifically those about girls' participation (e.g. Kate's unprompted mention of make-up). Even when Kate saw positive moments such as the *girls had a bit more enjoyment;* are *active in PE* and that *they do participate,* her teaching was often influenced by the dominant discourses that construct and constitute physical education. These ideas are deeply ingrained in the practice of 'successful' teachers, like Kate. In other words, despite Kate trying to make personal changes, she was still influenced by powerful discourses of health promotion in and through physical education while she was seeking to build the foundation for an activist approach *with* and *for* her pupils. The purpose of BtF is not necessarily to promote and learn about health, yet Kate found herself unable to detach from

her past experiences into a new way of thinking about and doing physical education. Consequently, her past experiences of physical education and her identity as a physically active woman were residual to her becoming an activist teacher.

Another assumption that emerged was related to the ways in which physical education programmes are structured. As noted earlier, Kate's routine practice, which the girls had previously experienced, consisted of six-week activity blocks of different sports, a multi-activity approach. The girls in her class expressed dissatisfaction with the repetitive nature of this approach, in comparison to the activist approach Kate was using with them:

> *Maeve - Because before like last year I wouldn't like having blocks of PE because it was all boring and I never felt motivated by it… but this year it's like everyone's participated in it and no one's like not involved.*
>
> *Rachel - Yeah like the 6-week blocks like you don't get attention paid on you if you know what I mean……like see our class because we've been doing like different activities, like (Kate's) been like in with us. She has been like motivating you to do it.*
>
> *Safa - When you talk to your friends and stuff, you're like we're all in PE next and it'll be like what are you doing and we'll be like something different like metafit and Zumba... they'll be like we've got hockey or badminton that they have been doing for weeks and not changed it.*
>
> (Group Interview, Holy Trinity Sec, November 2016)

As we consider the comments from Maeve, Safa and Rachel, it becomes evident that the multi-activity approach to physical education is perceived by these girls as boring, repetitive, and demotivating. Moreover, they found that when participating in this way that their teachers pay less attention to them. This demonstrates certain assumptions underpinning traditional physical education, such as that all pupils will benefit from repeating the same activity week after week. More importantly, the girls' reflections show that as they engaged with an activist approach in their class with Kate, they began to realise that there were possibilities beyond the confines of the traditional six-week block. Kate, too, began to see new possibilities in this alternative structuring of physical education. The key thing about structure was:

> *You've really got to just keep an open mind. Structure is not just going to be put in front of you, you really have to just design it yourself and it has to be based on what*

the pupils are telling you and sometimes that is really difficult…. It's not six-week blocks that every school does at the moment, it's something completely different… You really have to be quite inventive with your structure.

(Teacher Interview, Holy Trinity Sec, February 2017)

These new opportunities extended to the types of activities girls were offered in their activist programme. During their ten-lesson taster programme during the BtF phase, the girls participated in activities such as Zumba, Metafit, benchball and football. I asked them if they liked their football lesson, as it wasn't a regular feature of their physical education programme:

Grace – Yeah it was good to try football because girls don't normally do football
Addison – And it was good to at least try something that the boys play all the time
Cara – So if you didn't do some of these things last year…. What was PE like for you then?
Grace – Like lots of lessons in things like badminton and table tennis
Addison– And it would just be the same, like first year it will be the same, and second year the same, like just the same things and never changing it up.
Cara – So repetitive? How do you feel about that?
Addison – I like trying new things and not repeating the same things over and over again.

(Group Interview, Holy Trinity Sec, November 2016)

In a follow-up lesson with her class, Kate acknowledged this issue of 'assuming' she knew what girls wanted:

So that was a good point to make that you'd like more team sports. We always assume as teachers that girls don't like team sports and we also assume that if they want to do a team sport, it would be netball. Okay, that's a really bad assumption but that's what we do.

(Field notes BtF, Kate, November 2016)

As we consider these statements from the pupils and Kate, we see how Kate recognises it is inappropriate to *assume* what pupils are interested in. Based on gender, Kate assumed that these girls would not like team sports. Yet, the girls did show an interest in team sports, but the problem was that it was only boys in their school who had the opportunity to participate

in football during their physical education lessons. Thus, it is crucial to recognise how becoming-Activist is part of an alternative professional discourse that influences how we see and do school physical education. Indeed, consistent with activist research, it's important to acknowledge that micro changes happen first. Teachers require sufficient time to learn how to listen and respond to the girls they teach. Kate's experience of enacting an activist approach shows that while there were many times where things align smoothly, there were also times when her past experiences and assumptions posed challenges along the journey.

4.4 When stuck-ness leads to transformation

I use two short narratives from one lesson within the Thematic unit stage of Kate's activist intervention to relate how getting stuck (Lather, 1998) can lead to transformation of teaching. This lesson took place around four months after the initial Spin class described earlier. The first narrative focused on the first part of the lesson, which also used Spin as a vehicle for learning about the theme, which was learning different ways to stay active for life. Here, I have described how the class was initially set up, emphasising the differences between this and the previous Spin lesson. The second narrative explored the pupils' engagement with the Spin content as part of their thematic unit. Both of these stories offer evidence related to potential alternatives that an activist approach provided Kate and her pupils.

4.4.1 Alternative structures: a thematic unit

It was the last week of February 2017 and Kate was teaching another Spin lesson as part of a thematic unit with her activist class. The overarching theme, 'learning different ways to stay active for life', inspired her to revisit the Spin studio with a fresh perspective. Gone was the traditional role of the authoritative Spin instructor; instead, Kate chose to teach 'from the floor', weaving herself into the fabric of the class.

At the start of the lesson, Kate distributed worksheets to the girls, each page a canvas for their aspirations throughout this unit. The words inscribed at the top of the sheet, 'Based on our discussions this year', served as a poignant reminder of the journey they had embarked upon together. The worksheet detailed some of the personal and collective goals the girls had been working towards such as enhancing fitness to boost body confidence, learning stress management techniques, and developing better sleep habits. Kate directed the girls' attention to two questions she'd like them to answer: 1) What do you want to achieve? 2) How do you currently feel about your health/fitness?

Once Kate had collected the sheets, the girls dispersed eagerly, each seeking out their own Spin bike amidst the neatly arranged rows. With a sense of camaraderie, they gravitated towards bikes adjacent to their friends. As they settled into their saddles, Kate encouraged them to begin with a gentle cycle to warm up, emphasising the importance of setting their own pace and resistance levels. The girls pedalled on, their faces alight with smiles and occasional bursts of song mingling with the rhythm of the music. In this moment, I sensed a shift in the focus to collective warmth, each girl finding her own rhythm as they eased into the routine motion. Kate, too, relinquished control, allowing the girls the freedom to discover their own groove.

But amidst the flurry of motion, a shadow of concern crossed Kate's face as she noticed Chloe's hesitation to join in with the rest of the class. Chloe spoke to her about her concerns about the Spin workout, expressing that she had an injury. With a compassionate touch, Kate offered Chloe an alternative path, guiding her towards a mat and a tailored exercise routine. It was a moment of empathy and inclusion.

4.4.2 Spinning: part two

After the girls took charge of their own warm up, Kate opened the floor for exploration, inviting the girls to discover the possibilities of exercise they could do using the Spin bikes. She presented a variety of spinning activities, each offering a unique challenge and opportunity for growth. Among the options were an interval exercise, demanding bursts of maximum effort followed by moments of rest tailored to individual preferences. Another option involved a dynamic sequence, weaving through changes in resistance while shifting position in the saddle. As the girls threw themselves into the tasks at hand, a sense of collective effort permeated the room. They navigated the challenges with a spirit of companionship, lending a helping hand and sharing encouraging words along the way. Each girl worked at their own pace and according to their individual abilities.

Meanwhile, Chloe continued her personal exercise routine, taking a break from time to time to watch the other girls in their spinning activities. Kate continued to check in on her offering praise for her efforts.

In final stages of Kate's lesson, she divided the class into three groups, each tasked with a different challenge: a 30-second sprint, push-ups on the bike, and conquering a simulated hill climb. With enthusiasm, Kate personally demonstrated each challenge, offering adaptations to each challenge that the girls could tailor to their own preference. The girls embarked on their initial attempts, experimenting with the three challenges and customising them to suit their capabilities. Eventually, each group selected their preferred challenge to tackle within their chosen groups. As the lesson approached its finale, Kate organised a showcase of their work, urging each group to present their chosen challenge to their peers. She cranked up the music, transforming the studio into a pulsating arena of synchronised effort.

With hearts pounding in rhythm to the beat, the groups executed their challenges brilliantly, drawing cheers and applause from their classmates. It was a moment of triumph, a celebration of teamwork and personal achievement that resonated throughout the room.

4.4.3 Attuning not assuming: the possibilities of becoming-Activist

At the beginning of this chapter, I outlined how teachers often assume what pupils need from physical education. I argued that this is often aligned to dominant discourses that construct and constitute physical education-as-health promotion (Kirk, 2020), aligned with a Public Health perspective. In this part of the chapter, I want to provide an example of what happens in physical education when Kate 'attuned' to the pupils rather than assumed what the pupils need. By attuning to the girls' perspectives of their physical world, Kate's assumptions were reassembled with, by, and for girls in physical education. This reflection and re-alignment helped Kate understand that the girls needed to *work at their own level*, and not at her adult-version of exercise. As such, she put their needs to the forefront of her pedagogical decisions.

Take, for example, Chloe, who was the girl who Kate gave her own exercise routine to do as she was injured. Kate's reflection on Chloe months later shows a shift in her understanding of what types of activities girls could do, regardless of Kate's perceptions of her as overweight. Rather than assuming that Chloe's weight meant she could not participate and was a 'problem', Kate had this to say:

> *I mean she really surprised me this whole year really… because again you would think, I don't mean to be rude, but just by her size you would think that she absolutely hates this subject but she's (sic) come in and she's did everything… I think it's (sic) did her the world of good in terms of confidence because for her to sit in the Spin studio, on a mat, on her own which can be quite intimidating, and follow a wee programme that I jotted down on a wee piece of paper for her, you know it's quite good but it's (sic) you know sustain that as you leave school... keep going. It would be interesting to see them in a few years' time to see if it's had an effect.*
>
> (Teacher Interview, Holy Trinity Sec, February 2017)

There are two things to note here. The first is that, from what she said, Kate would have previously made assumptions about Chloe and her willingness and ability to participate and engage in physical education based on her size and gender. Yet, rather than making those assumptions about Chloe, she attuned to what Chloe wanted and provided her with a programme that she was excited to participate in. One of the girls in her class, Safa,

commented on Chloe's participation, *"she made up her own fitness thing, she was doing it when we were cycling and she's getting more like involved and stuff."* (FG, Holy Trinity HS, February). Second, however, this does not mean that Kate has absolved herself of that 'health promotion' mindset. Despite this being a small shift in her view, its effect (and value) is still measured by what Chloe does outside of physical education (participating later in life). Thus, it is important to remember that these shifts are small and spiralling. They are not linear but rather are influenced by our histories with physical education and physical activity.

In addition to shifting her view of Chloe, Kate also changed her approach to teaching Spin. Kate had begun to work in more student-centred ways in which she created an environment where the girls helped each other, could set their own goals, work at their own pace and choose different challenges (i.e. they have crucial insights into what better facilitates their participation). Moreover, this caused a shift in the power dynamic in the class from teacher to pupil. She did not lead 'from the front or set the standard' or say there was a 'right' exertion level to reach, as she had in the former Spin lesson example. Rather, she set up tasks and gave girls different opportunities to work individually or with others. She did not criticise when girls stopped or needed a break, but instead trusted them to join when they were ready, resulting in them putting in more effort. In a group interview, Gillian and Rachel commented on how they try new things, are more adventurous and put more effort in:

> *Cara: Tell me about trying something new that you've not done before.*
> *Rachel: Like you do an activity that you've not done before like metafit.*
> *Cara: So, is there a difference in you trying new things in PE?*
> *Rachel: Well because now I (participate) more with this class and people I know, I am now more likely to put more effort in, like rather than be in a room full of people I don't know.*
> *Gillian: You're like more willing to be adventurous.*
>
> *Cara: Okay that's good. And tell me how you've been adventurous?*
>
> *Gillian: Like, em, I just put more effort into new things that haven't done before…. I think it's because (this year) we started off where we…. discussed like what we wanted to do and I think she's (Kate) also like took that and like she's considered what we wanted to do in PE (…) and we've also discussed how to act around others and how to respect them and that.* (Group Interview, Holy Trinty Sec, February 2017)

As Kate got to know her pupils better and create an atmosphere where they respected one another, she was able to develop lessons that empowered the girls to seek different opportunities (i.e. to imagine new possibilities for themselves in relation to physical activity). In other words, Kate was attuning to, and not assuming, what facilitated girls' motivation, interests and learning in physical education. Indeed, and in line with Van Doren et al.'s (in press) recent work on attuning approaches, Kate nurtured her pupils' individual interests, welcomed their input and expressions, whilst providing engaging and enjoyable activities. Moreover, in her journey in becoming-Activist she acknowledged the pupils' concerns rather than dismissed them.

Kate's shift toward attuning to her pupils' needs was further exemplified in a Body Pump lesson a few weeks later. Yet, what we see here is that the journey of becoming-Activist is not a straightforward process. There were times when health promotion discourses within physical education influenced Kate's journey. This is not necessarily negative, as learning about health is an important aspect of physical education. Indeed, this was Kate's well-meaning intentions. Prior to teaching Body Pump, Kate discovered that her class was interested in learning more 'health facts' and therefore made the decision to include health promotion material into the lesson. The following is an excerpt from the lesson fieldnotes:

> On the whiteboard Kate put up calorie values: a 60-minute Body Pump class can *burn up to 600 calories*; one serving of chips and curry sauce equals 1081 calories; to burn this off you would *need to run for 90-100 minutes*. She asked the class how many of them eat chips and curry sauce at lunchtime and several hands raised. Kate told the girls to *think about the choices* they make at lunch time. She asked them if they saw the thing on Facebook about how long it takes to burn off a Kit-Kat? A few girls nod their heads. Kate answered, it's *54 minutes of running.* Kate explained to the class that they are doing Body Pump today and that the benefit of this is that their bodies will continue to burn calories even when the class is done. When the warm-up and exercise track began, Kate led and demonstrated the exercises, whilst encouraging the girls along the way. She slowed down moves to provide different levels for the girls to access. She provided alternatives for all the exercises and said things like *'if at any time the weight is too heavy, just unclip the weight and change it'*; *'when doing your squats, just go at your own level and if you don't want to go too low, that's fine'*. This continued until Kate realised she was out of time. She finished the lesson by saying

'just think now, all day you'll be burning calories, so think about the choices you're making at lunchtime now'.

(Fieldnotes, Holy Trinity Sec, March 2017)

There are two insights to capture from the 'body-pump' lesson. Firstly, Kate continued to let go of her assumptions about how hard the girls in her class can exert themselves physically. We see this when she continued to provide alternative exercises and allowed her pupils to work at their own level. In other words, the environment that Kate created in the second Spin lesson seemed to become a consistent part of her practice. Secondly, however, the focus of the lesson became more about calories in / calories out (Gard, 2011), rather than the original intention of the thematic unit, *learning different ways to stay active for life*. Although Kate responded to the girls' request of providing them with more 'health facts', her emphasis on the number of calories it takes to burn a Kit-Kat, may have provided some negative connotations to the girls. There are many ways to teach about health beyond the biophysical effects. Yet, the exercises Kate taught in the Body Pump class were framed as a way to 'burn calories', with particular reference to consider the calorie content of the girls' lunchtime food choices. So, whilst Kate's pedagogical choices were becoming-Activist, she still encountered challenges with regards to teaching about the value of health promoting activities during her lessons. Even when Kate was attuning to pupils' needs, her pedagogical practices were still influenced by powerful healthist discourses.

Reflecting on how things began to shift for Kate, it is not possible to pinpoint a single moment, an epiphany. Rather, becoming-Activist is a complex process. As Kate experienced enacting an activist approach, she saw changes in herself along this journey. Kate discussed some of these changes when reflecting on her version of teenage girls:

I've actually been quite surprised about how much they enjoy PE cos my opinion of them at the beginning of the year. I thought.. a third of the class would enjoy PE, the other two-thirds I just assumed wouldn't. But actually, they all tell me they do like PE and it is one of their favourite subjects …that was quite enlightening. You know I think (teenage) girls get this label that they don't like PE and that they're inactive and actually it's been quite refreshing to see that with the right activities and with a wee bit of conversation that actually, you know, they are quite active. It might not be what we are like at a gym but they're active for their own ability and that's been quite refreshing actually. (Kate, Informal Interview, February 2017)

In a further conversation with Kate, months after the activist intervention, she reflected on her experience of using this approach with her girls' classes:

> *I would say open your mind up a wee bit, and not in a cheeky way, but you know everyone comes into teaching PE and does it very traditionally. I would say think outside the box and open up your mind, and don't be afraid to try new things and don't worry about mistakes. They'll happen….. And just think about the pupils. Teachers sometimes don't even consider the pupils and just teach the way they've always taught…. The other thing is the pupil voice, having the conversations with them and making sure you understand what they liked and disliked about the subject. And is there anything you can do to help them get passed that barrier. Actually, most of the time there is something you can do about it. It's just sometimes you don't know what the barrier is. It's trying to change your mindset and be completely open to a different way of teaching.*
>
> (Teacher Interview, Holy Trinity Sec, December 2017)

The activist approach Kate was learning to use opened up the possibility that not all physically active girls look alike, or that they are a version of what Kate was like as a teenage girl. By reflecting on her experience with her class, Kate was able to challenge the notion that 'inactive' girls are this way because of barriers of their own making. Through her becoming-Activist journey, Kate learned that she couldn't assume what these barriers were and she needed to have conversations with her pupils' to gain their insights and perspectives towards physical education. She was able to consider how physical education is taught to girls is often what frames *them* as the problem. By re-thinking how physical education is structured, she was able to attune to girls' needs and re-structure the class to ensure their voices could be heard. Thus, whilst there was no single epiphany moment, the second Spin class helps crystallize what this transformation looks like in practice. Once Kate believed there was not a single 'right' or 'healthy' spinner, this changed how content was organised and taught. Rather, there could be many different types of Activist Spinners!

4.5 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has focused on key moments of Kate's learning journey. These moments were written as narratives to represent the complexities that are involved when one is learning to become an activist teacher. There has been an emphasis throughout the chapter on teachers' assumptions about what is best for their pupils in terms of content, teaching and curriculum. Through personal reflections and discussions with her pupils, Kate challenged some of her assumptions about girls and physical education more broadly. It would be reasonable to say that her use of an activist approach supported Kate in this journey as this was not something that she had previously been challenged with. As she was learning to use an activist approach, we saw how Kate let go of some of her assumptions and became more student-centred in her teaching. Through practicing the different elements of an activist approach, pupil-teacher power relations were disrupted in Kate's class which resulted in her changing positionality with her pupils.

Nevertheless, throughout the chapter, I have also emphasised the consistent presence of health-related exercise practices in Kate's activist approach, including measuring heart rates, prioritising MVPA and a focus on calorie expenditure. Indeed, the significance of participation in physical activity has long been recognised as a positive health-related behaviour (Harris, 2005) with physical education serving as a suitable environment to promote health (Kirk, 2018). Given the main idea of an activist approach, to support girls *learning to value the physically active life*, it is reasonable to expect that these health-related practices may influence what teachers do in their lessons.

Based on the evidence presented in this chapter, it seems that the dominant Public Health discourses surrounding the place and purpose of physical education influenced Kate's enactment of an activist approach. We observed how these discourses interrupted shifts in Kate's practice and hindered her ability to fully attune to her pupils' needs. Attuning to diverse pupils was not a simple and straightforward process for Kate, but one that required sufficient time and reflection. While this chapter showed Kate's apparent shift away from constructing the 'girls as the problem', the wider Public Health discourses that view physical education-as-health-promotion were more difficult to shift. This discourse is powerful and widely accepted. Hence, this seems to be more complex for physical education teachers to challenge as it has been ingrained during their professional socialisation and personal experiences within sport, physical activity and physical education.

Chapter 5: Becoming-Activist: Jess's journey

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I showed that an activist approach provided opportunities for the relationships between Kate and her pupils to shift and affect teaching and learning in different ways. I suggested that this was not a straightforward process. There were both setbacks and breakthrough moments that aided Kate's journey in becoming-Activist. In this chapter, I will tell the story of Jess, another teacher I introduced in Chapter 3, who was also engaging with an activist approach. Jess's story focuses on the peer relationships within her classes, and how her use of an activist approach made some of the social dynamics among pupils more visible. Moreover, I will explore how an activist approach started to reshape some of the relationships among the girls. As I noted in Chapter 2, the literature emphasises the significance of peer relationships in fostering engagement in physical education (see section 2.4.3). An activist pedagogical model, with its attentiveness to student-centeredness and co-construction of the curriculum, prioritises the creation of an emotionally safe environment (see subsection 2.5.3), necessitating positive relationships among pupils (Oliver & Kirk, 2015). Additionally, as teachers transition towards innovative and novel teaching approaches, such as an activist approach, it is important to understand the challenges they encounter in establishing a supportive environment when enacting such approaches. Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 3, an activist approach requires pupils to be open to others' perspectives, collaborate with their peers, and work in harmony with one another in order to better experience physical education.

This chapter explores the complexities of enacting an activist approach with two diverse girls' physical education classes, focussing on class dynamics and peer relationships. I begin with a brief discussion on the context of Jess's classes, noting when Jess and I identified issues with class dynamics. Next, I explore the observed pupil practices that contributed to less than harmonious relationships among the girls. The findings are organised into two main themes: the emergence of voting and a shift in class dynamics. Both themes are presented narratively, with the first exploring insights gained the practice of 'voting' that was commonplace throughout Jess's activist approach. The second theme illustrated the shifts in the relational and affective issues that emerged through Jess's becoming-Activist journey.

5.2 A preamble: The dynamics are still off

As discussed in Chapter 3, for this school year, Jess decided to work with two fourth year all-girls classes (aged 14-15 years) using an activist approach. To distinguish between the two classes, one will be referred to as 4M throughout this chapter. The 4M class had been taught by Jess using an activist approach in the previous school year and thus had some familiarity with the approach. The other class, known here as 4T, was entirely new to this activist approach. Given the activist pedagogical model's emphasis on co-construction of curriculum by teachers and pupils through the necessitation of teamwork, attentive listening, and openness among pupils, it is important to understand challenges teachers endure when attempting to create a class environment that is conducive to learning in this way. Early in Jess's activist programme, we began to sense that the girls were not always working well together. This was recognised in both classes, with Jess asserting that the 'dynamics are still off' with Class 4T, while some of the girls in Class 4M commented that they, at times, felt 'divided' from their peers.

From observations, reflections, and conversations with Jess and the girls, it was fairly clear to me that there were conflictual relationships amongst some of the girls in both of Jess's classes, and this was having a detrimental influence on their experiences of physical education. My field journal notes confirmed that things were not always quite right:

> *During today's group interview with five girls from Class 4M, I asked about their interactions with their classmates. Priya said that they typically stuck to their own 'little groups'. Olivia mentioned that, at times, she didn't want to be in a team with some of the girls in her class. They commented that the more competitive girls tended to receive more attention from their teacher. I got the sense from Mariam that not everyone appreciated that. The girls also spoke about how 'loud people control the class' and this was something I noticed during my lesson observations. In another group interview with girls from Class 4T, Kristina shared some similar concerns about the more assertive girls 'taking charge' and how 'some people don't speak at all'. I was beginning to realise that social circles, group dynamics, and individual preferences significantly influenced these girls' experiences in physical education.*
>
> (Fieldnote, St Mary's HS, November 2016)

Based on these observations, I felt that immediate change might not be feasible, given the complexity of the dynamics in Jess's activist classes. The enactment of an activist approach, emphasising 'everyone working together', may have amplified the distinct behaviours among the girls, a departure from the norms seen in traditional physical education settings.

Jess needed time to understand and adapt to the girls' interests, personalities, and their social dynamics during lessons. Given the complex nature of relationships among the girls, I experienced a degree of hesitation when attempting to precisely establish the unfolding events while Jess was working with an activist approach. In hindsight, during the fieldwork phase of this study, my emphasis was on the enactment of the approach that Jess and I were learning together. I was consumed with the idea of *what* Jess was doing whilst using the approach, rather than understanding what adopting an activist approach to physical education *could* entail, or how the enactment of such an approach *might* manifest in Jess's specific context. There were moments I found myself uncertain about whether she was actually using the approach in her practice at all. I noted in my fieldwork journal following a conversation I had with Kim, the expert in the activist approach:

> *Jess told me about how she did the second lesson of BtF. She seemed unsure whether or not she did the lesson at first. Then, she said, oh wait, yeah, I did that but we just had discussions in the fitness room and covered everything. I relayed this back to Kim who told me how important the foundation lessons are. They allow to you to have particular conversations with the girls that you simply can't have without it. Otherwise, you just end up doing what the girls want to do.*
>
> (Fieldnotes and Debriefing with Kim, September 2016).

As I immersed myself in the fieldwork, engaging in a co-learning experience with Jess, I found it easier to reflect on what she *wasn't* doing, as if I were in pursuit of a utopia where everything she did remained faithful to an activist approach as I, at the time, understood it. Over time, I came to recognise that using an activist approach, teenage girls, and educational environments are far more complex than my initial perceptions. This realisation prompted the need for ongoing reflections and adjustments throughout the becoming-Activist journey.

The findings presented in this chapter are organised into three main themes: pupil practices within physical education, the emergence of 'voting', and a shift in class dynamics. The first theme focused on my observations of the girls in Jess's classes, providing additional context about the diverse pupils she worked with, their interactions and how these came to

express how girls experience physical education. The second theme used a narrative to depict a quintessential moment in Jess's becoming-Activist journey and explored the subsequent influence on class dynamics. The third theme, also presented through the use of narratives, illustrated the evolving relationships among the girls in Jess's classes, showing how some of the pupil practices observed in initial lessons had changed.

5.3 Pupil practices within physical education

In her routine practice, Jess typically took the lead, and seldom inquired about the perspectives and experiences of her pupils in relation to their learning. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Jess's traditional approach consisted of a multi-activity programme that primarily centred on skill acquisition and physical fitness development. Given the time required for a typical warm-up, skill practice and game-like activity, Jess was unable to dedicate sufficient time in her lessons to *really* get to know her pupils. Consequently, Jess did not necessarily know much about the nuances of her pupils' practices within physical education beyond what was obvious to her. For instance, in a typical physical education lesson, Jess would hope to see pupils actively participating, having fun and behaving in an appropriate manner, or as captured by Placek (1983), being 'busy, happy, and good'. Moreover, she could anticipate a focus on high energy and vigorous physical activity, with pupils visibly displaying signs of physical exertion. This traditional approach, as argued by Lawson (1988), is a way of thinking about and 'doing' physical education and is seen as the dominant form disseminated among teachers through professional socialisation.

In the process of becoming-Activist, however, power relations among teachers and pupils change, and the conventional benchmarks of being 'busy, happy, and good' and maintaining high levels of physical activity are not the sole indicators of quality physical education. An activist approach provides an alternative way of 'doing' physical education, with activist teachers, like Jess, required to see and understand pupils' practices in and of physical education differently. The diverse ways the girls in Jess's classes practiced physical education not only shed light on their experiences of an activist approach but also helped us understand the challenges Jess faced when teaching physical education in a different way.

On the surface and at first glance, it appeared as though the ways in which girls engaged in physical education were associated with 'groups' or 'identities' within the class, which appear regularly in the literature in the form, for example, of 'sporty' and 'non-sporty'

girls. For instance, the 'sporty' girls displayed high energy levels and confidence in their physical capabilities, while the 'non-sporty' girls appeared disinterested and lacked motivation. However, upon closer examination, I realised that individual girls could not so easily be attached to specific groups or identities. The nuances between being considered 'sporty' or 'non-sporty' were less evident in more traditional lessons than as they became within an activist approach. In other words, the girls' identities and preferences in physical education were multifaceted, prompting me to dig deeper into this aspect.

The pupils' practices were not always obvious during classroom observations and became more evident as I engaged in extended discussions with Jess and the girls and reflected on the evolving dynamics, extending beyond the fieldwork years. Instead of opting for a simplistic classification of the girls into distinct groups or identities, which was my initial inclination, my emphasis shifted towards capturing the pupil practices that I observed in order to better understand the nature of the relationships among the girls in Jess's classes beyond these, as I came to think of them, superficial classifications of 'sporty' and 'non-sporty'.

As I argued in Chapter 2, not all girls experience physical education in the same way, shaped by social categories, specific environments, and interpersonal relations. Subsequently, the varied pupil practices exhibited during physical education lessons, as I will explore next, are indicative of the relationships among the girls in Jess's classes and, at times, were in conflict.

5.3.1. The prevalence of competitiveness

There were multiple times where 'competition' or 'being competitive' emerged in Jess's physical education lessons. In these lessons, several girls demonstrated an unwavering desire to win. Rebecca was one of these girls. Rebecca commented on her philosophy behind competition when she stated, '*if you weren't playing to win, then you weren't playing to the best of your ability'* (FG, 4M, St Mary's HS, Nov). The pursuit of victory manifested itself in multiple ways; it could involve outpacing slower peers during warm-up exercises or completing the most squats in a fitness activity. At other times, it might entail beating another team in a relay race or amassing the highest number of points in a team challenge. Irrespective of the activity, winning served as the ultimate goal of Rebecca's participation in physical education lessons and other girls like her.

Being competitive was often coupled with another action, exuberant celebration. For example, when playing against another team, many girls cheered loudly when their team won a point; they shouted at their teammates to 'Come on!'; and they celebrated winning a game by jumping in a circle with their arms around one another. There was also a tendency for some girls to lead exuberant celebration when competition featured in their physical education lessons. Deepali, for example, often found herself '*shouting to her teammates where they should go on the court*' when playing in a game against another team. Other 'natural leaders', a term used by the girls who (unselfconsciously) felt they had strong leadership qualities, in these classes assumed the role of 'captain' where they picked teams based on *who was best at sports* (FG, 4M, St Mary's HS, Nov). Girls who thrived on competition were enthusiastic and excited when they had the opportunity to 'beat' one another.

Competitiveness not only led to enthusiastic celebrations but also often revolved around the idea of 'being good' at physical education. Claire, in Class 4M, commented that when teams are selected *'there's always like a good player, like a good mix of competitive people'*. Deepali affirmed that Jess *'tries to split us up so everyone has a good mix'*. In Chapter 3 (see Table 3.2), I introduced Rebecca as someone who excels in team sports such as rugby, and likely fit the 'good player' status within her team. In contrast, Claire never felt she was very '*good at PE'* and Olivia felt like she wasn't very good at '*fitness stuff'* (FG, 4M, St Mary's HS, Nov). Girls in Class 4T also spoke about their ability levels. I reflected on the girls' perceptions of their abilities in my field journal:

> *I observed some tension arising from girls who seemed to conform to a 'sporty' identity and perceive themselves as superior in PE. I particularly felt this from Paula (Class 4T) after I spoke to her and her peers during the interview today. She made a comment like 'I'm not being funny but some of us are just better than others. Like I want to be the one who picks teams and is the captain, because I can pretty much do most things in PE.' I recalled Jess telling me that Paula was very focussed on winning and succeeding.*
>
> (Fieldnotes, St Mary's HS, November)

As argued in Chapter 2, the perceived competence levels of girls has been identified as a significant barrier to their engagement in physical education (Inchley et al., 2011). It is evident that this perception adversely affected girls like Claire and Olivia. Conversely, for

Paula and Rebecca who perceived their abilities as strong, this was a significant factor in driving their participation in physical education. In other words, and as Jess alluded to, there needed to be space for girls like Paula and Rebecca to succeed at the activities they participated in.

As I considered the competitiveness that featured regularly in Jess's lessons and, at times, dominated them, I also noticed that not all girls were motivated by competition. I will qualify this by stating that this was not obvious to me straight away, since my attention was drawn to the enthusiastic and competitive delight I was witnessing during Jess's lessons. As I noted in my field journal, *I'd love to teach a class as enthusiastic as this*. It's no wonder, really, as this was (and likely still is) the type of environment I personally thrived in as both a teacher and a pupil. The environment I knew and had worked in was just like the traditional environment Jess had worked in. As I began to get to know some of the girls better, I realised that by being drawn to the girls who were more like me, I was, perhaps, not seeing others. The girls I often overlooked seemed to be on the periphery in the sense that they were not competitive, loud, and exuberant, and were inclined to go along with things that others initiated. They tended to conform with, rather than participate in enthusiastically or lead, this competitive practice.

Over time, I realised that not all girls agreed with, or felt motivated by, competitiveness in their physical education lessons. For example, Mariam confirmed this observation when she told me that she didn't like competition in her class. She said, *'when we play games against other people, it kind of changes you in a way… like people's personalities change'.* She added that when the environment is competitive, '*people just shout more and get up in your face and stuff'* and because of this she '*wouldn't really care to take part'* (FG, 4M, St Mary's HS, Nov). Mariam helped me to understand that for her and some other classmates, competition does not consistently elicit the finest qualities in people and is not necessarily a motivating factor for all pupils in physical education; indeed, for some it was experienced negatively.

5.3.2. The prioritisation of high levels of physical activity

Another observation that emerged from my analysis of Jess's activist classes was that slightly more than half of the girls thrived on vigorous and high tempo activity. These girls, motivated by such an environment, viewed physical education as a place to sweat, be active,

and, as expressed by Rebecca, '*do proper exercise'* (FG, 4M, St Mary's HS, Nov). These practices were observed in both classes and mentioned by Jess several times. She told me that Class 4M '*wanted to do things that made them sweat, and, in their heads, they thought 'we're not working hard enough if we don't sweat'.* (Teacher Int, St Mary's HS, Nov). Likewise, Jess reiterated the comments from girls in Class 4T. They spoke to her about a lesson where they were learning about communication, stating that they '*didn't like that they weren't active enough. They felt as though there were walking out of the gym hall and did not feel like they had worked out'* (Teacher Int, St Mary's HS, Nov).

There were multiple occasions when 'working with a high intensity' was a prominent feature of Jess's early activist lessons. For example, during a sampler lesson of the Building the Foundation phase, Jess taught both classes a HIIT (high intensity interval training) workout. During these lessons, the girls were required to complete exercises (e.g., squats, mountain climbers, and jumping jacks) for a set duration (normally around 30 seconds) followed by a rest period. This was repeated for six rounds. What I noticed during these lessons was many girls pushed themselves to complete the strenuous workout. Sweat-soaked t-shirts, flushed faces and a sense of exhilaration where common characteristics amongst the girls who were motivated by these high tempo lessons (Fieldnotes, 4M, St. Mary's HS, Sept).

I also noticed that, in contrast, some girls were less motivated and seemed to be uneasy with high intensity activities. Some appeared disinterested, and looked as if they were merely 'going through the motions' of the prescribed exercises. Others exhibited signs of fatigue sooner than their peers, including heavy breathing and physical discomfort. For example, during a class warm-up, around one-quarter of the girls found it challenging to catch their breath while jogging around the gym for five minutes. In the context of a high-intensity interval training (HIIT) session, quite a few girls would lay down on their mats, hands on their faces during the rest intervals, exhibiting an air of defeat that sharply contrasted with the competitiveness I described earlier. A couple of girls resorted to making excuses to avoid participating in activities that they weren't enjoying or did not feel like they were good at. For example, during the HIIT lesson, Olivia asked to step outside to get fresh air as she *felt sick*. Upon her return to the class, she chose to sit at the rear of the room on a bench and did not participate further. (Fieldnotes, 4M, St. Mary's HS, Sept). Later, Olivia told me that '*her class had been doing a lot of fitness and stuff and she didn't always like it because she's really bad at fitness'* (FG, 4M, St Mary's HS, Nov). Looking back on the HIIT lesson, it's understandable why Olivia decided to make an excuse and withdraw from the lesson. Moreover, there were likely many other reasons why other girls were less motivated

by the fitness lessons that often featured in their physical education class. At the time, Jess and I did not fully understand why this was the case as we were so used to 'seeing' and 'doing' physical education in a traditional sense.

5.3.3 There's not always room for everyone to speak

In Jess's activist classes, I also observed varying levels of outspokenness from girls during class discussions. Some girls displayed a high degree of confidence when expressing their views and perspectives on physical education when prompted. Kristina described herself and some of her classmates as '*quite loud people that take charge of things'* (FG, 4T, St Mary's HS, Nov). The more outspoken girls, like Kristina, were quick to volunteer when asked to pick teams or help with setting up equipment. They tended to shout their opinions out during class discussions. For example, during a classroom lesson where Jess asked the girls about '*what an emotionally safe environment in physical education looks like'*, clashes of opinion were notable. Around six of the girls spoke over one another and did not listen to their peers' opinions, which is somewhat ironic given the topic of the discussion. Kiran referred to this behaviour as the girls having an *'outlash'* when '*something doesn't suit another's opinion'* (FG, 4T, St Mary's HS, Nov). These girls were not afraid to disagree; they lacked self-control at times; and they typically dominated conversations with limited consideration of others.

Whilst some girls dominated class discussions, others withdrew from them. Girls who withdrew from conversations were often referred to as the '*quiet ones* or *people who don't speak at all'* (Nisha, FG, Class 4T, St Mary's HS, Nov), characterisations that typically came from their more vocal and self-assured peers. For example, when playing games, Zaida mentioned that '*they would just go with what everyone else thinks'* (FG, 4T, St Mary's HS, Nov). I initially wrote in my field journal that these girls *withdrew* from discussions, but on further reflection, I now think that is not an accurate representation. I recall Sammi, who stayed behind after the lesson to speak with Jess. She wanted to tell Jess her thoughts about the class motto. Sammi did not as much withdraw as be kept out by the louder girls as they dominated the discussion. She held an opinion but didn't feel comfortable sharing it in class, because that would have meant shouting over others, choosing instead to discuss it privately with her teacher after the lesson (Fieldnotes, 4T, St Mary's HS, Sept). Likewise, Olivia commented in a group discussion that '*it was the same kind of people that made their voices*

heard and there was not always room for other people to say anything' (FG, 4M, St Mary's HS, Nov).

5.3.4 Pupil practices and the enactment of an activist approach

One of the challenges Jess faced in fostering an emotionally supportive class environment within her activist classes was how to navigate the diverse pupil practices just described, which became more overt and visible as she worked towards an activist approach. As cooperation and collaboration are essential components of this approach, relationships among pupils, their interactions, friendship circles, and preferences in physical education came to the forefront. Managing the diverse stances the girls held regarding physical education proved to be a challenging task for Jess. We found it difficult to pinpoint the exact dynamic within the girls' relationships in the class, but the practices mentioned earlier shed light on the issues that seemed to influence whether their experiences were more positive or negative in physical education. Indeed, Jess acknowledged that something about the varying behaviours of her pupils meant that something was amiss with her efforts to enact an activist approach, which prompted her to make adjustments, a topic I will come to later in this chapter.

In the meantime, as we consider the challenges teachers experience on the journey of becoming-Activist, we recognise that, unless teachers establish a class environment where pupils can openly and safely articulate their points of view, understanding their pupils genuinely will be an uphill task. Furthermore, some of the pupil practices that emerged in Jess's physical education were, at times, more obvious than others. On the one hand, it was easy for Jess and the girls to articulate that they were motivated by a competitive and active environment. This was not surprising since this type of environment is commonplace in traditional physical education classrooms. On the other hand, the less dominant behaviours such as girls who appeared disinterested and unwilling to engage in discussions did not always receive the necessary attention for deeper exploration. For example, Mariam's assertion about the competitive environment where people's personalities change hinted at disharmony within her class.

Without a genuine understanding of their pupils and the dynamics between them, a teacher's journey towards becoming-Activist may involve experiencing 'stuck place after stuck place' (Ellsworth, 1997). In other words, Jess was 'stuck' in the sense that she couldn't

figure out, first of all, what was 'wrong' with the dynamics in the class. She could only affirm that *the dynamics are still off* (Jess, Text message, September). And once she knew that something was 'wrong', Jess didn't necessarily know *how* to change the practices she was witnessing, which were not immediately obvious to her or me. At the time, we underestimated the influence of the class dynamics during the enactment of an activist approach. In hindsight, as an activist approach brought to light such things as the interactions among the girls, their social circles, and class dynamics, we could have made necessary adjustments sooner. Indeed, our collective sense of being 'stuck' was not always apparent; we simple sensed that something wasn't quite right. Next, to further understand this 'stuck place', I will explore how Jess's frequent use of a particular technique, 'voting', influenced the relationships among the girls in her classes.

5.4 The emergence of 'voting'

I first began to notice that Jess and her classes were 'voting' around four weeks into the start of the new school term, in mid-September. At first, I wasn't quite sure why Jess was using this voting practice to decide on the activities they were doing during their physical education lessons. I noted in my field journal *we didn't use voting when we learned about an activist approach during the pilot study did we?* Jess and myself were both in the early phases of our becoming-Activist journeys, in that we had both used this approach with a class the previous year, but I didn't recall voting as something we did. I recollected our prior discussions during the 'pilot study' about the purpose of the Building the Foundation phase, which aimed to broaden the girls' perspectives about the possibilities within physical education. During that phase, we encouraged sampler lessons involving non-traditional activities. Yes, that is what we did.

As we saw in Chapter 4, Kate, too, implemented a similar approach with her class. Kate had engaged her pupils in discussions about various activities they were interested in trying, supplementing these ideas with some of her own. Collectively, Kate and her class brainstormed and came up with a selection of ten different activities to make up their sampler programme. But Jess's approach seemed different to Kate's, and I wondered why. Reflecting on Jess's activist classes, my attention was captured by a lesson with Class 4M. The following is a short narrative based on my fieldnotes from one particular lesson where voting

was used to choose the activity for that lesson. It is not the only occurrence of the use of voting in Jess's classes, but it represents how this unfolded in practice.

5.4.1 'The pernicious vote'

It was early November, I accompanied Jess on a short walk to the gymnasium, when she shared with me that the class (4M) had been working on their leadership skills through a series of 'mini games', and this particular lesson marked the conclusion of that unit. Jess also told me that, after the upcoming Christmas break, the girls would have the opportunity to design and lead their very own mini sessions for their peers. The atmosphere was charged with anticipation as the class assembled in the gymnasium. Huddled around the whiteboard, the girls wore expressions of curiosity and intrigue as Jess prompted them to decide on today's mini game. Some girls were quick to shout out their activity choice, whilst others hovered in the background watching the suggestions unfold. With each suggestion, including *Four Corners, Dodge Boing Ball, Quick Cricket, and Gauntlet*, the room's atmosphere became increasingly charged. Some faces lit up with eager anticipation, while others bore expressions of disappointment. While the girls engaged in hushed deliberations, Jess offered a gentle yet heartfelt reminder, '*Everyone's opinion matters*.' She stressed the importance of creating an environment where intimidation had no place, emphasising, '*Remember, we don't intimidate the person next to us; everyone's voice is heard through their vote*.'

Jess announced each of the games, her words carrying a sense of excitement that was palpable in the room. The girls, one by one, raised their hands to cast their votes, their actions reflecting a mixture of hope and enthusiasm. Jess meticulously recorded their preferences on the whiteboard, her every mark echoing the anticipation in the air. As the final vote was cast, Jess counted the tally, her gaze unwavering. The decision hung in the balance, and as the final count was revealed, the room swayed between joy and disappointment. *Four Corners* had garnered six votes, but *Dodge Boing Ball* had clinched the lead with seven votes. The announcement of *Dodge Boing Ball* as the chosen game triggered a spectrum of emotions. Some girls cheered with unbridled excitement, while others lowered their heads in apparent disappointment. The room crackled with a unique energy, a blend of reluctance to participate and a burning eagerness to dive into the game. It was a complex tapestry of emotions, where enthusiasm and disappointment wove together, creating a vivid backdrop for the upcoming activity.

Anxiety surged through me as I anticipated the unfolding of this lesson. I was acutely aware that not every girl in the class was fuelled by a competitive spirit, and the notion of being coerced into something didn't sit well with them. The game commenced with two teams, lined up opposite each other, their backs against the gymnasium walls. Priya, unable to participate due to an injury, was entrusted with the role of referee. Jess also asked her to select the initial exercise for the game, and Priya decided on a wall sit. Tension mounted as the two teams, each comprised of seven girls, assumed their wall sit positions, their eyes fixed on Priya, who stood ready to give the signal. Everyone held their breath in those fleeting moments before Priya's command, "GO", shattered the silence. In an instant, a few girls from each team bolted towards the centre of the court, scrambling to seize as many dodgeballs as they could. Meanwhile, a couple girls remained firmly planted against the wall, while others swiftly sought refuge in the corners of the hall, desperately evading being the first ones 'hit'. It was a display of contrasting engagement; the rush of competition, the apprehension of being tagged out, and the strategic manoeuvres to stay in the game.

5.4.2. The unintended consequences of the voting practice

As I argued in Chapter 2 (see section 2.4.3), girls experience, confidence, and enjoyment of physical education is influenced by their social environment and peer relations, which can be comprised when the dynamics in a class are less than ideal. Given the class dynamics discussed in section 5.2, there are a few things worth unpacking in relation to the 'pernicious vote' narrative and the pupils' practices described earlier in the chapter. Voting was not something I had encountered before in activist work, and although it occurred frequently with Jess and her classes, it was somewhat of a surprise, and therefore worthwhile trying to make sense of. Firstly, the act of voting seemed to be a deliberate step taken by Jess, believing it to be a student-centred practice. I recalled a lesson near the end of September when Jess spoke to her class about how they would *make sure everyone's voices were heard*. Jess and the class agreed that sometimes they could use voting on activity choices to do this, and if there was a 'majority vote', then anyone in the minority would also have a chance to choose in other lessons (Fieldnotes, Class 4T, September). In the pernicious vote narrative, we see Jess provide the girls with choices for activities they had suggested (e.g. Gauntlet,

Four Corners etc.), assuring them that their voices would hold equal weight in the voting process. Nevertheless, the manner in which voting unfolded during this particular lesson occurred within a highly visible public context. Given some of the common characteristics of Jess's classes, with competitiveness, exuberance and so on, recounted earlier in this chapter, this public practice was inevitably a source of discomfort for some girls. Girls in Class 4T commented on their feelings towards the voting process:

> *Hayat – I don't like it when it's always the majority rules, cos I think there's always like groups of people that always choose the same thing, and then we might have different ideas to them and you're never getting your voice.*
>
> *Nisha – And then you get the popular people who everyone follows anyway, and then it's just always them choosing.*
>
> (FG, 4T, St Mary's HS, Nov 2016)

The comments made by Hayat and Nisha brought to light a disparity between Jess's intentions for what she assumed was a democratic process, voting, and the actual outcomes. While Jess aimed for a democratic approach, wherein everyone had an opportunity to voice their opinions, the girls revealed that the more 'popular' pupils often had the influence to sway the vote in their favour. Popular was a term Nisha used, when referring to '*people who everyone follows anyway'*. In other words, the girls who aligned to behaviours such as outspoken, competitive and exuberant tended to dominate the voting system employed in Jess's classes. Hence, the inherent public nature of voting stands in direct contradiction to the purpose of the Building the Foundation phase within the activist model. Moreover, voting has the potential to magnify the voices of those who are consistently heard, as Olivia's earlier remarks alluded to — '*it was the same kind of people that made their voices heard'* (FG, St Mary's HS, Class 4M, Nov). If we remember Olivia from earlier, she was the girl who withdrew herself from the HIIT lesson. Olivia was also a girl who Jess referred to as someone who *'does try but she's getting bigger'* (Jess, Informal discussion, St Mary's HS, Sept). This may suggest that girls like Olivia, who were less motivated by high intensity physical activity, were not always having their voices heard, a point Olivia herself made. This observation points to the critical divergence from Jess's intended actions of responding to her pupils' voices.

Another unintended consequence related to this voting practice is the notion of 'majority rules', mentioned earlier by Hayat. Although Hayat referred to this as majority rules, perhaps a better way to think about this is the dominant voices within this context (i.e., voting on activities) where certain girls are more vocal and feel boldened to speak out when they can do this in a physical education setting. It's worth acknowledging that choosing their activities was not something that was commonplace in the girls' previous physical education classes. Indeed, as I noted in my field journal, being offered a choice of activities was something the girls mentioned as being a positive aspect of physical education (Fieldnotes, St Mary's HS, Nov). It did, however, take time for the girls to understand the level of choice that was available to them. For instance, Olivia mentioned that *'(her class) didn't really get that it was all of our choice so no one wanted to like say anything about it at first'* (FG, 4M, St Mary's HS, Nov). Yet, at the same time, not all girls were convinced that every girl in their class had the opportunity to voice their opinions.

As evidenced in the pernicious vote scenario, suggestions were made by some of the more outspoken girls. The suggestions were made on the spot, with no time built in for girls to think about what they wanted to do, or time for the more reserved girls to have their say. In the end, four activities were in the running and the activity with the majority of votes was chosen. In this instance, *Dodge Boing Ball* narrowly won by just one vote. This shows there was no consensus between girls in the class. In this case, even some of the more competitive girls, like Rebecca and Deepali, disagreed with the activity they wanted to do. *Dodge Boing Ball* was a highly competitive game that set two teams up against each other. A goal of the game was to get players on the opposing team 'out'. When teams were successful at this game, they celebrated in an exuberant manner, which allowed for the competitive behaviours to prevail thus, reinforcing the dominant discourses in physical education; that is, that competitive activities in physical education are reserved for boys, or in this case, for girls who were outspoken and possessed higher physical capabilities (Larsson et al., 2009; Stride, 2014).

The process of favouring majority activities can potentially isolate those who voted for a different activity. For example, the class's suggestion of the *Gauntlet* game received only two votes, yet those two pupils were highly enthusiastic about this activity for that particular lesson. Interestingly, the girls who voted for the Gauntlet game were Mariam and Claire, two girls who had said they were not motivated by competition in their physical education class. They were less interested in playing the dodge ball game (likely because of the competitive behaviours it drew out of the class) and consequently, remained less engaged,

seeking refuge in the gymnasium's corners. Mariam, Claire, and others whose vote counted in the tally but they did not get what they wanted, became the 'unintentional losers', regardless of their team's performance in the game. Conversely, the seven girls who voted for the dodge ball lesson were actively involved. They eagerly gathered dodge balls at the centre, cheered, and leaped for joy with each successful hit. They experienced either jubilation (if their team won) or disappointment (if their team lost). Irrespective of the game's outcome, these girls emerged as 'unintended victors' in this lesson.

The unintended consequences of using voting to foster a student-centred approach posed a dilemma for Jess. On the one hand, Jess and I acknowledged the puzzling behaviours and less-than-ideal relationships among the girls, as discussed earlier. We recognised this around six weeks into the school term, in late September. We knew something wasn't quite right and felt a return to the class environment lessons would be a good idea (Fieldnotes, St Mary's HS, September). On the other hand, voting was Jess's intentional attempt at being student-centred. However, the lesson described in the narrative had an almost 'reverse' effect, potentially leading to further strained relationships within the class. Interestingly, this lesson took place in early November with Class 4M which, at the time, Jess felt everything seemed okay. Yet, voting and the use of 'majority and minority' activities were commonplace in both classes. Considering that Jess sensed the relationships in Class 4T *were off*, it is difficult to understand why she thought voting would be a good idea. In Chapter 4, I illustrated how Kate employed a more student-centred approach by negotiating choices with her class, leading to a ten-lesson taster programme that Kate co-constructed *with* her pupils. Jess, however, diverted from the co-construction of the ten-lesson taster programme and used a series of voting practices to build her taster lessons during the BtF phase.

Nonetheless, the pernicious vote was not a completely negative incident. For Jess, it marked one of the steps in her learning to become an activist teacher. Indeed, Jess began to question the limitations of the voting practice that transpired in her lessons. Over time, she came to recognise these unintended consequences through self-reflection, discussions with me, and interactions with her pupils. Jess and I had a discussion after one of the focus group sessions, early in November around a week after the voting lesson depicted in the narrative. I shared some of the key points the girls had brought up, including the issue of voting. Jess concurred, and said, *'that's a big gripe for them, the whole majority thing…. So I've tried to change some of that'*. (Jess debrief, St Mary's HS, Nov). Following our discussion, Jess implemented a modification to voting by alternating between majority and minority activities. Later, Kristina explained to me what that looked like:

We now do one week of the majority activity, and then the next time, we'd pick the minority so that everyone could have a say, instead of always going for the majority. And, it's only happened a few times, but the teacher picked some new things for us to try.

(FG, 4T, St Mary's HS, Feb 2017)

Girls in 4M also suggested a different approach to choosing activities:

Claire – yeh but she did the wee basket where everyone put their ideas in, so even the shy people got to put things in that they thought.
Cara – And do you think those shy people are getting their choices?
Claire – I think they are.
Olivia - We've got a bucket where we all put suggestions in so we pick things out of that so it's definitely things everybody wants to do.

(FG, 4M, St Mary's HS, Feb 2017)

While this notion of 'putting ideas in a bucket' may not entirely align to fully understanding what drives girls' interests and motivations to participate in physical education (i.e. being student-centred), it marked a departure from the voting method that previously limited Jess's ability to be student-centred, in terms of offering choice. The significance of these reflections and modifications for Jess should not go unnoticed. If, as physical educators on a journey to becoming-Activist, we aim to genuinely involve our pupils in our pedagogical decisions, a willingness and receptiveness to change is essential. On the one hand, we may have to get things 'wrong' before we realise that things are not quite as they should be. On the other hand, when these moments of realisation occur, we can begin to *really listen* to our pupils so that we can *respond* accordingly.

5.5 A shift in class dynamics

In light of our conversations and feedback from the girls, Jess found a way to negotiate choice with her classes, in a way she felt was fair. In this case, Jess decided to switch voting from a public domain (i.e. in front of the class using the whiteboard to tally votes) to a more private domain (i.e. activities from everyone were put into a bucket). This very slight shift to becoming more student-centred could potentially disrupt some of the dominant voices present within her classes. Consequently, Jess experienced some moments in establishing an inclusive class culture where EVERY pupil feels valued. In the next section, I will set out two further narratives that depict how the class culture began to shift.

The evidence presented in these narratives is based on field notes, group interviews, and lesson observations that occurred during the Thematic Unit stage of an activist approach. The unit began after the Christmas holidays in mid-January and continued until the beginning of April, around two to four months after the 'pernicious vote' lesson.

5.5.1 Building pupils' confidence

In February, approximately five months into enacting an activist approach with her classes, Jess had reached the Thematic Unit stage. This phase involves organising learning around a central theme. Jess shared with me that the co-constructed theme for 4M was about the girls taking on *leadership roles to build their confidence or their leadership capacity*. As for 4T, their thematic focus was to *develop their communication to help advance their leadership skills and/or confidence* (Jess debrief, St Mary's HS, Jan). In light of the common theme of leadership, I became curious about how Jess structured her class. Deepali informed me in a focus group in February that in her class (4M), their *theme is leadership, so like every day in PE, one person would lead an activity* (FG, 4M, St Mary's HS, Feb). Jenn, from class 4M, also mentioned that her classmate, Claire, had recently led the class through a warm-up exercise. Initially I was surprised Claire felt confident leading this activity, given her reluctance to fully participate in PE in her previous school. Claire seemed to be one of the more reserved pupils in the class, who lacked enthusiasm for the subject.

I pondered the depths of Claire's emotions regarding this experience, and she candidly revealed that it was a mix of exhilaration and trepidation. She said, '*it was fun but it was kind of scary'.* The reassuring part was that her peers unanimously urged her on, surrounding her with support. Claire emphasised that every member of the class contributed to an '*encouraging and supportive'* atmosphere, effectively diluting the initial sense of daunting challenge (FG, 4M, St. Mary's HS, Feb). Claire's account of her leadership experience led me to recall a conversation I had with her and her peers the previous November. During our discussion, they mentioned that Jess and the pupils decided that, after Christmas, they would have opportunities to take on leadership roles during their physical education lessons. At that time, I asked them how they felt about the opportunity to lead the class. Claire and Priya expressed apprehension, with Claire sharing that she was uncertain about leading because she didn't consider herself skilled in sports and feared she might lead others poorly (FG, 4M, St. Mary's HS, Nov). This reflection led me to contemplate the quieter, more introverted girls in Jess's classes, like Claire, who initially harboured self-doubts about their leadership abilities. However, despite these doubts about being leaders, it appeared Claire had a positive experience in the January lesson. Claire's transformation became evident when she confidently led her entire class in a warm-up, lifted by the unwavering support and encouragement of her peers.

5.5.2 Becoming a 'family'

As I spent more time with Jess's classes, I began to notice that a sense of community was developing among the girls and, in the process of analysing my data, I reflected on what that looked like. In a February group interview, Deepali shared some insights about their teacher, Jess, who she said was always sensitive to their individual comfort levels. She told me Jess '*would never force them to lead and would make sure everyone is comfortable'.* Jenn chimed in with a thoughtful observation, highlighting the diversity within their class: '*there's definitely people in our class that are more confident and there's shy people too, so those people had the option to lead in pairs, and even just lead a smaller group if they wanted'*. As a result, those less self-assured pupils had the option to share leadership duties, an inclusive approach that aimed to cater to everyone's needs. Priya touched upon the quieter individuals who often went unnoticed. She emphasised that '*you should think about other people rather than just yourself'* (FG, 4M, St. Mary's HS, Feb). It seemed as though the relationships among pupils in the class had shifted from one where the girls did not always agree to one that fostered a sense of community and mutual support.

The shift in relationships among girls in Jess's classes wasn't limited to just Class 4M; it extended to Class 4T as well. Indeed, as mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, it was in Class 4T that both Jess and I detected early signs that the class relationships were not always harmonious. I noted in my field journal a conversation with Jess where she told me about the difficulties she faced in fostering connections and cohesion among the girls in 4T:

> *What I found from Building the Foundations was that they didn't feel that they could work together and progress together being away from their immediate peer group and what I did was push them with these challenges by putting them into groups with people that they don't normally work with. And…Paula's initial response to having to work with other girls in the… class was that she wasn't going to be able to get on with them and that she couldn't possibly work with them.*
>
> (Jess Interview, St Mary's HS, Nov 2016)

As I considered Jess's efforts to unite the girls, I recognised a sense of community developing. The girls began to exhibit greater warmth towards one another. Arguments and unnecessary disagreements seemed less prominent as they no longer felt the need to compete against each other to have their own preferences selected.

Commenting on this emerging sense of community, Alana's words struck a chord with me, resonating deeply. Thought of by Jess and others in the class as a shy and more reserved pupil, Alana opened up; - '*I think we all have changed a bit. Like don't judge me but like we are a family, like I genuinely feel like we're a family'.* There was an unmistakable authenticity in her voice, conveying a genuine sense of kinship that had evolved among the girls. Emma reinforced Alana's sentiment with enthusiasm. She described how, during physical education lessons, everyone now gathered and sat together; - '*like in PE we're just together now and it's not like a group here and a group over there'*.

It was a stark departure from the previous division, where groups of girls would segregate themselves. The unity they now shared was palpable. Paula, who Jess previously thought '*could not possibly work with others*', expressed a heightened connection with her classmates. She said, '*rather than just be in the class WITH them, you've got more of a connection… like (we) trust each other… and talk to people in corridors, you ask them questions and stuff'.* Nisha, too, contributed to the narrative, sharing her personal growth. She disclosed that she had begun interacting more with her classmates and had forged '*new friendships'* along the way (FG, 4T, St. Mary's HS, Feb).

5.5.3 An emerging community of learners and an activist approach

Fostering communal relationships among pupils is a key endeavour in an activist approach. By adopting this approach, teachers can act as facilitators seeking to engage their pupils *where they are* in order to work collectively with pupils toward *what might be* (Oliver & Kirk, 2015). In other words, by paying attention to the diverse behaviours (e.g. competitive, reserved, assertive, highly active etc.) among girls in her classes *(starting from where they are),* a shift to more positive interpersonal relationships may occur *(moving*

towards what might be). In the narratives above, I emphasised how Jess not only identified a lack of consensus and community among the girls in her activist classes but also proactively sought strategies to forge deeper and more meaningful connections, thereby enriching their physical education learning experiences. As a result of her efforts to transform the social dynamics, the girls became more engaged, exhibited increased consideration for one another, and provided mutual support to their peers.

There are a few things worth dwelling on in with regards to how the class dynamics evolved as Jess enacted an activist approach. Firstly, as mentioned in the narrative, the thematic unit in both of Jess's classes was centred around leadership. These themes emerged from efforts undertaken during the Building the Foundation phase, with the aim of fostering girls' self-assurance in leadership and encouraging them to proactively take ownership of leading their own physical activities. In other words, this expanded the scope of learning beyond the purely physical aspects of physical education and into the realm of affective learning. In the course of enacting the leadership units, a disparity in the levels of confidence among the girls became evident. While some girls displayed confidence right from the beginning, others were more hesitant about taking on leadership roles. Take, for instance, Rebecca, whom we previously discussed in this chapter as an individual who excelled in competitive and high-intensity physical education activities. Rebecca readily volunteered to take the lead in her class, positioning herself as one of the initial leaders. However, her involvement in the activist programme brought about a realisation for Rebecca; that is, not all girls shared her enthusiasm for high-energy physical activities, nor did they possess the same level of confidence in their leadership abilities. In my field journal, I made note of a brief conversation I had with Rebecca:

> *I've noticed that Rebecca has become more considerate of others, particularly Olivia, and no longer dominates class discussions. She still has her competitive spirit and views physical education as a 'place to sweat and be active'. I don't think that will ever change for Rebecca – it's what motivates her. Yet, it appears she has come to recognise the unique strengths that other girls in her class possess. She mentioned how Olivia loved gymnastics (Jess told me this too), and that she (Rebecca) couldn't even do a roly poly (her words). Surprisingly, she expressed a willingness to learn from Olivia.*
>
> (Fieldnotes, St Mary's HS, February 2017)

Based on these observations, we can surmise that while Rebecca remains committed to being highly active and competitive in physical education, she now understands that these characteristics do not represent the sole objectives of physical education or of her classmates.

Mariam, on the other hand, whom we previously mentioned as someone less enthusiastic about the competitive aspects of the class, showed less inclination to lead her entire class. Knowing that there were girls like Mariam who were less confident, Jess considered how to approach the leadership activities with her class. She described this to me in November prior to undertaking the unit:

> *Some of the girls are unsure whether or not they want to… (lead), and I said that's absolutely fine, if you want to lead small groups or if you don't want to lead at the moment we'll wait and see. So next week, Rebecca is going to start off because I thought she's quite confident and I think she'll show them that it's easy to do.*
>
> (Jess, Teacher Interview, St Mary's HS, Nov 2016)

For her leadership task, Mariam decided to lead with one of her friends in the class. They led a short warm-up for five minutes and then Jess took over leading the game that Mariam and her friend had chosen to play (Fieldnotes, Class 4M, St Mary's HS, March). During her teaching within the thematic unit, Jess made a conscious effort to recognise and validate these differences in confidence. She deliberately provided pupils with options of how they could develop their leadership skills, based on their individual capacities. She did not coerce them, nor overly celebrate those who led with confidence. Instead, she nurtured a culture of support and encouragement, where girls like Mariam and Rebecca could learn in *their own way* and on *their* terms.

I was curious about Mariam's participation during the thematic unit as I remembered back in November Jess told me that she '*had no interest and that PE seemed like a chore for her…even when it was fun, in Mariam's head, it's a chore'* (Jess, Teacher Interview, St Mary's HS, Nov). I spoke to Mariam about her participation during a February group interview:

> *Mariam – I feel like I participate in class more cos like before I wouldn't like do much in class, like I'd be there and I would do it but I wouldn't really care to do it.*
> *Cara – So why do you think you participate more?*

Mariam – I dunno, it's more fun and your friends are there so it's kinda like it motivates you. Like if they're having fun, it's kinda like I want to do it as well.

(Mariam, FG, 4M, St Mary's HS, Feb 2017)

The examples of shifts in behaviours of Rebecca and Mariam show how Jess became better at *starting from where the girls were* rather that where she thought they ought to be. In other words, in her becoming-Activist journey, Jess learned how to respond to girls who lacked confidence or were less inclined towards high activity and competition in physical education. This suggests that through her enactment of an activist approach, Jess became more attuned to these types of pupil practices as they were more visible to her, thus, enabling her to respond more effectively. With regards to changes in the pupils, Rebecca became less dominant and more understanding of other girls in the class. Much like Claire's experience depicted in the narrative, Mariam also gained confidence and found that her friends motivated her to participate. By paying attention to and affirming the differences of all girls in her classes, Jess nurtured a culture where the girls understood their difference yet found a way to work with each other.

Another consequence of Jess's deliberate actions to foster a supportive and emotionally safe space was the creation of what Alana referred to as a 'family'. To help explain this, I return to the first part of this chapter where I described some of the pupil practices I observed in Jess's classes. Olivia from Class 4M spoke to me about the notion of 'winning':

*We're more likely to work **together** now… whereas before it was like I am going to win, it wasn't about the team, so now you pay attention to what other people are doing and see how you can help them… cos you want to try and win with everyone… **together**.*

(Oliva, 4M, St Mary's HS, Feb 2017)

Other girls in Class 4T commented about how they felt the nature of competitiveness had changed in their class:

*Paula: It's just **less aggressive**. Like people just **get along** and don't shout at each other when we are playing a game*

*Nisha: It's much friendlier and everyone works with each other, well we're still competitive, but it's a **friendly** competitive.*

(Class 4T, FG, St Mary's HS, Feb 2017)

Echoing Paula's points about the class being less aggressive, Kristina spoke about how they used '*to shout bad things to the other team, but now they are more focused on **positive** things'* (FG, St Mary's HS, Feb). Referring to the more outspoken girls, Hayat described a shift in their behaviour:

> *There's also the attitude of **working with others**. Like some people used to maybe get really angry, and very loud about certain things, like if they felt their opinion maybe wasn't being heard, and it was clashing with someone else. But now they've got **calmer**, and they actually like **cooperate**.*
>
> (FG, Class 4T, St Mary's HS, Feb 2017)

The multiple words and phrases the girls use to describe their class environment ('together', 'less aggressive', 'get along', 'friendly', 'positive', 'working with others', 'calmer', 'cooperate') accentuates the transformation in the interpersonal connections among the girls. While these attributes may not characterise every 'family', they embody the aspirations of the family that Alana genuinely considers herself a part of. This is significant because the discourse of physical education changed from competition to collaboration based on paying attention to and affirming the differences in physical education spaces.

Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that the sense of community or 'family' did not simply evolve organically. It took considerable time for both Jess and me to grasp the influence of less-than-ideal relationships among the girls on the quality of their physical education experiences. It required us to think beyond the typical behaviours we expect to see in physical education classrooms, but this took time. In the initial two months of the school term, we engaged in numerous discussions, often perplexed and uncertain about our next steps; we were in 'stuck place after stuck place'. Eventually, we came to the realisation that Jess hadn't invested enough time understanding the girls' interests and motivations in physical education during the Building the Foundation phase and needed to revisit it. During a brief conversation following a lesson observation in early September, around three weeks after Jess started BtF with her classes, I suggested to her that it might be beneficial to revisit some of these foundational activities again. Jess acknowledged that the needs and preferences of some of the girls had changed since she last taught them (Jess, Fieldnotes, St. Mary's HS, September).

There was an underlying assumption shared by both Jess and, to some extent, me, that the foundational activities needed to be taught only once, at the beginning of the enactment of

an activist approach. Given that Class 4M had previously used this approach in the preceding year, Jess assumed she *could start where they left off* (Fieldnotes, Class 4M, August). She believed she had a solid understanding of this group and had already accomplished enough to begin co-creating their physical education curriculum. In the initial stages of the activist work, the girls in Class 4M had discussions about the 'thigh gap' and the notion of ideal body shapes. This caught Jess off guard, as she realised she did not fully understand the perspectives of these girls (Fieldnotes, Class 4M, August). This illustrates that, considering the complex developmental challenges faced by teenage girls and the myriad of societal pressures they confront, it would be misleading to assert that we *really know* all of our pupils. Despite acknowledging that 'body image' was a significant concern for these girls in August, Jess found herself unsure of how to address the issue. Her response was a brief in-class conversation, where she mentioned, '*we all want something different, and we all have something to work on, but that's in your head, don't buy into the media*' (Lesson Obs., St Mary's HS, Class 4M, August).

On other hand, with Class 4T, who were new to this approach, there was an assumption that once the foundational lessons were taught, that would suffice. Yet, we discovered that certain parts of those lessons required revisiting, and some lessons were merely given cursory attention. For example, as noted in Chapter 3 and earlier in this chapter, Jess held a discussion about the class environment in the fitness suite but did not fully complete the entire lesson. Indeed, through reflecting on Jess's activist journey we can surmise that the time required to explore deeper into girls' perspectives of their bodies, physical education and physical activity is boundless. In other words, we learned that if things aren't progressing as desired, it is imperative to return and revisit the foundational lessons as often as necessary.

5.6 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has explored various facets of Jess's journey in becoming-Activist. There was particular emphasis on the observable and less obvious pupil practices in Jess's classes and how these influenced her capacity to enact an activist approach early in the cycle. Throughout the chapter, I've presented key learning moments in narrative form, shedding light on some of the strategies Jess employed with her activist classes. One of these moments revolved around Jess's meaningful intention to prioritise student-centeredness, as exemplified

by the use of ‘voting’ to select activities. Notably, I highlighted the unintended consequences stemming from her well-meaning intentions, including the discomfort experienced by certain girls due to the public nature of the voting process and the inadvertent emergence of ‘winners’ and ‘losers’. This predicament posed a substantial challenge for Jess. However, with reflection, candid discussions, and a decision to revisit some of the foundational activities, we observed Jess grappling with and ultimately navigating this challenge. The end result was the cultivation of more harmonious relationships among the girls in Jess’s classes, effectively disrupting some of the entrenched barriers that had previously separated them.

Nonetheless, we should not underestimate the complexities inherent in Jess’s journey toward becoming-Activist. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, she encountered what Patti Lather (1998) terms a ‘praxis of stuck places’. It could be argued that enacting an activist approach supported Jess in collaborating with her pupils to negotiate the “circles of stuck places and resistances” she experienced (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 71). As Jess and I positioned ourselves within these tensions, this level of uncertainty could potentially lead to a more equitable environment for teaching physical education. However, it is important to recognise that navigating these stuck places is a complex and multifaceted process. We come to appreciate the residues of pupil engagement within traditional practice that become more apparent and intrude on activist lessons. Nevertheless, an activist approach can provide different ways of doing, seeing and understanding pupils’ experiences of physical education.

Without careful teacher preparation and attention to class dynamics, the interactions amongst pupils may not improve but may also appear to worsen when enacting an activist approach, as this approach makes these interactions more visible. The findings detailed in this chapter help us understand the importance of Building the Foundation *with* and *among* girls. Not only were the foundational lessons important, but they continually needed to be revisited. Furthermore, we understand that there is no endpoint in using transformative teaching approaches, such as an activist approach. In other words, a teacher does not simply become-Activist and stop. It is not a destination (outcome), it is a journey (process). We continually have to go back, re-build and refresh, adapt to the context and to the pupils in our classes.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' journeys in becoming-Activist as they learn to use and enact an activist approach in their own physical education setting. The findings presented in Chapters 4 and 5 show the nature of these journeys highlighting some of the pivotal moments for each teacher as they embraced an activist approach. From these findings emerge new insights that warrant further discussion. These are: 1) how an activist approach changed relationships between teachers and pupils, and among pupils; 2) how an activist approach increased the visibility of teachers' and pupils' practices; 3) a shift toward a more democratic form of participation for girls; and 4) some benefits and challenges of school-based teacher professional learning. These insights contribute to a better understanding of the nature of teachers' journeys in becoming-Activist and the experiences of pupils and teachers as they engage with an activist approach to school physical education in Scotland. We also gain some insights into teachers' experiences within school-based professional learning.

It is worth noting that much of our understanding of enacting an activist approach stems from researchers studying their own teaching practices. One exception to this is Luguetti's research (see Luguetti et al. 2015, 2017 a/b) where she worked with coaches in a community-based soccer programme using an activist approach. The main purpose of Luguetti's research focused on co-creating a prototype activist pedagogical model with boys from socially vulnerable backgrounds. Indeed, Luguetti et al. (2017a/b) emphasised that the next phase of the research would involve working with coaches to support them learning how to implement the critical elements of the model, with a greater focus on learning to become activist. Subsequently, Luguetti used an activist approach in PETE settings to support others in enacting this in practice (see Luguetti et al, 2019; Luguetti & Oliver, 2020,2021; Luguetti & McLachlan, 2021).

The cited work that addresses girls' physical education experiences with an activist approach in Chapter 2, such as Oliver's early research (Oliver & Lalik, 2004b; Oliver et al. 2009), Fisette (2014) and Enright's (Enright and O'Sullivan, 2010) activist research, along with Walseth et al.'s (2018) co-educational activist approach, has largely been driven by researchers enacting an activist approach themselves. In contrast to this body of research, my study aimed to empower teachers in leading their own journeys toward becoming-Activist.

While the teachers in this study were initially introduced to this approach by Kim, it was their interpretation and enactment within their own school contexts that provide us with a somewhat different perspective of the nature of their becoming-Activist journeys. As discussed in Chapter 3, I viewed myself as learning alongside the teachers, having recently transitioned from a school teaching role to a university teaching role. This meant I brought a novice perspective, supported by guidance from an expert (Kim), to understand how the teachers made sense of this approach in their own contexts.

In this chapter, I will outline four new insights emerging from the findings presented in Chapters 4 and 5. I start by revisiting the research questions, offering clear answers to each. Then, I explore the concept of 'becoming-Activist' as it emerged through data analysis, which provides a basis for discussing the new insights. The first new insight focuses on changing relationships between teachers and their pupils and among peers in the activist classes, emphasising the nature of teachers' journeys as they attuned to girls' interests, motivation and individual differences. I will then discuss how enacting an activist approach enabled teachers to see pupil practices that were less visible in traditional lessons. Following this, I will discuss how the enactment of an activist approach led to more democratic forms of participation than pupils had experienced previously, while also highlighting challenges encountered in co-creating curricula. Next, I will outline teachers' experiences of school-based professional learning, considering the influence of traditional contexts and teachers' professional identities on learning to enact an activist approach in school settings. Finally, I will reflect on lessons learned regarding supporting teachers through school-based professional learning within the context of becoming-Activist. Throughout each section, I will support my findings by drawing on appropriate literature, showing where my study makes a contribution to the field.

6.2 Revisiting the Research Questions

The next section provides explicit answers to the three research questions central to this study, with further insights discussed in sections 6.4, 6.5, 6.6 and 6.7. Unlike previous activist research, this study involved in-service teachers, making these findings especially relevant to them.

6.2.1 Research Question 1

What is the nature of the teachers' journeys in becoming-Activist as they learn to use an activist approach in their girls-only physical education classes?

The findings demonstrate that the teachers' journeys in becoming-Activist were both non-linear and complex, marked by pivotal moments as they were learning to enact an activist approach for girls in physical education. The narratives in Chapters 4 and 5 highlight the 'messiness' of these journeys, demonstrating that becoming-Activist is not a straightforward process. Significant changes emerged in relationships, between teachers and pupils, as well as among students themselves, suggesting that relationship transformation is a common feature of activist teaching. As will be discussed further in section 6.4, these changes were most evident when teachers more consistently attuned to their pupils' needs, a key aspect of Kate's journey, and when they took time to understand class dynamics, a central aspect within Jess's journey. However, as shown in Chapters 4 and 5, shifts in relationships did not simply occur organically; both Kate and Jess implemented specific strategies to get to know their pupils and foster an emotionally safe environment in physical education. Throughout their becoming-Activist journeys, they showed a consistent attentiveness to pupils' affective experiences and relational issues within their classes, a process that required time, patience, and sustained effort.

The teachers in this study encountered both setbacks as well as breakthrough moments, a pattern previously observed in activist research. Kate's challenges were tied to her struggle against entrenched discourses that persist in physical education, something I elaborate further in section 6.4.2. Similarly, Jess faced difficulties in trying to move beyond long-established teaching practices and addressing the diverse needs of pupils in her activist classes. The findings suggest that such setbacks, followed by critical reflection, were integral to the transformations described in the narratives in sections 4.4 and 5.5. The concept of 'stuck places', a term new to activist research, provides insight into the complex nature of teachers' journeys in becoming-Activist.

6.3.2 Research Question 2

How do teachers and pupils experience an activist approach to physical education in two secondary schools in Scotland?

For teachers and pupils in this study, an activist approach provided a starting point to challenge traditional approaches to physical education, which often emphasise multi-activity sport technique and fitness-based goals. This approach encouraged teachers to build deeper relationships with their pupils, going beyond the interactions typical of traditional methods. By giving specific attention to relationship-building and fostering an emotionally safe learning environment, residual practices, such as competitiveness, a focus on MVPA, and the dominance of more assertive, sporty pupils, became more visible to teachers. This then prompted teachers, particularly Jess, to address these issues, ultimately creating a more harmonious environment, a topic further discussed in section 6.5.

After an initial 'honeymoon period' of the pilot study, both teachers adapted their approaches, revising how they taught the initial BtF lessons, which sometimes led to them having to revisit some of these lessons. This iterative process emphasises the importance of these BtF lessons in understanding pupils' perspectives of physical education, as these insights are essential for planning meaningful future lessons. Through their use of activist approach, teachers and pupils collaboratively explored new ways of engaging in physical education, incorporating choice, novelty, and variety. The majority of girls in this study clearly preferred this approach over the traditional multi-activity approach they had previously experienced.

The teachers' experiences diverged in some ways as well. Kate's process of enacting the approach revealed assumptions she held, prompting her to reflect and make adjustments to her activist teaching. Jess, on the other hand, encountered relational tensions that highlighted issues within her student-centred methods, such as using 'voting' that may not have been as inclusive as intended. Both teachers faced challenges in understanding and applying critical elements of the activist approach in practice. Insights from their experiences can help us address these challenges in future professional development for teachers.

6.3.3 Research Question 3

How do teachers experience school-based professional learning?

The findings of this study demonstrated that school-based professional learning was well-received by in-service teachers. Notably, professional learning within school sites offers teachers flexibility to adapt new approaches to their unique contexts, aligning with the framework of pedagogical models in physical education. This study shows that teachers can translate pedagogical theory into practice, though not without challenges. Such issues as struggles with professional identities and entrenched traditions are further explored in section 6.7. In this study, the enactment of an activist approach was running alongside traditional physical education structures where the confines of the physical and cultural spaces of schools can act as impediments to becoming-Activist. Thus, for future school-based professional development, the findings of this study suggest we should carefully consider these programmes, ensuring space is given for teachers to critically reflect on their beliefs about physical education, their personal and professional identities, and the influences of school traditions and structures in enacting novel ideas, such as an activist approach.

Given that girls' experiences in physical education are often less than positive, the school environment provides a space for teachers to reflect on and challenge these issues. My study found that enacting an activist approach within their schools, teachers experienced a shift in mindset about what may be possibly for girls in physical education. This form of professional learning encouraged teachers to challenge the traditional methods, exploring new ways to collaborate with girls in co-constructing physical education experiences that better met their needs. Co-constructing the curriculum, however, was not always straightforward due to the diverse needs of the girls and the constraints of school traditions. Still, adapting an activist approach to fit their unique settings appears to be a promising direction for teacher professional development, especially compared to more traditional approaches like one-off, content-focused workshops that often lack relevance to individual school contexts. Overall, this study supports the value of school-based professional learning for in-service teachers due to its strong ecological validity, while also emphasising the powerful influence of context on teachers' ability to learn and enact innovative approaches.

6.3 Becoming-Activist: the emergence of the concept

The notion of 'becoming-Activist' evolved throughout the analysis of data and writing of this thesis. Initially, it wasn't a concept I consciously embraced at the outset of this project. However, as I immersed myself in the data, the experiences of the teachers, and my own personal journey, I gradually recognised that becoming an activist teacher is an ongoing process. It is not a static state one achieves and maintains; rather, it is an ever-evolving journey of growth and learning.

Drawing on Dewey's (1938) concept of experience, the journey of becoming-Activist involves bringing past knowledge into present situations, whilst modifying experiences as required. Indeed, in the process of becoming, we have come to understand that our ideas are not fixed; they are shaped and reshaped through our experiences. Dewey suggests that experiences which spark curiosity and open up new possibilities foster conditions for growth. As such, within the journey of becoming- Activist, 'growth' can be seen as an "on-going process of *constant reconstruction of experiences* allowing individuals to make sense of even broader realms of their own experiences" (Armour et al., 2017, p. 806).

'Becoming' is not a new concept. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) posit that becoming is represented as a long-term, iterative and non-linear process characterised by an acknowledgement of difference within and among individuals. Given the foundational philosophy of an activist approach (i.e., an intentional shift towards *what might be*), it is reasonable to suggest that teachers endeavouring to adopt this approach require sufficient time to work out its implications for themselves (individually as teachers) and their context (the pupils they teach and the parameters of their school settings). Indeed, as argued by Jess et al. (in press), "becoming raises fundamental issues for physical education because it challenges the traditional portrayal of a subject that is only experienced in a school timetable" (p.4).

Physical education, as a subject, is inherently confined by institutional factors such as the school timetable, available facilities, and the characteristics of those who teach it. Moreover, activities typically associated with the subject, such as sports, physical exercises, and fitness routines, extend beyond the confines of the classroom into people's daily lives (e.g., sports clubs, fitness centres, outdoor activities, etc.). Notwithstanding, the established traditions of the subject, teachers' biographies, and the institutional constraints of the school serve as 'fixed boundaries' that are difficult to change. Consequently, teachers who are accustomed to a multi-activity approach to physical education find themselves constrained by

a tightly bound curriculum that emphasises standardised teaching practices and pupil learning outcomes (Jess et al., 2011).

Navigating the confines of a 'fixed boundary' environment, the path to becoming-Activist for teachers can prove exceedingly challenging. Not only must they confront entrenched traditions within their subject area, but they are also tasked with adopting an approach remarkably different from their accustomed practices, often diverging sharply from the practice of their colleagues. Hence, becoming-Activist is a gradual process, a journey of growth that continually questions prevailing realities and aspires to transcend fixed limitations. 'Becoming' signifies a paradigm shift, emphasising change over a static state. It entails the development of novel ways of existence that emerge from influences and transformations (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The following sections demonstrate how the idea of 'becoming-Activist' took shape in Kate's and Jess's professional journeys of enacting an activist approach with girls in physical education.

6.4 Changing relationships

One significant finding that was highlighted in the preceding two chapters was that the enactment of an activist approach facilitated a change of relationships between teachers and pupils, as well as among girls within the activist classes. The data suggests that these relationship changes stemmed from two main factors. Firstly, through their enactment of an activist approach, teachers learned to attune to, and not assume, what facilitated girls' motivation, interests and learning in physical education. Secondly, a shift in power dynamics inherent within activist approaches facilitated a change in relationships. Neither of these processes were straightforward for the teachers to learn, and as Kate's journey in Chapter 4 shows in particular, the shift in relationships and class dynamics was not without its challenges. These changes of relationships between and among the teachers and pupils were key to understanding the nature of the teachers' journeys in becoming-Activist.

6.4.1 The process of attuning

An attuning physical education teacher can be identified as someone who actively listens, responds, and understands various emotions expressed by their pupils (Landi, 2023a).

Furthermore, attuning refers to the practice of teachers nurturing pupils' personal interests by creating engaging and enjoyable lessons, accepting expressions of negative emotions, whilst trying to understand the perspectives of pupils (Aelterman et al., 2019). Attuning includes allowing pupils to work at their own pace, providing meaningful explanations, and fostering an environment where pupils' comments, concerns, and fears are acknowledged and addressed positively and with curiosity (Aelterman et al., 2019; VanDoren et al., in press), and aligns well with the *listening and responding over time* critical element of an activist approach. Throughout their journeys in becoming-Activist, Kate and Jess frequently used attuning and this, in turn, facilitated the emergence of different relationships between and among the teachers and their pupils.

To better attune to the needs and interests of her pupils, Kate's activist journey detailed in Chapter 4 suggests that her initial assumptions regarding girls in physical education were reshaped through collaborative efforts with her activist class. Initially, Kate made assumptions about teenage girls in physical education, such as doubting their effort levels during lessons, assuming certain activities were more suitable for girls than boys and believing that introducing an 'adult-version' Spin class would broaden their perspectives on physical education. While these assumptions may not appear groundbreaking, they reflect a historically ingrained gendered discourse within physical education (Kirk, 1992), as highlighted in Chapter 2 where I argued that teachers' assumptions about gender have consistently shaped teaching practices, often perpetuating gender stereotypes (Griffin, 1984; Nilges, 1998; Vertinsky, 1992). Indeed, Kate's experiences confirm the deep-rooted nature of this discourse, despite her efforts to enact an approach constructed to challenge the gender narrative in physical education.

Previous research, including Azzarito and Katzew's (2010) study, advocates for reconceptualising physical education to promote gender equity by embedding young people's narratives within school contexts. Studies by Stride (2014) and Oliver and Lalik (2004b) argue that girls are experts on their own active lives and bodies, capable of genuinely contributing to shaping a more meaningful physical education curriculum. Expanding on this research, the findings from my study give us a better understanding of how teachers can draw on their pupils' perspectives to provide a better experience of physical education through an activist approach. For example, Kate's preconceptions about 'what an active teenage girl looks like' were reshaped when she reflected on the diverse ways in which they *could* express their own possibilities of being physically active. This transformation was evident in the

second Spin lesson (see subsection 4.4.2) when Kate adapted her approach to align *with* the girls' physical capabilities. By collaborating with girls to better understand barriers to their participation from their perspectives, Kate began to form different relationships with her pupils. Unlike the traditional physical education practices Kate was accustomed to where she inevitably and invariably led and directed lessons, enacting an activist approach allowed her to not only reconsider her assumptions about girls, but also establish more personal connections with her pupils.

Nevertheless, as the analysis in Kate's case showed, it is important to acknowledge the considerable time and reflection required for this transformation to take place. As I noted in Chapter 2, Oliver and Kirk (2015) emphasise the time required to foster deeper relationships where girls feel comfortable expressing their emotions to teachers. Kate's interactions with her pupils during the initial BtF phase of the girls' activist approach, depicted in subsection 4.3.1, enabled her to initiate a change in her relationships with them, encouraging them to share their perspectives on physical education. While the girls in this study were initially forthcoming in discussing aspects of physical education that demotivated them, Kate also faced setbacks, such as instances where she prioritised increasing heart rates and pushed the girls beyond their limits, despite having been told by the girls that these practices did not motivate them. Indeed, for teachers learning to become Activist, it is important to acknowledge that setbacks are inevitable in this journey, yet they can also serve as opportunities for teachers to better attune to their pupils.

6.4.2 Shifts in power dynamics

Through attuning to their pupils' interests and motivation, the power dynamics shifted within Kate's and Jess's activist classes, aligning with the critical element, *student-centred pedagogy*. This shift involves teachers recognising that girls have unique perspectives on their embodied worlds that teachers may not fully grasp (Oliver & Kirk, 2015). As highlighted in Chapter 2, there has been extensive research aimed at disrupting power dynamics between teachers and pupils (see subsection 2.4.3). Enright and O'Sullivan's (2012b) and Fisette's (2011b) activist research empowered girls to challenge their traditional physical education curricula, emphasising the need for sufficient time and collaboration between teachers and pupils to imagine alternatives within physical education. More recent

activist studies by Walseth et al. (2018) and Shilcutt et al. (in press) found increased pupil engagement when they were involved in the co-creating their curricula.

This study builds upon the aforementioned research (e.g. Fisette, 2011b; Walseth et al., 2018) on the disruption of power dynamics between teachers and pupils as they engage with an activist approach. Through their enactment of this approach, both teachers co-constructed their physical education programmes with the girls. Kate tailored her taster programme and thematic unit based on discussions with the girls, utilising group interview feedback to respond to pupils' interests and motivation in physical education. The critical element of *listening and responding over time* inherent within an activist approach made this straightforward for Kate although, in order to do this, she needed to reconsider the structure of the school's physical education curriculum to effectively meet her pupils' needs. The data reported in the findings chapters (in particular, subsections 4.3.3, 4.4.1 and 4.4.3), illustrate how re-structuring physical education within an activist approach allowed Kate to attune to her pupils' perspectives when co-constructing the curriculum, ultimately changing her relationship with them. As such, physical education shifted from a multi-activity approach to one centred on pupils' perspectives and interests.

The shift in power dynamics among Jess and her pupils' was more complex than she or I had anticipated. As outlined in Chapter 5, particularly in subsections 5.2, 5.3, and 5.3.3, Jess found herself revisiting the foundational lessons due to conflictual relationships among the girls in her classes, a topic to be explored further in the following section. While she felt familiar enough with Class 4M to *start where they left off*, having used an activist approach with them the previous school year, Jess found that the girls' needs and interests had changed. With Class 4T, Jess believed she had covered sufficient ground with them during the initial BtF lessons to progress to the taster lesson programme. Consequently, Jess initially struggled to attune to her pupils' needs and structure her lessons accordingly. It took time and patience for her to realise that things weren't quite right. Indeed, as already noted, and consistent with Enright and O'Sullivan (2012b) and Oliver and Kirk (2015), developing collaborative relationships with and among her pupils took time. Jess could not assume that she would gain a deep understanding of the diverse girls in her classes by only asking for their perspectives on a few occasions at the start of the school year, or simply build upon what she knew of them from the previous year. Similar to Luguetti's experience of an activist approach (Luguetti & Oliver, 2021), Jess also experienced challenges in valuing young people's voices. However, as Aelterman et al. (2019) and Landi (2023a) suggest about attuning, once Jess

better understood the different emotions in her class, and fostered an environment where pupils' concerns were addressed, she was more able to attune to their needs, resulting in a change of relationships among pupils. My study, then, further highlights the challenges of continually *listening and responding* to pupils in order to attune to their changing needs and interests in physical education. Yet, through ongoing reflection and debriefing with myself and her pupils, Jess was able to negotiate this challenge and better understand and attune to their diverse needs.

6.4.3 Attuning when becoming-Activist

The findings presented in Chapters 4 and 5, concerning the transformations observed in Kate's and Jess's journeys, suggest that teachers, when enacting an activist approach, can develop their ability to *listen and respond* by attuning to their pupils' needs, interests and perspectives about their physical education experiences. Furthermore, these findings fill a gap in knowledge as highlighted by Shilcutt et al. (in press), who advocate for further research into practical ways of listening and responding. As we can see in subsections 4.4.3 and 5.5.3 particularly, attuning was represented multiple times throughout Jess's and Kate's becoming-Activist journeys.

Consistent with Aelterman et al.'s (2019) concept of attuning discussed at the beginning of this section, Kate facilitated a learning environment where pupils could work at their own pace. Initially, Kate's approach was more directive as evidenced in her control of the girls' pace during the first Spin lesson (see subsection 4.3.2) and her ongoing emphasis on high levels of physical activity during physical education lessons. However, as Kate gained new insights into the girls' perspectives and feelings towards physical education, she provided them with options on how they *could* be active, welcoming their input and creating an atmosphere of mutual respect among the girls. In contrast, Jess initially struggled to establish a positive atmosphere in her classes. Yet, her ongoing efforts to understand different perspectives of her pupils and prevent dominant individuals and friendship groups from taking over her lessons led to a change in relationships among girls in her classes. This transformation was evidenced in Chapter 5, subsection 5.5.2, through the narrative of cultivating a sense of 'family' within her class.

While Aelterman et al. (2019) suggest that attuning tends to be more directive than participative, my study demonstrates that, in the context of becoming-Activist, attuning is not

solely guided by the teacher but can also draw from the knowledge and experiences of young people. Renold et al. (2021) propose that teachers can discover news ways to address pupils' concerns by attuning to the nuances of their experiences and acknowledging and addressing any dissonance they may feel. Thus, my study extends the literature on attuning by offering strategies for teachers to "attune to affect" (Landi, 2023a) in the process of becoming-Activist.

Another key consideration in attuning to diverse groups in physical education is the role of race, ethnicity and religion. Given the demographics of the schools (see sections 3.4 and 3.5) and Jess's use of terms like 'majority' and 'minority' in her classes, it is important to acknowledge the silence around race, ethnicity, and religion in this project. Explicitly considering pupils' cultural backgrounds might have enhanced teachers' capacity to enact an activist approach, enabling them to better align with the girls' lived experiences. However, the data teachers gathered in BtF to guide their teaching did not reveal particular insights into pupils' race, ethnicity or religion. Likewise, I, as the researcher, did not ask questions focused on these aspects of identify, or others such as sexuality, class or disability, as the study's primary focus was on gender. Consequently, these considerations remained silenced throughout this project.

According to Penney (2002), feminist and critical physical education research has often prioritised 'single' issues rather than using an intersectional approach, with gender being the dominant lens for exploring difference in physical education (Flintoff et al, 2008). This is not to say that intersectional perspectives are absent from activist work, as Oliver's earlier studies, for example, focused on racialised bodies of girls (See Oliver & Lalik, 2004a/b). Yet, as this study was informed by the theoretical framework (i.e. the critical elements) of an activist approach for girls, which does not explicitly address intersectional issues like race, ethnicity and religion, these aspects remained largely unexplored, with the focus primarily on gender. Additionally, I recognise that both the teachers and I identify as White, with our teaching in physical education shaped by a predominantly traditional, 'whitewashed' curriculum that privileges white, Eurocentric knowledge content (Dowling & Flintoff, 2018). Unintentionally, this focus on gender allowed our Whiteness to remain a silent influence in how we taught, discussed and reflected on the data, and in how 'attuning' was expressed in the becoming- Activist journeys of Kate and Jess.

6.5 The visibility of teachers' and pupils' practices

A second insight embedded within the teachers' development in attuning to affect was that the use of an activist approach heightened the visibility of teachers' and pupils' practices beyond what is typically found in traditional physical education lessons. In traditional lessons (e.g. Kirk's (2010) characterisation of 'physical education-as-sports techniques' within multi-activity approaches), teachers attend primarily to skill learning and physical activity levels. The data suggests two things became apparent as the teachers were learning to use an activist approach. Firstly, the teachers' awareness of relational and affective issues in their classes increased and, secondly, the residual influences of traditional physical education practices among pupils and teachers became more visible as they attempted to teach in new ways. These changes of teacher awareness and attention show the process of becoming- Activist to be nuanced and complex.

6.5.1 Awareness of relational and affective issues

The findings outlined in Chapter 5, subsection 5.3, demonstrate how the social dynamics of Jess's classes influenced her enactment of an activist approach. Prior studies have emphasised the significance of peer interactions in pupils' engagement in physical education (Griffin, 1984; Vertinsky, 1992; Stride, 2014). Moreover, as noted in Chapter 2, certain pedagogical models such as Sport Education (Siedentop, 1992), Sport for Peace (Ennis, 1999) and Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR) (Hellison, 1995), demonstrate a commitment to reshaping peer relationships through their critical elements. For instance, within the levels of responsibility of TPSR, elements such as respect for the rights and feelings of others, cooperation and helping others are key to promoting developing young people's self-worth and identity (Hellison, 1995; Kirk, 2020). Indeed, according to Kirk (2020), these pedagogical models, along with an activist approach, can be thought of as pedagogies of affect, aiming to empower young people to make responsible decisions, solve issues that impact them, and work together towards common goals among other objectives.

The findings from this study, most notably in Jess's becoming-Activist journey in Chapter 5, show that the social relations and pupil practices within physical education became more visible to her during her enactment of an activist approach. This key insight, to

my knowledge, has not yet been reported in the existing literature. As Jess and her classes engaged with an activist approach, some of the behaviours of the pupils became more noticeable in their attempt to co-create a supportive class environment. For instance, the competitive, assertive and athletic girls tended to dominate Jess's physical education lessons, as evident in the 'pernicious vote' narrative (see subsection 5.4.1). While this particular insight is not new, as previous studies by Stride (2014) and Hills (2007) among others have highlighted the influence of 'sporty' and 'non-sporty' identities on girls' engagement, my study advances this line of inquiry by showing how an activist approach led Jess to see more clearly and address these observed practices. It's worth noting that the research by Stride (2014) and Hills (2007) primarily focused on observing girls in traditional physical education lessons, resulting in the authors suggesting ways to make physical education more appealing to girls.

Throughout Jess's becoming-Activist journey, we initially see how certain practices within her physical education lessons emphasised competitiveness and high levels of physical activity (see subsections 5.3.1 and 5.3.2), which consequently demotivated some pupils. Indeed, we underestimated the influence of such practices in her enactment of an activist approach. This is not surprising given the traditional nature of physical education Jess and her pupils were accustomed to, where such practices were commonplace. These were the expectations ingrained in our understanding of physical education. However, as an activist approach prompts teachers to start paying attention and deliberately notice social relations within their classes, these practices became more visible. Indeed, as we observed the influence of these practices on the class environment, such as when Jess pointed out that the *dynamics are still off*, we recognised that we needed to address these pupil practices explicitly and directly. My study shows that when teachers confront the residual traditional practices shaping pupil engagement, including competitiveness, exuberance and so on, they can affirm the differences among the pupils they teach. Similar to Oliver et al.'s (2009) study where the authors acknowledged the girls' desire to be girly and worked *with* them to co-create games *for* girly girls, the findings (detailed in subsections 5.3.4, 5.5.1, 5.5.2 and 5.5.3) highlight how Jess acknowledged and accommodated the differences among the girls in her classes, thereby creating a more inclusive environment in physical education.

As demonstrated throughout Chapter 5, achieving this transformation required significant time and effort, a pattern consistent with other activist studies (see, for example, Luguetti et al., 2019; Nuñez-Enriquez & Oliver, 2022), aligned to the critical element of

listening and responding over time. Jess had to navigate through a period of feeling 'stuck' before meaningful change could take place, evidenced when she began to question the limitations of the voting practice and had discussions with her pupils to change this (see subsection 5.4.2). Progressing towards the Thematic Unit, Jess offered the girls different ways to develop their leadership skills, while supporting them to build confidence by working with their peers in their class (see a narrative account in subsection 5.5.1). These relatively small adjustments, where Jess attended to the differences among her pupils, led to a 'family-type' environment characterised by trust and camaraderie. Equally significant, these findings help us better understand that through the enactment of an activist approach, the girls also recognised differences among their classmates. They saw that their peers could participate in physical activities in their own way, without being dominated by the sporty and assertive girls. This was evidenced in the findings (see subsection 5.5.3) when certain changes were observed among the girls in Jess's classes, such as increased participation, shifts in the nature of competition, and some girls becoming less dominant. For Jess and her pupils, engaging with an activist approach marked a departure from traditional ways of experiencing physical education and fostered new ways of interacting with each other.

Over the time spent learning to become activist teachers, both Kate and Jess developed an increased awareness of the affective experiences of their pupils. For Kate, this realisation was exemplified in her evolving perception of Chloe, a pupil she initially presumed would lack interest in physical education due to her size. However, as discussed in the second Spin narrative (subsection 4.4.2) and Kate's reflection on Choe's unexpected engagement (subsection 4.4.3), Kate become more attentive to Chloe's needs, offering alternative ways to participate. Similarly, Jess also gained insight into the affective experiences of her pupils. Initially viewing Mariam as disinterested in physical education, Jess later recognised that the classroom environment was not always inclusive, leading her to address Mariam and others' lack of confidence by providing tailored leadership opportunities, as detailed in subsection 5.5.3. Previous research by Goodyear et al. (2014) found that addressing girls' feelings of inferiority and concerns about public performance of physical activities increased their engagement. Likewise, Garrett (2004) and Hills (2007) suggest that girls need time to make sense of their physical education experiences in relation to their bodies and physical identities. Expanding on this research, my study demonstrates how an activist approach facilitated teachers' recognition of the diverse ways girls can be physically active by paying attention to and affirming their differences, extending the critical element of

student-centred pedagogy. This is consistent with the fundamental tenet of an activist approach where teachers should *start from where the girls are*, rather from where they think they ought to be (Oliver & Kirk, 2015).

Through their enactment of an activist approach, the teachers in this study developed their understanding of their classes by paying attention to and affirming the differences among the girls. While Landi's (2023a) paper primarily focused on 'response-able pedagogy for fitness testing', he argued that recognising cultural diversity among pupils, exploring various ways in which different bodies can be physically active, and considering how various factors can influence pupils' engagement levels can support teachers in addressing their differences. Building on Landi's notions of attentiveness and affirmation, my study has provided some examples of how teachers were able to foster connections among pupils through an activist approach, extending the theoretical framework of this approach. Moreover, this study demonstrates that teachers were more adept at nurturing these connections as the relational issues and affective experiences of pupils became more noticeable through the enactment of an activist approach compared to a traditional physical education-as-sports techniques curriculum, where emphasis typically lies on skill acquisition and physical activity.

6.5.2 The residual effects of traditional physical education

Another aspect of physical education practices that became apparent throughout the teachers' journeys in becoming-Activist was the influence of the traditional physical education practices that permeate the field. Indeed, Kate and Jess showed us that their journey was not straightforward, and detaching themselves from many years of ingrained teaching practices in which they had been highly successful was a challenge. For instance, both teachers felt compelled to promote high levels of physical activity in their lessons, aligning with an array of studies that emphasise the importance of maintaining MVPA among pupils (for example, Sallis & McKenzie, 2001; McKenzie et al, 2004, 2016). Additionally, in Scotland, where physical education has been framed under the health and wellbeing umbrella, many teachers feel it is their duty to promote physical activity for its health benefits (Gray et al., 2015; Horrell et al., 2012). My study confirms that, during at least the fieldwork period, Kate and Jess shared this biomedical perspective on physical education. As discussed in

Chapter 4, Kate repeatedly stressed her desire for increased physical activity levels during physical education lessons, despite some girls feeling as though they had already improved their effort levels (see subsection 4.4.3). Similarly, Jess encountered some pressure from more assertive pupils who sought a sense of achievement through exertion in their physical education classes, leading her to prioritise physical activity, as evidenced in the HIIT lesson described in subsection 5.3.2.

An overarching finding from the analysis of the teachers' journeys was the entrenched nature of their health-promotion practices, which proved difficult to shift, particularly evident in Kate's journey (see subsection 4.4.3). This commitment to health-related physical activity was further reinforced by the teachers' own personal engagement in leading a physically active life (see subsections 3.4.1 and 3.5.1). This study shows, however, that simply promoting high levels of physical activity may not necessarily equate to *girls learning to value the physically active life.* Moreover, it emphasises the importance of supporting teachers in recognising how certain fitness practices may alienate some girls, as evidenced by the decreased motivation observed among several girls due the overemphasis of MVPA (see subsections 4.3.3 and 5.3.2.). Consistent with McCuaig and Quennerstedt (2018) and Kirk (2020), this study reinforces the notion that adopting a salutogenic approach to physical education, which is in curricular terms 'strengths-based', may support teachers in exploring how movement activities can enrich young people's lives rather than merely mitigating the risks of a sedentary lifestyle. Moreover, it acknowledges that the teachers in this study consistently held genuine intentions to provide their pupils with better physical education experiences. However, translating these intentions into practice can be difficult when residual forms of physical education continually permeate one's practice.

Although the teachers in this study engaged with an approach that centred around alternative forms of physical activity and physical education, the residual effects of a pathogenic perspective of health posed a challenge to shift. Nevertheless, we saw subtle shifts in Kate's perceptions of physical education, evident in the second Spin lesson (subsection 4.3.2). Moreover, the nature of Jess's and Kate's journey shows that the tasks within the BtF lessons are likely to reveal some of the teachers' underlying assumptions and practices within physical education. As previously mentioned in subsections 6.2.1.and 6.3.1, the girls themselves exposed these assumptions as their perceptions and feelings are actively sought by their teachers in an activist approach. This study offers a starting point for considering an activist approach as a potential way to help teachers in moving beyond a solely pathogenic

perspective towards exploring health in terms of young people living a 'good life' (McCuaig & Quennerstedt, 2018).

Previous studies of pedagogical models have also demonstrated their potential to challenge dominant forms of physical education, albeit primarily focusing on the structural organisation of physical education itself. For example, Bjørke & Modal Moen (2020) showed that implementing cooperative learning shifted pupils' engagement in physical education from mere participation to active learning for, with, and by their peers. Similarly, in the context of dance, Shilcutt et al.'s (2022) research emphasised how adopting an activist approach allowed for the disruption of authoritarian dance structures, offering a new perspective on dance in general. This study extends these findings by revealing how an activist approach can encourage teachers to critically question their regular practices and consider the responses of their pupils to the forms of physical education they have experienced, aligning to the critical element of *inquiry-based education centred in action*. As we learned from the journeys of Kate and Jess throughout Chapters 4 and 5, this could prompt teachers to reconsider the way in which physical education is taught and structured, potentially leading to more positive experiences for girls.

6.6 Alternative forms of participation

Another insight emerging from the findings was that the enactment of an activist approach led to more democratic forms of participation, contrasting with the pupils' prior experiences. This insight stemmed from the teachers' willingness to disrupt more traditional forms of physical education, such as a multi-activity approach, and co-construct curricula *with* pupils. The data suggests that by offering alternative ways to participate, not only did the girls' perceptions of physical education change, but the teachers also embraced a new outlook on how girls can engage with physical education. This new way of 'doing' physical education, characterised by choice, novelty and variety, emerged as pupils and teachers embraced an activist approach. This insight, however, also highlights the challenges of co-creating curricula with girls and the difficulties teachers face in grasping the critical elements of an activist approach, such as *student-centred pedagogy* and *pedagogies of embodiment*.

6.6.1 New ways to 'do' physical education

The findings presented in Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate that through their engagement with an activist approach, the girls in Jess's and Kate's classes experienced physical education in a way that differed from their previous experiences. The introduction of novel activities such as Zumba and Spin, along with offering choice and variety, emerged as common factors motivating the girls to participate. Notably, as evidenced in subsections 4.3.3 and 5.4.2 particularly, most of the girls in this study engaged better with the variety and choice of activities taught in their activist classes, which contrasted with the repetitive six-week blocks of single activities they previously experienced in a more traditional approach. In Jess's classes, girls frequently spoke about having their opinions valued, trying something new, and having choices, as positive aspects of their activist programme. Likewise, in Kate's class, girls expressed dissatisfaction with the boring and repetitive nature of traditional physical education, stating their preference for being listened to and having the opportunity to try new things.

Girls' discontentment with traditional physical education is not a revelation, nor is it unexpected, especially in light of the recent media coverage highlighted in Chapter 2, which reinforced the 'same old story' about girls in physical education (de Ferrer & Bryson, 2023; Kirk & Oliver, 2014). Previous research has consistently emphasised the significance of offering choice and variety as motivational factors for girls' engagement in physical education (Mitchell et al., 2015; Lamb et al., 2018). Yet, in line with research by Stride and Flintoff (2018), this study confirms the limited translation of knowledge about girls' experiences in physical education into practice. Despite a breadth of evidence, physical education programmes continue to favour multi-activity approaches consisting of the same activities year on year, a pattern entrenched among pupils and their teachers. Yet, an activist approach challenged this conventional model of physical education, opening up new possibilities for both girls and teachers, consistent with findings from other activist studies (for example, Oliver et al., 2009; Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010). While not necessarily groundbreaking within the existing literature, this study shows the potential of an activist approach in enabling girls to experience new forms of physical activity. It highlights that when girls feel their needs are being addressed, they are more inclined to participate in physical education. Moreover, this form of participation is more democratic in nature.

Previous studies have shown the benefits of more democratic forms of participation in physical education. For instance, Howley and O'Sullivan (2021) explored the enactment of democratic teaching practices by collaborating with teachers and pupils to examine and critique their experiences in physical education. They advocate for pupil voice structures that are dedicated to transformation, acknowledging that implementing pupil voice should be viewed as a fluid process rather than a fixed procedure. Similarly, Lynch and Curtner-Smith (2019) observed democratic practices in teachers' willingness to value the knowledge pupils bring to school, enabling them to co-create their curriculum, while Walseth et al. (2018) found that girls were more enthusiastic for participating in physical education when they were involved in co-creating the curriculum.

The findings from my study expand upon the notion of democratic practice, showing how an activist approach facilitated a more equitable form of participation among all girls; but this was not without challenges. This was particularly evident in Chapter 5 (subsection 5.3.3), where I outlined how Jess elicited pupils' voices during some of the BtF lessons yet encountered difficulties as some quieter girls struggled to be heard amongst more dominant peers. It took time and reflection for Jess to notice this dynamic and, as discussed in the previous section, her use of an activist approach supported her in acknowledging and addressing such inequities. Additionally, instances of 'voting' and 'drawing ideas out of a bucket' demonstrated Jess's efforts to involve pupils in the decision-making processes, albeit with their own set of challenges, a topic I will come to in the next section. Similarly, throughout Kate's journey (see, in particular, subsection 4.4.3), we saw how she valued the conversations that she had with the pupils, recognising the importance of understanding their perspectives when co-creating their curriculum. Both teachers found ways to make physical education more accessible for all pupils, not solely catering to the 'sporty', 'fit', or 'competitive' pupils, thereby fostering more democratic forms of participation. As evidenced in subsections 4.4.2, 4.4.3, 5.5.1 and 5.5.2, both teachers used various alternatives to promote diverse forms of participation, including different leadership tasks, different ways to exercise, and different ways to build group dynamics.

Previous research contends that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to democratic practices in terms of organisational structures, content, or methods, emphasising the importance for teachers to identify what works best within their specific context (Fitzpatrick & Enright, 2017; Lynch & Curtner-Smith; Howley & O'Sullivan, 2021). This research aligns closely to the critical elements of an activist approach, emphasising *student-centred*

pedagogy, *listening and responding over time* and *inquiry-based education centred in action,* all of which prioritise girls' interests and perspectives as central to their physical education experiences. As I pointed out in Chapter 2, enacting an activist approach requires teachers to negotiate curricula in a way that includes all pupils, tailoring this to specific localised contexts. Consequently, while teachers cannot be expected to have ALL of the knowledge they need to support girls, they can prioritise the valuable insights and knowledge that girls have to offer. My study emphasises the necessity for teachers to adapt their practices to suit the needs of their specific contexts by foregrounding the perspectives and feelings of girls. Nonetheless, it also reveals the considerable challenges associated with co-constructing curriculum in physical education.

6.6.2 Challenges of co-constructing curricula

Throughout their becoming-Activist journeys, both Kate and Jess experienced challenges in enabling more democratic forms of participation, particularly in co-constructing curricula. For Kate, this was notable during the taster lesson programme of BtF. As detailed in subsection 4.2.3, Kate and the girls in her class came up with ten different activities designed to broaden pupils' perspectives of the possibilities within physical education, a main goal of the BtF phase of an activist approach. While the structuring of this programme was straightforward for Kate, one challenge that emerged from the analysis was ensuring the content she taught aligned with the goals of BtF. For example, as I noted previously, the first Spin lesson (see a narrative account in 4.3.2) resembled an adult-version of a Spin class, emphasising high levels of physical activity. It could be argued that this type of lesson did indeed broaden pupils' perspectives, as they had not experienced a Spin class before. However, when considering the critical elements of *student-centred pedagogy* and *pedagogies of embodiment* outlined in subsection 2.5.3, it becomes evident that Kate's approach to teaching this lesson was centred on her own perspective rather than on the embodied experiences of the girls and what makes them comfortable in physical activity settings.

The notion of girls feeling comfortable in physical education, aligned to the critical element of pedagogies of embodiment, is widely reported in the literature. As outlined in Chapter 2, previous research has identified that discomfort among girls performing in front of

boys, in particular, along with feeling safe and comfortable in their learning environment, are key factors in girls' engagement (Vertinsky, 1992; Oliver et al., 2009; Kirk et al., 2016; Walseth et al., 2018). Indeed, Walseth et al. (2018) and Oliver and Kirk (2015) emphasise the commitment needed to create a comfortable space for girls when enacting an activist approach. Building on these insights, my study extends the argument by suggesting that teachers not only need time to co-create the environment but also time to understand issues related to embodiment that may not always be apparent but, as Oliver and Kirk (2015) suggest, are often at a preconscious level for girls. When co-creating curricula, it is imperative for teachers, like Kate in this study, to not only consider the content and activities (which arguably she did) but also take into account pupils' emotional responses. For instance, while Kate might introduce an adult-version of a Spin class as part of an activist approach, neglecting to acknowledge how pupils feel about such physical activities would overlook their embodied experiences. As observed in the initial Spin class and subsequent Body Pump lesson (subsection 4.4.3), Kate focused primarily on teaching physical exercises without giving sufficient attention to how the pupils felt about these activities. Moreover, as mentioned in Chapter 4, although Kate had well-meaning intentions here, translating these into practice was difficult due to the influence of her past teaching practices. Indeed, if the aim of an activist approach is to support girls to envision a physically active life, this study highlights some of the challenges teachers may face in addressing issues of embodiment when co-creating curricula.

In Jess's case, the practice of voting became commonplace during her activist lessons. Initially, Jess viewed voting as a democratic practice without realising that it inadvertently amplified the voices of the already dominant girls in her classes, thereby contradicting the critical element of *pedagogies of embodiment*, which emphasises the co-construction of an emotionally safe environment for all pupils (Oliver & Kirk, 2015; Kirk et al., 2018). Similar to the findings of Luguetti & Oliver's (2020) study, where PSTs used voting within an activist approach, Jess also, arguably mistakenly, viewed doing what the girls wanted and voting on activities as *student-centred pedagogy*. Moreover, the public nature of the voting practice made some girls feel uncomfortable, whilst amplifying the already dominant voices. Consistent with Oliver et al.'s (2018) study, Jess encountered the challenge of ensuring that all voices were heard rather than solely listening to the loudest. Consequently, Jess introduced slight modifications to the voting practice, making it less overtly public (i.e. collecting ideas in a bucket). However, unlike the efforts described in Oliver et al.'s study (2018), where

multiple educators worked together to address this challenge, Jess faced greater difficulty. As noted in subsections 5.3.3 and 5.4.2, not all voices of the girls were consistently heard. This could be attributed to the absence of a 'community of practice' in this study and our relatively limited experience with an activist approach. As a result, only small shifts were observed in Jess's facilitation of the girls' voices through these methods.

Small shifts from Jess were also evident in her approach to 'majority' and 'minority' activities. As seen in subsection 5.4.2, not all girls embraced the concept of such activities, which were commonplace in Jess's activist approach. Despite attempts to vary the selection process by alternating between majority and minority activities weekly (as outlined in subsection 5.4.2), it appears questionable that these choices were made with consideration for what best facilitates pupils' interest, motivation, and learning in physical education, a core principle of an activist approach (Oliver & Kirk, 2015). Moreover, the language of 'majority' and 'minority' often implies ethnic distinctions, with minority groups typically representing those who are more marginalised in society. The usage of such terms could inadvertently reinforce existing power relations among pupils. From a democratic perspective, this might imply that 'majority always rules', echoing sentiments expressed by Hayat and her peers. Consequently, this study provides further understanding of the challenges teachers may have with enacting pupil voice whilst still ensuring there is a comfortable learning environment for their pupils.

Jess and Kate's understanding of what *student-centred pedagogy* is within an activist approach (i.e. working *with* girls to create a curriculum that better meets their needs) and what it is not (i.e. 'voting' and 'adult-driven activities'), is consistent with other activist studies. For example, previous activist research identifies teachers' assumptions about student-centred pedagogy as a challenge when becoming-Activist (Luguetti et al., 2019; Luguetti & Oliver, 2020). Indeed, both teachers in my study had meaningful intentions to challenge the status quo of physical education and teach in a noticeably different way than they had previously. This helps us understand more clearly how the practices ingrained within the traditions of physical education are difficult to shift when co-creating curricula. Additionally, consistent with Luguetti and Oliver (2021), this study suggests that when becoming-Activist, teachers should confront their preconceived notions of what constitutes student-centred pedagogy and critically examine these. This involves valuing the knowledge of all young people rather than privileging only some perspectives (Luguetti & Oliver, 2021).

By doing this, teachers can support girls in finding activities that best suit their individual and collective needs and wants within physical education (Oliver & Kirk, 2015).

As we reflect on Jess's voting scenario and Kate's adult Spin class, this study resonates with the findings of Oliver et al. (2018), emphasising the importance of supporting activist teachers in seeing all types of 'data' within their classrooms from the perspectives of all pupils, rather than solely relying on what pupils say when asked. We acknowledge that this is not easy for teachers, like Kate and Jess. However, as mentioned in section 6.3, enacting an activist approach provides teachers with additional sources of information, such as observing pupil practices, understanding their feelings, and observing their peer interactions. This study, then, helps us understand that considering the broader context of the class can enhance the effectiveness of co-creating the curriculum with pupils.

6.7 School-based professional learning is not a panacea

The final insight reflected the effectiveness of school-based professional learning throughout the teachers' journey in becoming-Activist. The data indicates that while this approach is not necessarily the definitive solution when teachers are learning to enact pedagogical models, it still holds promise when accompanied by appropriate support. Additionally, the data suggests that both teachers experienced challenges with school-based professional learning, such as entrenched traditional contexts and professional identities, which subsequently influenced their enactment of an activist approach with their classes. As we reflect on Kate's and Jess's becoming-Activist journeys, we have learned some valuable lessons regarding supporting teachers with school-based TPL.

6.7.1 Traditional contexts: working with what we've got

While the broader educational literature has extensively explored teacher professional learning (see, for example, Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Lieberman & Miller, 2001; Guskey, 2002), the study of this topic within physical education is relatively new (Parker & Patton, 2019). Despite gaining better insights into professional development in physical education, studies have yet to confirm the most productive approaches to its practice

(Armour et al., 2019). As discussed in Chapter 2, traditional approaches to professional learning in physical education typically consisted of off-site workshop style courses. In the 2000s, Armour and Yelling (2004a) found that experienced teachers recalled the most common learning experiences as one-day, sport-specific courses which lacked any follow-up within school settings. These courses were offered by a range of providers including local authorities, national governing bodies, private sports organisations, and academic institutions (Armour & Yelling, 2004a).

Critics have denounced this fragmented approach to professional development, arguing that it lacks integration into school contexts and fails to provide a cohesive, progressive programme that supports both pupils' and teachers' learning (Lieberman, 1995; Armour & Yelling, 2004a/b; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Drawing from Greene's (2001) call for alternative approaches that prioritise the teacher, Armour and Yelling's (2004a/b) research played a crucial role in reshaping research on professional learning for physical education teachers, advocating for a shift towards more school-based development. Despite this shift, it's worth noting that one-day off-site courses still persist in the field today.

As outlined in Chapter 3, Kate and Jess underwent initial professional learning experiences characterised by a 'pilot' year of workshop-style sessions focused on learning an activist approach, alongside practical application within their respective school environments. In the subsequent year, during which this thesis's data set was generated, professional learning involved supporting teachers within their own setting, combined with occasional group meetings to reflect on the process of enacting the approach. As such, our goal was to help teachers make sense of and adapt these experiences to their unique contexts, whilst providing them with support to navigate and understand the process independently. This project's approach is consistent with existing literature (Patton & Parker, 2014; Armour et al., 2017), emphasising teacher empowerment, ownership of learning, and the prioritisation of contextual challenges. Through the experiences of the teachers in this study, we gain a better understanding of how they experienced school-based professional learning, taking into account the specific contexts in which they worked, contexts that arguably shaped their experiences throughout their careers.

Research has shown that school settings for teacher professional learning have high 'ecological validity' (Kirk et al., 2017), in so far as learning *in situ* has direct relevance and application to teachers' work. There are, however, two sides to this issue. On the one hand,

teachers are afforded autonomy in tailoring their professional development needs to suit their own contexts (Parker & Patton, 2019; Lawson et al. 2020), fostering a sense of empowerment and active engagement in their own learning (Armour, 2010). Furthermore, Timperley et al. (2007) propose that effective professional learning thrives within collaborative school-based efforts. On the other hand, as evidenced throughout Chapters 4 and 5, entrenched traditional structures within physical education can act as impediments to becoming-Activist, even within school environments.

During their enactment of an activist approach, both teachers were required to deviate from the traditional physical education programmes they were accustomed to, while still using traditional practices in their other classes (see subsection 3.4 and 3.5). In other words, Kate and Jess taught using one pedagogical model (an activist approach) within a multi-activity sport-technique curriculum. Moreover, the timetable and learning spaces for physical education were based around a traditional multi-activity model. Ennis (2014) refers to this as a '*like us* curriculum', where skilful pupils who enjoy sport and physical activity are welcomed into multi-activity programmes reminiscent of what teachers themselves experienced during their schooling, similar to Kate's and Jess's own school experiences of physical education as pupils. Additionally, the pupils in their activist classes, who were in their fourth year of high school, had expectations of physical education shaped by the traditional approaches they experienced throughout their schooling. Throughout this study, the girls in both schools consistently emphasised their expectations of physical education as involving playing sports, learning sports-techniques, and participating in fitness-based activities.

Despite both teachers holding leadership roles within their departments and attempting to make minor adaptations to their physical education programmes (for instance, as detailed in subsections 3.4 and 3.5, Kate implemented shorter units of work for the S3 year group, while Jess introduced a choice programme for S5-6 pupils), their colleagues persisted in adhering to the traditional structures they were accustomed to. Furthermore, the teachers within their respective departments retained expectations of 'good' teaching that were informed by traditional approaches to physical education. Indeed, working within a physical education curriculum where emphasis typically is placed on skill acquisition and physical activity, was the environment in which Jess, Kate (and I!) built successful careers. When required to deviate from this norm, encountering challenges was not unexpected. In those moments, we had to work within the existing structures we were given and make the best of

what we had. Although we were experienced and successful teachers, our practical experience with enacting pedagogical models in our teaching was limited. This is consistent with research by Baker (2023) and Fernandez-Rio and Iglesias (2022), indicating a potential gap in our understanding of alternative pedagogical approaches. The use of an activist approach represented the first time Kate and Jess ventured into unfamiliar territory in their teaching, departing from the status quo, which is consistent with others' experiences of enacting activist approaches (Kirk et al., 2018; Luguetti et al., 2019; Shilcutt et al., forthcoming). Moreover, my study supports the findings of Armour and Yelling (2004a) suggesting that external support may be necessary when becoming-Activist.

6.7.2 Struggles with purposes and professional identities

One of the challenges Kate and Jess encountered in their becoming-Activist journeys was the requirement to teach material that lacked a physical component. For example, the 'classroom-based' lessons of the BtF phase required Kate and Jess to interact with their pupils in a different manner from usual and in a setting where there was no physical activity during lessons. Kate, in particular, found teaching girls in a classroom setting to be at odds with what she perceived as the fundamental goal of an activist approach and, arguably, physical education itself, which is to increase girls' physical activity levels (see subsection 4.2.2). Kate was reluctant to spend more than one lesson in a classroom setting when felt she could get the same information by having brief conversations in the gymnasium. However, regardless of the location of the BtF lessons and how they are taught, the activities within these lessons are crucial for understanding all pupils' perspectives and co-creating an emotionally supportive environment (Oliver & Kirk, 2015). Nonetheless, it can be argued that Kate did not fully grasp her pupils' perspectives based on her approach during the initial BtF lessons. This was evident in her tendency to push the girls toward adult-level performance in activities like Spin and in her promotion of (un)healthy messages, such as emphasising calorie intake and expenditure.

Similar to the teachers in Curtner-Smith and Soho's (2004) study, Kate grappled with her perception of the purpose of physical education. As we saw in Chapter 2, the nature and purpose of physical education has been debated for decades with much criticism from scholars in the field (Kirk, 2010). Indeed, consistent with Lawson's (1986) rendering of the

notion of occupational socialisation and the anticipatory socialisation phase, the reasons that lead teachers into the field of physical education subsequently shape their beliefs and actions. As detailed in subsection 3.4.1, Kate initially aspired to become a physical education teacher out of her love of working with young people and encouraging as many of them as possible to participate in physical activity. Despite her use of an activist approach to change the ways she taught physical education (as discussed in the previous section), Kate found it challenging to explore alternative perspectives on the purpose of physical education and its educative value beyond the 'physical' aspect. This study, thus, corroborates Richards and Gaudreault's (2017) claim that professional development programmes should help teachers "question their preconceived notions about what PE is and should be" (p. 264). Moreover, it suggests that adopting an activist approach can support teachers in challenging their preconceived beliefs, as highlighted particularly by Kate's experience in the BtF phase (see subsections 4.3.1 and 4.3.3). The tasks within this phase brought to light some of her ingrained beliefs, yet it may not always be easy for teachers to recognise that these beliefs stem from their professional socialisation. Consequently, this study enhances our understanding that when learning a new approach within teachers' own school contexts, they may encounter difficulties not only in negotiating traditional school structures but also in reshaping their professional identities and beliefs about physical education.

Previous activist studies have highlighted the challenge of negotiating one's professional identity when becoming-Activist. For instance, Nuñez-Enriquez and Oliver's (2021) research showed Oscar's (Nuñez-Enriquez) struggle to understand the influence of his cultural background (i.e. a masculine dominant culture) and move beyond his own biases (Fine et al., 2003). Likewise, Luguetti et al. (2019) found that teachers had to confront their professional identities to further develop their ability to be student-centred. Like some of the teachers in Luguetti et al.'s (2019) study, Kate's and Jess's beliefs seemed to align to the conception of *student-centred pedagogy* as evidenced by their commitment to make physical education better for the girls in their activist classes. As detailed in subsections 4.4.3 and 5.5.3, both teachers had good intentions to actively seek input from the girls, support them in imagining new possibilities within physical education, and find ways to support their participation on their own terms. Indeed, as argued by Oliver and Kirk (2015), the enactment of the critical element of *inquiry-based education centred in action* brings about "a profound shift in thinking about what physical education *is* and *might be"* (p. 74). Embracing this shift when becoming-Activist, requires teachers to adopt a different mindset to the traditional one.

This study shows that both Kate and Jess underwent such shifts. However, the persistent influence of residual subject traditions and school customs renders school-based TPL a challenging environment to embrace significantly different practices, such as an activist approach.

The journey in becoming- Activist for both teachers was shaped by the contextual and structural factors of their respective schools. As detailed in subsections 4.2.2 and 5.2, Jess and Kate adapted their activist approaches during the subsequent enactment after the initial pilot study. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Jess opted not to resume the BtF lessons with her 4M class, choosing instead to pick up where she had left off the previous year. With class 4T, Jess engaged in brief discussions in the school fitness room rather than allocating the necessary time to the tasks of BtF lessons. Additionally, both teachers incorporated more traditional features of their physical education programmes with their activist classes. For instance, Jess included a trampolining unit of six lessons in the taster lesson programme due to safety concerns, feeling as though more time was needed for these sessions. Similarly, during the Thematic Unit phase, Kate's activist class participated in the traditional 'choice' programme alongside their peers. The experiences of both teachers demonstrate that the school context and traditional structures play a significant role in shaping how teachers enact new approaches within their own learning environments, aligning with the findings of Timperley et al. (2008). Moreover, consistent with the observations of Richards et al. (2019), this study highlights that the emphasis on traditional practices in many schools can inhibit teacher innovation.

Building on the findings of Kirk et al. (2017) who contend that school-based TPL is deeply individualised, this study illustrates the importance of understanding the specific challenges teachers may encounter within their school settings to effectively support them in enacting innovative pedagogical approaches. Anticipating the specific challenges that Kate and Jess would face regarding their professional identities, the influence of traditional structures, and the varied composition of their classes, presented difficulties. However, we now recognise that encountering such challenges are common when teachers are becoming-Activist. Nonetheless, this study highlights that school-based TPL provides a means of better identifying and addressing such challenges than traditional off-site CPD courses, which often and inevitably prioritise content over context (Patton & Parker, 2014). Indeed, recognising the obstacles teachers encounter enables us to tailor subsequent phases of support aimed at

enacting an activist approach. As such, I argue that, while school-based professional learning is complex, understanding the context is crucial to enacting forms of TPL.

6.7.3 What we have learned about supporting teachers with school-based TPL

The previous sections highlighted some of the challenges the teachers encountered with school-based TPL during their becoming-Activist journeys. These challenges offer valuable insights into supporting teachers in becoming-Activist within a school-based context. As noted earlier, the unique perspective of this study, driven by teachers operating within their own school settings, enriches the research on becoming-Activist in physical education.

As demonstrated in section 6.5.2, it is feasible for an activist approach to coexist with and complement a traditional multi-activity curriculum, but this can be difficult for teachers to navigate. One lesson we learned from this study was that when enacting a pedagogical model, it is important for teachers to envisage curricula in new ways, and the experiences of Kate and Jess show how the use of an activist approach facilitated this shift. For instance, as detailed in subsections 4.3.3 and 4.4.3, Kate discussed the need to be inventive with her curricular structure, departing from the traditional 'six-lesson block' model, and recognised the necessity of a complete mindset change to improve physical education for girls. Similarly, in a post-activist intervention discussion involving both teachers, Kate and Jess talked about how their perspectives on physical education evolved, despite encountering initial resistance from their colleagues. We all agreed that changing traditional mindsets was very challenging.

Prior research on the enactment of pedagogical models in physical education has emphasised that changing one's mindset is necessary when learning to use student-centred models. For example, Luguetti and Oliver's (2020) study with PSTs found that their experience of an activist approach altered their perception of young people, leading the PSTs to no longer 'blame' them for lack of engagement. Likewise, multiple studies show the significance of teachers in transitioning from a teacher-directed approach, where they make all decisions, to one where they facilitate learning in response to pupils' needs, a more student-centred approach (Casey, 2012; Goodyear et al., 2014; Howley & O'Sullivan, 2023). Nonetheless, consistent with Oliver & Kirk (2015), the becoming-Activist journeys undertaken by Kate and Jess afforded them to push against the status quo of physical

education through attuning (and not assuming) and by paying attention to and affirming the differences of the girls they taught.

We have also learned about the importance of teachers questioning their beliefs and values regarding physical education within school-based professional learning. As detailed throughout this chapter, Kate's and Jess's beliefs about physical education and their values regarding physical activity influenced how they enacted an activist approach. Patton and Parker (2014) suggest that traditional professional development rarely prompts teachers to question their beliefs and understanding of teaching and learning, nor does it allocate sufficient time for such reflection. Similarly, Culp (2014) argues that PSTs should begin their professional learning with critical reflection on their own culture, experiences, and values, and how these beliefs may influence their interactions with pupils.

Guskey's (2002) model of professional development proposes that significant change in teachers' attitudes and beliefs typically occur after they observe evidence of pupil learning resulting from changes in their teaching practice. However, the findings from my study slightly diverge from Guskey's model regarding the timing of these changes. I suggest that, at least in the context of becoming-Activist, Jess and Kate experienced simultaneous shifts in their beliefs and values while enacting an activist approach and reflecting on pupils' experience of it. This observation addresses a gap in our knowledge of enacting an activist approach through school-based professional learning, suggesting that as teachers are in the process of becoming-Activist, they are also re-evaluating their beliefs and values to better address their pupils' needs. Furthermore, this study concurs with Culp (2014) and Patton and Parker (2014) emphasising the importance of dedicating sufficient time to explore teachers' personal biographies, beliefs and values within school-based professional learning. In Oliver's earlier activist work outlined in Chapter 2, she had PSTs complete tasks related to their physical activity biographies and their perceptions of physical education (see Oliver & Oesterreich, 2013). However, this aspect was absent from the fieldwork of this study, likely due to the participants being experienced teachers. Consequently, my study affirms that, regardless of their career stage, teachers' professional identities heavily influence their enactment of an activist approach. Although Jess and Kate were experienced teachers, they were novice learners of an activist approach.

Another thing we have learned about supporting teachers in becoming-Activist within school-based settings involves recognising the 'stuck places' (Ellsworth, 1997) they

encountered along their journeys. In Chapter 4, we saw Kate getting stuck in terms of the assumptions she made about teenage girls and physical education more broadly. Similarly, Jess's narrative in Chapter 5 showed her getting stuck in terms of figuring out the class dynamics. We agree with Ellsworth that these same stuck places may have occurred over and over again for the teachers. Staley (2018) suggests that, in education, "we have grown accustomed to rigid and repetitive ways of thinking and constructing meaning of complex concerns" (p. 289). Nevertheless, my study reveals within the context of becoming-Activist, the stuck places encountered by Jess and Kate prompted transformation as teachers began to question their practice. Indeed, when others learn this approach, it is reasonable to expect stuck places, but this study has provided valuable insights to help future studies more effectively address the challenges previously mentioned. Lather (1998) proposes that when faced with challenges, there's a tendency to prescribe universal solutions for 'what to do next' in struggles of social justice (p. 488). However, considering the fundamental goals of an activist approach, that is, to challenge the narrative of the 'same old story' with girls and question the existing physical education practices (Oliver & Kirk, 2015), universal solutions are not possible. Rather, as demonstrated by Kate and Jess, navigating through their stuck places was essential for transformation.

In negotiating their stuck places, critical reflection was integral for Jess and Kate in their becoming-Activist journeys. For instance, Kate discovered that there is no one way to be physically active, nor is there a homogonous teenage girl. Likewise, Jess realised the importance of investing time in understanding the dynamics of her classes to better support her pupils' learning. The growth in both teachers' learning shows how the integration of reflective practices built into an activist approach facilitated this process. Armour et al. (2012) emphasise the importance of reflective practice in developing teachers' ability to critically evaluate their own teaching approaches. Furthermore, in the process of 'becoming', learning extends beyond mere development of practice; it also involves the development of the person (Attard & Armour, 2006). The evolution of Kate's and Jess's learning throughout this study demonstrates their ability to adapt and challenge some of the 'fixed boundaries' (e.g. established traditions, curriculum structures, teacher biographies) that influence their enactment of an activist approach (Jess et al., 2011). This transformation, I suggest, can be attributed partly to the activist approach itself and partly to its enactment within their respective school environments. This study provides a good example of how teachers learn

by ‘trying’, ‘doing’, and ‘sharing’, consistent with the strategies for teacher professional learning proposed by Patton et al. (2013).

6.8 Chapter conclusion

My study has outlined four new insights arising from the exploration of two teachers’ journeys as they learn to enact an activist approach in their girls’ physical education classes. Each insight demonstrates the nature of teachers’ journeys within school-based professional learning, as well as the experiences of an activist approach for the pupils and teachers. The notion of ‘becoming-Activist’, central to this thesis, captures the complex and non-linear path of teachers’ journeys in learning to use an activist approach.

Within this chapter, two important concepts that emerged from Chapters 4 and 5 were highlighted. The first, ‘attuning and not assuming’ explored how teachers can actively *listen and respond* to pupils’ perspectives, interests and needs when enacting an activist approach. Throughout Jess’s and Kate’s journeys, we observed practical examples of ‘attuning’, alongside the challenge of ‘attuning to affect’ within physical education. The second concept, ‘attentiveness and affirmation of difference’ improves our understanding of how teachers can foster more harmonious relationships in physical education, leading to a heightened awareness of relational and affective issues among pupils. This increased visibility afforded teachers, particularly Jess, to address instances of disharmony she was noticing. Notably, these concepts represent unique contributions to activist literature, highlighting shifts toward more student-centred and democratic forms of participation in physical education, which diverge from traditional practices.

The finding from this study add depth to the theoretical understanding of the critical elements in an activist approach. For example, *attuning* builds on the critical element of *listening and responding over time*, offering new language and ideas for practical application. *Attuning to affect* provides further depth and nuance to research focused on student voice and issues of embodiment. In particular, how girls experience embodiment directly influenced their learning in physical education. This highlights the importance of attuning in supporting teachers’ development in becoming-Activist. Similarly, the concept of *attentiveness and affirmation of difference* expands on the critical elements of student-centred pedagogy and inquiry-based education centred in action. Indeed, if teachers are to trust the crucial insights

girls have to offer, and work *with* them to address inequities in physical education, affirming these differences is crucial. Thus, the concept of attentiveness and affirmation can help create transformative experiences for girls in physical education. Finally, I reflected on the use of school-based professional learning throughout this study. While valuable, I argued that this approach is not a panacea and warrants careful consideration. Acknowledging traditional school structures, as well as teachers' assumptions and beliefs, should be integral to any school-based professional development programme. With these insights in mind, I advocate for future research directions to incorporate critical reflections, enabling teachers to navigate inevitable challenges or 'stuck places', such as the ones encountered during Kate's and Jess's becoming-Activist journeys.

Chapter 7: Epilogue

7.1 Why an epilogue?

I have chosen to close this thesis in the form of an epilogue. This decision arose from my ever-evolving journey of becoming-Activist, which I view as more of a starting point, rather than an end point. My intention is to create space for reflection and considerations that enable us to continue this line of research from where we currently are. Indeed, embracing an activist approach means *starting from where we are,* and I can attest that my position throughout my becoming-Activist journey has changed since the beginning of this project. As I mentioned earlier in Chapter 4, the concept of 'becoming' evolved throughout my analysis of data and the writing of this thesis, yet there remains much to be learned. Consistent with Greene's (1995) insights, this study highlights the transformative nature of two teachers' becoming-Activist journeys, which were powerful as they transcended the traditional contexts they were accustomed to. Our collective learning led to envisioning new possibilities for girls, curricula, and the dominant forms of physical education. Echoing the sentiments of Jess et al. (in press), I contend that the process of becoming-Activist sparks a re-imagining of physical education beyond the confines of the school, towards a broader lifelong agenda.

The motivation behind this study stemmed from our involvement with teaching girls and our shared aspiration to improve their experiences in physical education. It aligns with a larger movement that has emerged from decades of research, government-funded initiatives and media campaigns. Yet, the recurring issue of the 'same old story' for girls still holds true today, despite the insights gained from research (Kirk & Oliver, 2014). My study has taken a specific focus of supporting teachers in enacting an activist approach within their own school settings, responding to Armour et al.'s (2012) plea for professional learning programmes to empower teachers to learn 'continuously *in* and *through* practice' (p. 75), whilst drawing on external knowledge as required.

I acknowledge that this has been a long-running project, and although the fieldwork spanned a relatively brief period (9-months), reaching this stage in the culmination of the thesis has required significant thought, deliberation and reflection. Nonetheless, I see this as the beauty of the becoming-Activist journey, a journey marked by complexities, depth and the continual refinement of my perspectives in light of our evolving findings. Consistent with Oliver's activist research, which has accumulated through 30 years of critical reflection and

inquiry, this project has embraced the integration of thought, emotion, creativity, action, humility, and passion (Oliver et al., forthcoming). Indeed, while I may have initially sought to 'get it right' for the girls and the teachers, as I mention in Chapter 5, the progression within this journey has helped me deepen my understanding of the possibilities an activist approach can provide for girls and physical education more broadly. While Oliver's contributions have been pivotal to the learning of this approach, I see this thesis as a stepping stone in my personal journey of becoming-Activist, propelling us forward in our exploration of *that which might be*.

7.2 Reflections on the study

The Discussion chapter has provided depth to my findings and overall contributions to the field. In this section, I will take a step back to offer a broader reflection on the becoming-Activist journey, including the challenges that we encountered. This reflection is intended to guide us toward potential avenues for future research.

7.2.1 What we have learned

At the onset of the pilot study of this project, we asked the question: Can other teachers learn how to use an activist approach with girls in physical education, or is this just a Kim Oliver thing? In short, our response is 'Yes, but…'. To unpack this 'but' further, this study explored the nature of teachers' journeys in becoming-Activist. Throughout this thesis, I have recognised the non-linear and complex process the teachers (and myself) went through as we navigated the confines of traditional contexts, battled with our identities as active women and 'sporty girls', reconsidered the purposes of physical education, and learned to attune to and affirm the differences among the girls we taught. We anticipate, then, that other teachers embarking on a comparable journey toward becoming-Activist may have similar experiences. The encouraging news is that we are now better equipped to negotiate some of those challenges we encountered.

We have learned that despite teachers' well-meaning intentions, it seems common that these intentions do not always translate into practice, resulting in what is referred to

throughout this thesis as a 'stuck place' (Ellsworth, 1997) within their becoming-Activist journeys. Predicting the occurrence or nature of these stuck places is challenging, as they are deeply contextualised and influenced by teachers' professional socialisation (Timperley et al., 2007; Lawson, 2017). Stuck places are, indeed, almost inevitable when teaching a diverse group of teenage girls who are navigating their own personal journeys of physical activity, their bodies, and their social relationships. Yet, we have come to understand that engaging in critical reflections of their stuck places are key to teachers' ongoing professional learning (Armour et al., 2012). Indeed, throughout their becoming-Activist journeys, the teachers in this study not only scrutinised their own practices and fundamentally changed the way they taught physical education, but also endeavoured to transform inequitable environments that affect girls' engagement with physical education (Oliver & Kirk, 2015). Thus, encountering stuck places in any becoming-Activist journey should be expected, and as we position ourselves to work through the 'tensions of stuck-ness' presented in Chapters 4 and 5, the outcomes are more than likely to be a positive transformation.

The literature has previously shown the pivotal role of relationships in girls' engagement with physical education (Lamb et al., 2018; Walseth et al., 2018). This study has highlighted how an activist approach can transform relationships between teachers and pupils, as well as among pupils themselves. Consistent with previous activist research, we have learned that this transformation takes patience, reflection, sustained effort, and a willingness to step back in order to move forward (Oliver et al., 2015; Luguetti et al, 2019). Hence, we can expect this process to be non-linear and messy in any future research projects. Nevertheless, we have learned that investing time in *Building the Foundation* with pupils is necessary in creating a physically and emotionally safe environment where girls can participate in physical education at their own level. Thus, we anticipate others who adopt this approach will experience similar transformations in relationships. Setbacks are expected, particularly if teachers' do not invest the time in building the foundation. Yet, through reflection on classroom dynamics and efforts to foster an environment where mutual respect among pupils prevails, a sense of camaraderie can emerge (Fisette & Walton, 2014).

We have also learned more about school-based professional learning within the context of becoming-Activist, an area that has received relatively less attention in physical education research. Revisiting the teacher-centred strategies outlined by Patton et al. (2013) (see subsection 2.2.1) for facilitating teacher professional learning, we contend that 'learning by trying' emerged as the main strategy highlighted throughout this study. Teachers in this

research project tried and tested their own ideas, tailored to their own contexts, which empowered them to make meaning of 'what works' in enacting an activist approach (Patton et al., 2013). With its four critical elements, an activist approach inherently offers flexibility and adaptability to diverse school contexts (Kirk et al., 2018). However, my study revealed instances where teachers did not fully grasp these critical elements. Consequently, we have learned that by facilitating 'learning by doing' during teacher professional learning programmes, teachers can be provided with more opportunities to discuss, reflect upon, and actively engage with learning experiences that offer practical ideas into how these critical elements are manifest in practice.

7.2.2. The challenges we experienced

There were some challenges we encountered throughout this study that enable us to consider future lines of research. Firstly, the small sample size limits the generalisability of the findings to other contexts, a common constraint within qualitative research (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003). In contrast, the deeply contextualised nature of this study offers possibilities for generalisation through a 'surrogate experience' (Stenhouse, 1975) of what a becoming-Activist journey might look like for physical education teachers. Indeed, I personally experienced a 'shock of recognition' as I identified with the experiences of the teachers' throughout this project, indicating the dependability of these findings, as I believe others will similarly see themselves reflected within these chapters.

Secondly, the extensive data generated throughout the study provided challenges during the analysis process. It was a difficult decision to exclude one teacher's experiences of an activist approach. However, this decision was made after careful consideration, with the belief that future publications could stem from these data. Including Liana's data would have significantly altered the direction of the final thesis. Liana's aspiration for using this approach with her all-boys class came out of frustration with their unruly behaviour. She consistently struggled to gain their cooperation, often feeling inclined to give up. Liana's story is unique and warrants its own spotlight, particularly in the subtle shifts she experienced when enacting an activist approach with a 'disruptive' boys' class. Additionally, our approach to data generation and analysis did not adopt an intersectional lens, as the study was primarily

focused on gender within the framework of the critical elements of an activist approach. An intersectional framing may have yielded different findings.

Finally, I recognise that our aspiration to create a 'community of practice' throughout this project did not transpire as we hoped. Despite having monthly meetings scheduled for myself and all participating teachers, there were instances when school-related incidents and last-minute childcare arrangements prevented the attendance of all teachers. Patton et al (2013) suggest 'learning by sharing' is a key strategy in teacher professional learning programmes, and although teachers did share with each other on a few occasions and through individual discussions with me, we were unable to build a true community of practice. Our intention was to formally present our work at a local authority principal teachers' meeting, but the slightly abrupt conclusion to the fieldwork due to the birth of my daughter also prevented this plan.

7.2.3 Where do we go from here?

This study has provided a solid foundation for scaling up the enactment of an activist approach in Scottish schools. We have strong evidence of the nature of teachers' journeys as they learned to enact this approach and understand more about how pupils and teachers experienced this approach within their local contexts. Furthermore, we now have a clearer understanding of the challenges associated with school-based professional learning and are better equipped to address these obstacles in any future scaling up projects.

One potential avenue to explore is how the use of an activist approach in physical education could prompt teachers in Scotland to reconsider their curriculum design. Recently, His Majesty's Inspectors of Education published an *'Evaluation of curriculum design in Scotland'* (Scottish Government, 2024), which recommends staff "to involve children and young people, parents and partners more actively in designing, evaluating and developing their curriculum to ensure it remains relevant in an ever-changing society" (p. 9). Moreover, Scotland is currently undergoing a period of curriculum reform, with a significant focus on health and well-being. Supporting teachers in learning and enacting an activist approach through school-based professional development aligns closely with the nation's current educational priorities, particularly in terms of co-creating curricula.

Reflecting on the traditional structures of physical education observed throughout this study and in my ongoing observations of PETE students' teaching practices in schools, I could argue that the current form of physical education may not be relevant to contemporary society. As evidenced throughout this thesis, embracing an activist approach prompted a shift in perspective for Jess, Kate, and myself regarding physical education's place and purpose in schools. Thus, further exploration into the enactment of this approach in terms of its relevance to today's society has the potential to transform the way physical education is taught in Scotland.

As mentioned earlier, Liana's experience with a disruptive all-boys class was not within the scope of this thesis. However, this presents a promising avenue for future research, expanding on this work to encompass diverse groups of young people, including those with disabilities, from diverse ethnicities, socially disadvantaged backgrounds, and LGBTQ+ young people. With the increasing prevalence of mental health issues among young people and a recent HBSC Scotland 2022 survey indicating that confidence levels among young people are at their lowest in 28 years (Inchley et al., 2023), there's a compelling need to support teachers in adopting pedagogies of affect, such as an activist approach, in physical education. Indeed, social justice lies at the core of an activist approach and is also a fundamental aspect of the General Teaching Council of Scotland's (GTCS) professional standards. Learning to use an activist approach in physical education with a diverse range of young people and teachers has the potential to promote social justice by fostering positive relationships and promoting the health and well-being of all children and young people (GTCS, 2021).

Moreover, an activist approach, recognised in the literature as a transformative pedagogy (Oliver & Kirk, 2016); a social justice pedagogy (Lynch et al., 2021) and a critical pedagogy of affect (Kirk, 2020) holds promise for minoritised populations, particularly in physical education, where young people are often marginalised due to race, gender, sexuality and ability (Fitzpatrick, 2013). This approach, rooted in the belief of knowledge produced collaboratively *in* action, a vision towards *what might be*; and a micro-level focus, empowers young people to challenge injustices in their educational experiences (Oliver & Kirk, 2015). Recent activist work in the field has extended beyond girls in physical education to include PETE programmes and physical activity settings, such as dance, sports, coaching, community programmes and firefighting camps (see Shilcutt et al., forthcoming). This body of work, alongside my study on the experiences of girls, opens new possibilities for future activist

research. Indeed, some of the elements of an activist approach have shown promise in studies focused on marginalised groups. For example, Luguetti et al.'s (2017a/b) research used the SCIC model within an activist approach to support socially vulnerable youth. Likewise, c*ritical inquiry centred in action* and *attentiveness to embodiment* were central to Oliver's research with Latina girls (Oliver et al., 2009) and Black girls (Oliver & Lalik, 2004a/b). Exploring how an activist approach might work for young people with multiple intersecting identities through an intersectional lens would, therefore, be a compelling avenue for future research. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that girls remain underserved by physical education. Despite progress by the scholarly community, challenges for girls in physical education persist in schools.

7.3 Closing thoughts: a personal note

The becoming-Activist journeys of Kate and Jess have been intertwined with my personal reflections as a sporty girl, a teacher, a teacher educator, and a mother. As a sporty girl, I initially did not understand the complexities of gender. However, ever since the race against a stronger and faster boy at age 8 that I wrote about at the beginning of this thesis, I've harboured a sense of never feeling *good enough*. My involvement in competitive team sports persisted through my teenage years, into early adulthood, and even into my late 30s. Despite being selected for multiple teams and even captaining some, I never felt *good enough* to elevate my performance to the next level. As I've grown in my roles as a teacher and teacher educator, and now as a mother to a young girl, I've come to the realisation that I do not need to 'fix' girls in schools or 'fix' the practices of the PETE students I work with. I now recognise that I am *good enough* in making a meaningful difference in my own small way.

As I write these final words, my 7-year-old daughter is immersed in her Saturday afternoon cheer and dance classes. Witnessing her transformation into a noticeably more confident young girl throughout this experience has been remarkable. I've watched her step onto the stage with a newfound sense of self-assurance, performing in front of audiences of up to 500 people. While I can't help but encourage her to participate in soccer, a sport that ignited my own passion, she staunchly resists, asserting that 'it's a boys' game'. Despite the impressive performance of England's Lionesses in the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup finals, in her eyes, soccer remains firmly entrenched in a predominantly male domain. Watching the

boys monopolise the playground at her school, denying the girls their rightful place in the game, it's clear to me that we still have much progress to make. It's possible we may never fully bridge this equality gap, it's a longstanding issue that transcends school physical education. Nevertheless, the more teachers, young women, and girls we can learn *from* and collaborate *with*, the closer we come to addressing this disparity. Each individual we connect with represents a step forward. And this is my journey toward becoming-Activist, where knowledge is gained from embracing the perspectives of others; where we can imagine new possibilities together; and where we can strive to shape physical education into a space where everyBODY feels *good enough*. This thesis is testament to my journey.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Teacher Interview Questions (November)

The critical elements of an activist approach

1. Can you give me an example of something you have done in BtF that you think is student-centred. Tell me how it went, how the pupils responded? Has it influenced your future action? If so, give me an example?

2. Give me an example of one of the challenges you've had when you were doing something student –centred? What did you do to negotiate this challenge? What were the pupil responses to this? Describe a pupil whose response stands out to you in some way.

3. Can you give me an example of something you have done in BtF that focused on issues of embodiment. Tell me how it went, how the pupils responded? Has it influenced your future action? If so, give me an example?

4. Give me an example of one of the challenges you've had when you were doing something that focused on embodiment? What did you do to negotiate this challenge? What were the pupil responses to this? Describe a pupil whose response stands out to you in some way.

5. Can you give me an example of something you have done in BtF that is based on inquiry with then the intent to take action. Tell me how it went, how the pupils responded? Has it influenced your future action? If so, give me an example?

6. Give me an example of one of the challenges you've had when you were doing based on inquiry? What did you do to negotiate this challenge? What were the pupil responses to this? Describe a pupil whose response stands out to you in some way.

7. Can you give me an example of something you have done in BtF that you think is a response to you listening to pupils. What was your thinking behind that response? Does one pupil's response to this stand out to you? Tell me about it

8. Give me an example of one of the challenges you've had when you were doing something to help you listen to respond? What did you do to negotiate this challenge? What were the pupil responses to this? Describe a pupil whose response stands out to you in some way.

9. What are the overall challenges you have experienced in the BtF? How are the challenges similar to the pilot and how are they different?

Pupil responses to an activist approach

10. What have you noticed so far about your pupils' engagement with this approach? What specific challenges have you had with regards to pupil engagement? How have you been able to negotiate these challenges?

11. How have the pupils been responding to you and each other this year? Is this similar or different to what you experienced during the pilot?

12. How have pupils' responses to Building the Foundation influenced your thinking about your thematic unit?

Teacher Professional Learning

13. What have you done this year that is the same that you did in the pilot with respect to implementing this approach?

14. Have you made any specific changes to the implementation of this approach from last year? What was your thinking behind these changes? How did the pupils respond?

15. What contextual and structural factors have facilitated and hindered your developing and implementing the building the foundation? (pupils' response, colleague response, HT response, planning, timetable, contact time, facilities, equipment, time needed etc.) Can you talk to any specific critical elements that have been easier or more difficult to implement based on the contextual and structural factors?

Scaling up an activist approach

16. As you think about helping your colleagues or others to learn to use this approach, what advice would you have that would help them to understand about the four critical elements?

17. What advice would you give them to help them be successful in Building the Foundation?

18. What challenges do you anticipate your colleagues having if they were to implement this approach? What advice would you give them to help them negotiate these challenges?

19. As we move forward and think about helping others to learn this approach, what particular support structures do you think will be necessary to make this more effective?

20. I know some of you have been working with your colleagues to do pieces of this. Can you tell me about that experience?

21. How do you think we, as a collective group, can work together to scale up this approach? Would it be something we would want to do on our own? In collaboration with Kim? How do you feel this will work best in the Scottish context?

Appendix B: Teacher Interview Questions (February)

Structure

1. Since completing BtF, how have you structured your class? Has it worked in the ways you have hoped? Has this been similar of different than the pilot study

2. Can you give me any examples of what you have done to structure your class?

3. What would you do differently if you were to structure this again? Or if you were to give
   advice to other teachers about how to structure this, what would that be?

Using pupil data to inform your decisions

4. How have you negotiated pupil interests when approaching your thematic unit?

5. How have you used the data you gained during the BtF to help guide your pedagogical decisions for this unit? (i.e. where are you doing "what they want" versus where are you using "what you know about what helps them learn" in making your pedagogical decisions)

6. Can you give any examples of what you have done?

7. What advice would you give to other teachers in terms of using pupil data to guide pedagogical decisions? What data have you found most helpful in your planning?

8. What are the 3 most important things that you have learned about your pupils that influences their interest, motivation and learning in PE?

9. Have you noticed any gaps in their learning over the course of this year?

Pupil responses to an activist approach

10. What have you noticed about pupil engagement with this approach?

11. What is working differently than in the pilot study? What's working the same?

12. What is working better than in the pilot study? What's not working better?

Scaling up / Teacher Professional Learning

13. If we were to create workshops for teachers to learn how to use this approach, what kind of things should we include?

14. What challenges do you expect them to have whilst learning to work in this way?

15. Can you give them any advice on how they would negotiate these challenges?

16. What kinds of things over the course of the two years has been MOST useful for you in learning how to use this approach?

17. What kinds of things over the course of the two years has been LEAST useful for you in learning how to use this approach?

18. What kind of things do you wish you would have had when learning to use this approach?

Appendix C: Teacher Interview Questions (follow up post-fieldwork)

General

1. Since I last spoke to you (end of March 2017), have you been doing anything with regards to the activist approach in your practice. If so, tell me about it and if not, what are you doing now when working with girls?

2. If you are continuing to use this approach, have you found anything working differently now than when you used it previously? Is there anything working in the same way? Why do you think so?

3. Is there anything more challenging now than previously? Has anything worked better now? Why do you think so?

Barriers

There have been a number of different barriers to both implementing and learning this approach that you have brought up over the two years.

4. Structure → With regards to structure, how do you feel about this now? Has this been resolved to your satisfaction? Is there anything more you need?

5. Timetabling / Facilities → Does this continue to be a barrier? Do you have any suggestions of how this could be resolved?

6. Colleagues → Have you been able to bring any of your colleagues on board with this approach? (or at least as empathetic supporters?)

Scaling up an activist approach

7. Would you recommend this way of working with girls (or boys) to others?

8. If you were to speak to the following groups, what would you say to them about this approach…
    i. Local authorities
    ii. Individual departments
    iii. Professional associations

Pupil responses to an activist approach

Over the course of the 2 years pupils have responded to this approach in a number of ways:

E.g., They feel more comfortable; they feel their voices are being listened to; they feel their relationships have improved with their teacher and their peers; they participate more than they did; they are willing to try new things)

9. Have these responses influenced your teaching practice? If so, how? Why do you think this has influenced you?

Teacher Professional Learning

10. Have there been any "key learning" moments over the course of the two years that have stuck with you?

11. What have been your "take home" messages? Have there been anything that you have learned that you have dismissed now (or perhaps forgot about?)

Appendix D: Pupil Group Interview Questions (November)

1. What has PE been like for you since August? (highs and lows). Can you tell me a story about one of the highs that sticks out in your mind? Can you tell me a story about one of the lows that sticks out in your mind?

2. Have you noticed any changes in your teacher since August? Could you tell me a story about a change you have noticed and what she did and how your classmates responded?

3. Have you noticed any differences in how your class engages with each other? Can you share a story about one of these differences that stands out in your mind?

4. Have you noticed any changes in how YOU engage and/or feel about class? Can you share a story about one of these changes that stands out in your mind?

5. If you could tell your teacher 3 things that she could do to make PE even more interesting, what would they be?

6. If you could tell your teacher 3 things that she could do to better help you learn in PE, what would they be?

7. If you could tell your teacher 3 things that she could do to make the class work better together, what would they be?

8. If you could give your classmates 3 pieces of advice aimed at making PE either more interesting, easier to learn, or a more enjoyable space to work what would these 3 things be?

9. If you could change 2 things about yourself that you believe would make PE more interesting, easier to learn, or a more enjoyable space to work what changes would you make? Why?

10. What's been your favorite part about PE since August? Why?

11. What's been your least favorite part of PE since August? Why?

12. If your teacher was to help other teachers to learn to use this approach to teaching PE to pupils you age, what advice would you have for her?

Appendix E: Pupil Group Interview Questions (February)

1. Since I last spoke to you in the last focus group (November 2016), can you tell me about how your teacher structured your PE class? Give me some examples of things that she has done.

2. What strategies do you think your teacher is using to help motivate you or help you learn better as an individual? Can you give me some examples?

3. What strategies do you think your teacher is using to help motivate your class as whole or further their learning? Can you give me some examples?

4. Is there anything that you can advise your teacher to do that would better motivate you or your classmates?

5. Is there anything that you can advise your teacher to do that would help you or your classmates learn better?

6. What changes, with respect to your attitude, your engagement, your motivation, your participation and/or your ability to work with others, have you noticed about yourself? Give me any examples?

7. What changes, with respect to attitude, engagement, motivation, participation and/or ability to work with others, have you noticed in your classmates? Can you give me any examples?

8. Is there anything YOU can do to stay more motivated or further your learning in PE?

9. Since I last saw you, what has been your favourite part of PE? Least favourite part of PE? WHY?

10. If you were to give advice to other girls (pupils) whose teacher wanted to teach in these ways, what advice would you give them? What might they expect PE to be like?

Appendix F: Pupil Questionnaire (April)

P.E. Project Questionnaire April 2017

This questionnaire is entirely confidential. Please answer the questions as honest as possible. The questions below are related to your experiences within Core P.E. throughout the year.

1. Think about your experience in Core P.E. over the course of the year. Have you noticed any changes in your participation levels, engagement and attitude during your P.E. lessons? If so, what have these been? Why do you think you've made these changes?

2. With regards to the relationships with your classmates, have you noticed any changes in how pupils get along with each other over the course of the year? If so, what have these been and why do you think these changes have happened?

3. Have you noticed anything particular that your teacher has done to keep you more motivated during Core P.E. lessons? If so, what has this been and how have you and your classmates responded to this?

4. When you think about how your Core P.E. lessons have been structured, has this been any different to how you have previously experienced Core P.E.? If so, how has this been different?

5. Think about what you have been learning about in Core P.E. this year. Is there anything that stands out to you? Tell me about this.

6. Is there anything your teacher can do to help you learn better or stay more motivated in your Core P.E. lessons? Give some examples of this.

7. Is there anything that YOU can do to help you learn better or stay more motivated in your Core P.E. lessons? Give some examples of this.

8. Is there anything that you have learned during your Core P.E. lessons that you have been able to apply to other aspects of your life (i.e. at home, in other subjects, with friends etc.)? Tell me about this.

9. Over the course of the whole year, what has been your favourite part of Core P.E.? Why has this been your favourite part?

10. Over the course of the whole year, what has been your LEAST favourite part of Core P.E.? Why have you not enjoyed this?

11. If you were to give advice to other pupils whose teacher wanted to teach Core P.E. in the way your teacher has done, what advice would you give them? What could you tell them to expect in their Core P.E. programme?

12. Do you have any further comments about your experiences in your Core P.E. class this year?

Thank you for taking the time in completing this questionnaire.

Appendix G: Ethical Approval

Hello Cara,

Your ethics approval has now been officially extended, see Linsey's message below.

Best regards,

Virginie

Dr Virginie Thériault

Lecturer in Informal Education

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v.theriault@strath.ac.uk

From: Linsey Baxter
Sent: 08 August 2016 12:01
To: Virginie Theriault
Subject: RE: Ethics Application Form - Cara Lamb

Hi Virginie

I can now confirm the extension of ethics approval for this application and all records have been updated

Kind Regards

Linsey Baxter, RaKET Administrative Assistant (Research and KE support team)

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Appendix H: Lesson 1 Building the Foundation: Student Perceptions of Physical Education

LEARNING INTENTIONS / SUCCESS CRITERIA	LINK WITH PREVIOUS LEARNING	EQUIPMENT / RESOURCES NEEDED
LI's - To discuss what influences your enjoyment and learning in PE - To challenge you to broaden your perspectives on physical activity SC - I can communicate openly my thoughts and feelings on physical education lessons - I can keep an open-mind when discussing PE with my peers and teacher	Pupils will be discussing their past / present experiences in physical education	Classroom based 36 note cards 12 pencils 4 flipchart markers 2 whiteboard markers 12 name tags

STAGE/ TIME of LESSON	CONTENT	TEACHING POINTS	ORGANISATION / RESOURCES	Benchmark	DIFFERENTIATION
CONNECT THE LEARNING **(5 minutes)** **SHARE LI & SC**	**Introduction** - introduce the project to the class - answer any questions they have surrounding this	1. adults will not make assumptions about what is best for pupils your age. 2. tell pupils how they will be challenged 3. explain how the first 3 sit-down lessons will help us work together to see what works for them 4. tell pupils not to be afraid to voice their opinion (your feeling won't be hurt) 5. tell pupils to keep an open-mind – you are the experts on people your age	Groups of 3-4 pupils (pupil choice) Pupils should sit with people they feel comfortable with.	Responsibility Respect & Tolerance Communication	Pupil choice of grouping
ACTIVE LEARNING **(30 mins)**	**Part 1: Feelings During PE** **Part 2: Changes They Want in PE** **Part 3: Peer Interaction** *Free Writing Exercises*	Teacher will work around the groups offering support *Refer to attached sheet on "suggested interview questions and tips…" Consider how you will probe pupils to find out what they are really meaning	Groups of 3-4 pupils (as above) Pupil Task sheets Notecards Pencils	Responsibility & Leadership Communication Respect & Tolerance	Spelling and grammar is not important Pupils can work at own pace
DEMONSTRATE UNDERSTANDING **(10 mins)**	**Feedback in Large Group** This can be done after each individual task or after all tasks	Teacher can lead the discussion by selecting specific topics Repeat what the pupils are saying to ensure you have understood (probe as needed) Highlight that this will help them develop their public speaking skills	Whole Group Discussion - Pupil choice as to who reports back to large group	Communication Respect & Tolerance Responsibility & Leadership	Pupils who are confident to speak to whole group can feedback individually or on paper
REVIEW / RECALL **(5 mins)**	**Recap of lesson and review of LI / SC** **Important Question:** Who can control the issues you have raised today?	It is important that pupils understand the shared responsibility that both teachers and pupils have Highlight what you will be doing in the next session - Any questions from pupils?	Whole Group Discussion	Respect & Tolerance Responsibility	

Appendix I: Lesson 2 Building the Foundation: Co-constructing a Class Environment

LEARNING INTENTIONS / SUCCESS CRITERIA	LINK WITH PREVIOUS LEARNING	EQUIPMENT / RESOURCES NEEDED
LI's - To understand what you (the pupils) believe a physically and emotionally safe class environment entails - To co-create (pupils and teacher) ways in which the class will work together moving forward SC - I can communicate openly my thoughts and feelings on the class environment in PE - I can work with my peers and teachers to create how we will work together for the rest of the year	Pupils will discuss what we talked about last time and reflect on their experiences in PE	Classroom based PowerPoint presentation Task Sheets (5 copies of each) 36 note cards 12 pencils 4 flipchart markers 2 whiteboard markers

STAGE/ TIME of LESSON	CONTENT	TEACHING POINTS	ORGANISATION / RESOURCES	Benchmark	DIFFERENTIATION
CONNECT THE LEARNING **(10-12 minutes)** **SHARE LI & SC**	**Introduction** -Recap what the pupils said in Lesson 1 – highlighting the main themes Tell them what today is about	**Highlight:** 1. reaffirm to the pupils about keeping an open-mind and that you're feeling won't be hurt based on what they've told you 2. This really helped you to get to know what interests, motivates and engages them in PE 3. Highlight the main themes that came out of their responses 4. Anything else they have been thinking about since last time?	Large group discussion Collate and bring in responses from last week	Responsibility Respect & Tolerance Communication	
ACTIVE LEARNING **(20 mins)** *Refer to attached sheet	**Task 1: The Class Environment** **Task 2: Bullying** *Free Writing Exercises*	Teacher will work around the groups offering support Explain what a "emotionally physically safe class environment is" if needed Consider how you will probe pupils to find out what they are really meaning	Groups of 3-4 pupils (as last week) Pupil Task sheets Notecards Pencils	Responsibility & Leadership Communication Respect & Tolerance Confidence & Self-esteem	Spelling and grammar is not important Pupils can work at own pace
DEMONSTRATE UNDERSTANDING **(10-12 mins)**	**Share main points from above** **How we will work together** Agreement of "class rules" between all of the pupils and the teacher	Teacher can lead the discussion by selecting specific topics Repeat what the pupils are saying to ensure you have understood (probe as needed) Ensure health and safety is included in the rules	Whole group then small groups and whole group again	Communication Respect & Tolerance Responsibility & Leadership	Pupils who are confident to speak to whole group can feedback individually or on paper
REVIEW / RECALL **(5 mins)**	**Recap of lesson and review of LI / SC** Any questions from pupils?	There are no consequences for breaking your agreement BUT if it's not working, we will re-visit. It is important that pupils understand the shared responsibility b/t teachers & pupils	Whole Group Discussion	Respect & Tolerance Responsibility	

Appendix J: Thematic Unit Sample

Overall theme: Pupils will learn strategies to improve their wellbeing in the spaces that they occupy in their daily lives

Link to curricular areas	
Experiences and Outcomes covered (3rd Level): HWB 3-01a, 304a, 3-05a, 3-06a, HWB 3-15a, HWB 3-19aHWB 3-22a, 3-23a, 3-25a, HWB 3-27a, 3-28a HWB 3-46a, 3-47a LIT 3-02a MNU 3-03a, 3-10a	Benchmarks (4-5 can be picked for the unit): Cognitive Skills: problem solving, creativity, decision making Personal Qualities: motivation, self-esteem, determination, resilience, responsibility, leadership, respect, communication Physical Competencies: kinaesthetic awareness, balance Physical Fitness: stamina, core stability, strength, flexibility

Lesson content (approx. 12-18 lessons)

Lesson	Lesson (s) Objective (s)	Main Activities	Assessment
1	Classroom-based lesson: Pupils will review what they have learned in the BtF phase to plan unit Goal: identify what facilitates their interests, motivation and learning	Introduction to thematic unit Understanding well-being PPoint Working with others to identify the 'spaces' they occupy	Peer feedback Worksheet / Learning Journal
2 - 4	Pupils will learn strategies to improve their well-being 'at home' Pupils will work with their peers to create a well-being activity they can do at home individually or with others they live with Pupils will set personal targets to improve their overall well-being	Teacher-led activities that can be done at home (dance fitness, aerobics, metafit etc.) Pupil-led creation of new activities they can do at home Pupils set individual targets (Give-it-a go)	Journal reflection Targets recorded Think-Pair-Share
5-7	Pupils will learn strategies to improve their well-being 'at school' Pupils will work with others to develop a well-being activity Pupils will develop their understanding of how 'girls' and 'women' are portrayed in the media	Teacher-led activities that can be done at school (activities based on pupil feedback and response to taster sessions) Pupil-led creation of games they can play / activities they can do at school. Pupils-led games for peers Magazine explorations / Dove Self-esteem project	Teacher feedback Journal reflection Targets recorded & reviewed

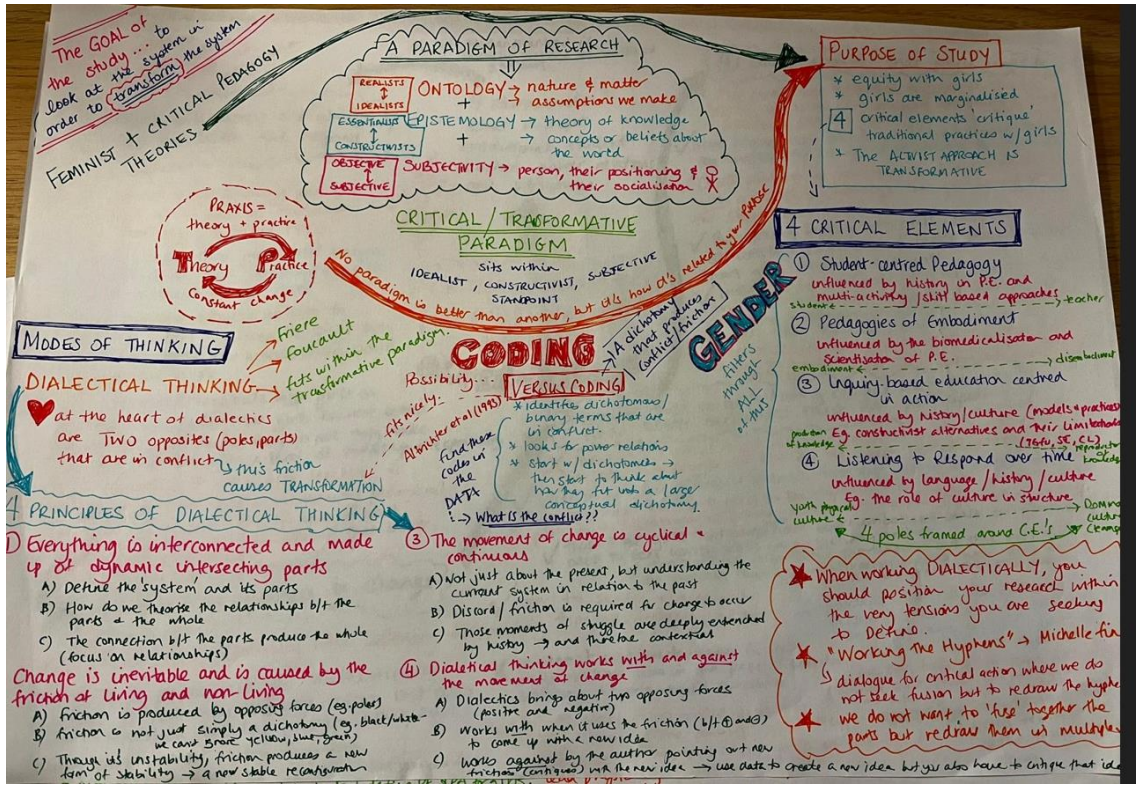
8-9	Pupils will learn strategies to improve their well-being ‘at a club / organisation’ Pupils will explore the range of opportunities available for them outside of school	Pupil participation with an organisation or club (i.e. visit to local gym, guest coach etc.) Group exploration of the organisations / clubs in their local area	Journal reflection Targets recorded & reviewed Log of activities available
10-12	Pupils will learn strategies to improve their well-being ‘outdoors’ Pupils will learn strategies of how to manage stress in their daily lives (understanding mental factors)	Outdoor learning activities (e.g. urban orienteering, Couch2 5k, pupil-created game) Develop and review targets set Meditation / mindfulness exercises	Journal reflections Targets recorded & reviewed
13-14	Pupils will understand social / emotional factors that affect their well-being Pupils will review their targets and progress over the course of the unit Pupils will make plans to educate their peers about what they have learned	Group discussions / worksheet on peer and societal influences Questionnaires Targets revisited Goals for future learning discussed Celebrate achievements at pupil assembly	Worksheets Journal reflections Targets recorded & reviewed Praise cards

Appendix K: SWOT Analysis Sample

Strengths	**Challenges**
- enjoy new activities, variety and less repetition than previous years - some enjoy team games because everyone is involved and they like working as a team - several of the girls enjoyed Zumba (instructor was enthusiastic, energetic and activity was new and fun) - girls like activities that they choose - they like when the teacher lets them work at their own pace, that there's no favourites and everyone is involved - they like when the teacher joins in as it helps her understand how they are feeling; she doesn't push you too much and lets you work at your own level - they like a teacher that motivated them as it gives them confidence - they like the way the teacher has mixed up the teams and are feeling more comfortable with each other - relationship with teacher, she encourages participation and motivates us - working in groups has created some new friendships - girls are participating and enjoying PE more than before	- not all of the taster sessions were enjoyed by everyone (Zumba) - not everyone likes the competitive nature but some do
Opportunities	**Possible Threats**
- team building activities allow the girls to get to know each other better - they want to keep variety as much as possible and to keep doing activities that they haven't tried - they participate more when they like the activity - continue to be creative in the way teams are decided - they would like to understand rules better of specific games (netball) and skills needed in certain games - they want to continue to understand what they like and dislike - feeling of comfort is key to their participation levels - preference for all girls class - know classes ability level to help cater for them - girls can develop motivating each other and trust each other - excitement for new activities - repeat activities more than once that everyone likes	- some feel they may be less active in an individual activity (i.e. Zumba – hide at the back) - participation level may drop in an activity they don't like and if they feel like they may be judged when doing it. - if boys are present, it may change their feelings on taking part - teacher has to build up new knowledge in activities they are unfamiliar with – this is a challenge - negotiating with the girls (i.e. so that everyone feels catered for and listened to) - teachers need to be flexible in what they do (this can make teachers feel uncomfortable)

Appendix L: Research Paradigm and Dialectical Mode of Thinking

An overview of the process I went through the decide on the research paradigm and the mode of thinking for analysing the data

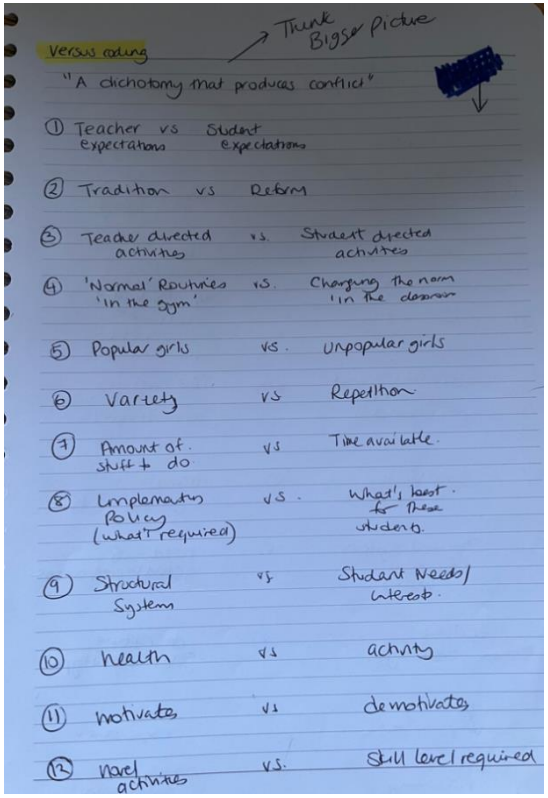


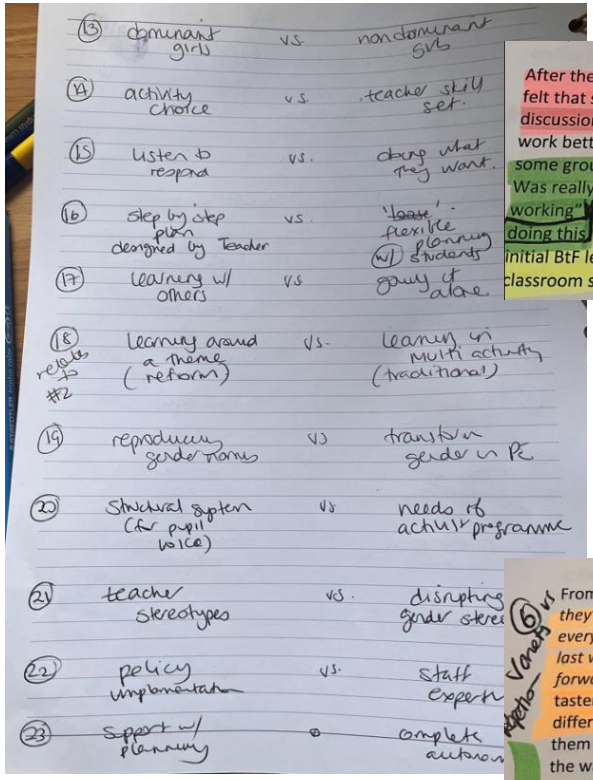
Some of the conflicts note on first read of data (Kate) when applying the Dialectical mode of thinking:

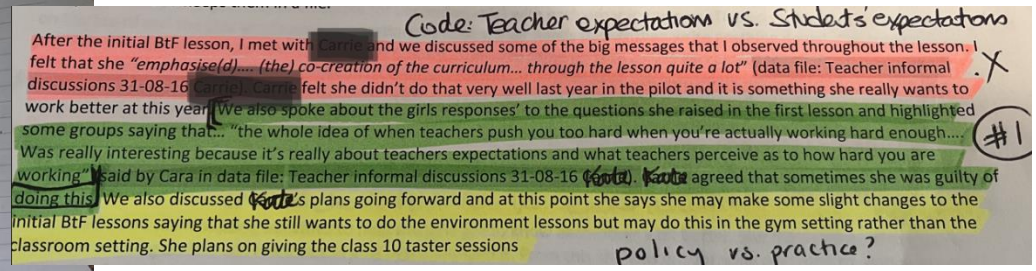
- *Gender stereotypes – the activities the girls want to do / the activities Kate things they ought to do*
- *Teachers reinforcing how girls should be in PE (e.g. how hard they should work) and the reality of what girls can do*
- *What PE is for (teachers expectations) / What girls think PE is for – there are tensions noted in this*

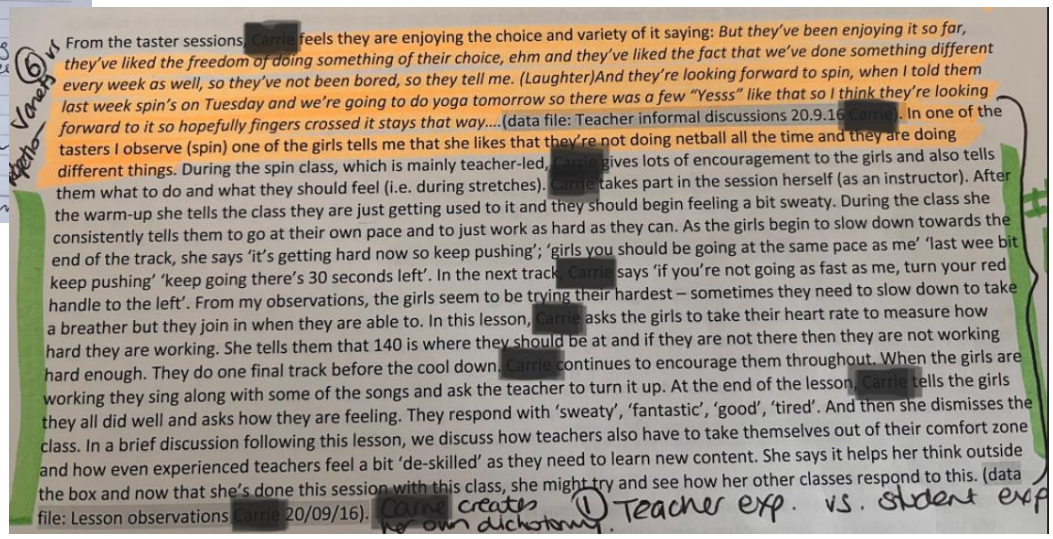
Appendix M: Samples of versus codes

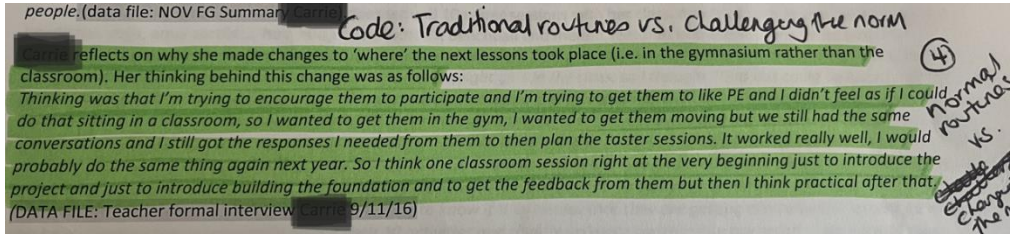
Examples of the initial versus codes found in Kate's dataset, including some data that supported these codes.







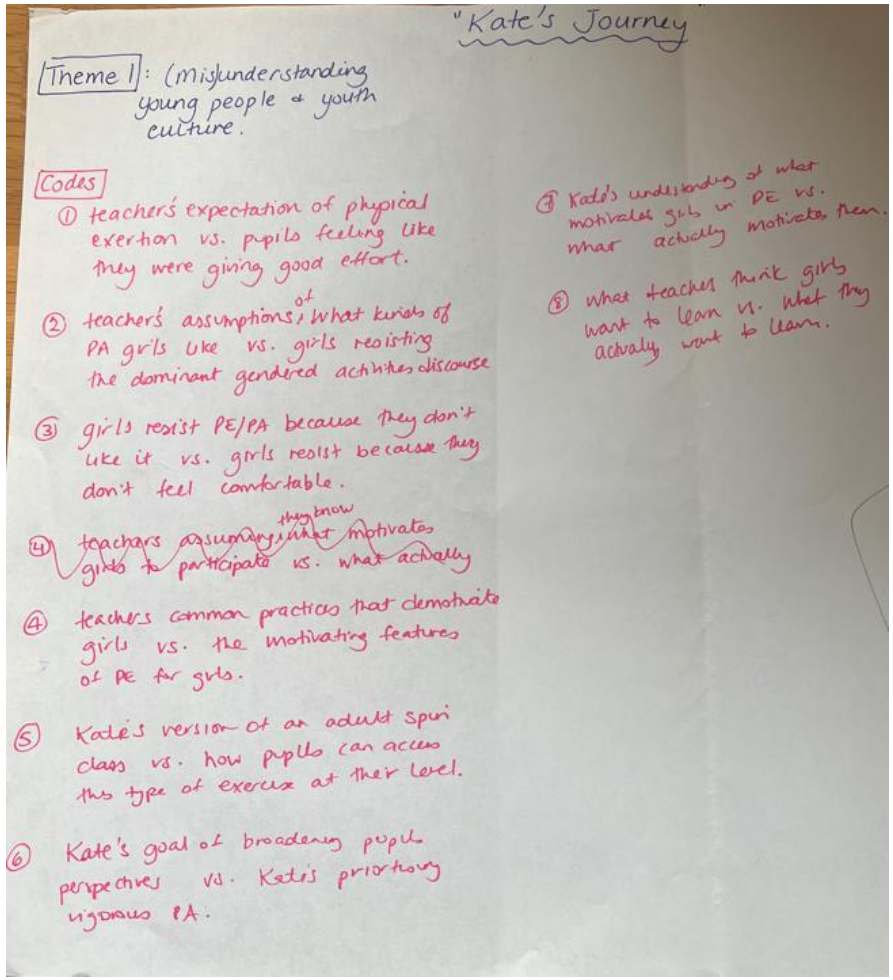




Appendix N: Samples of Concept Codes

Concept code: Misunderstanding of young people

This code was derived from clustering the following versus codes (below), with examples from the data for this cluster (to the right).



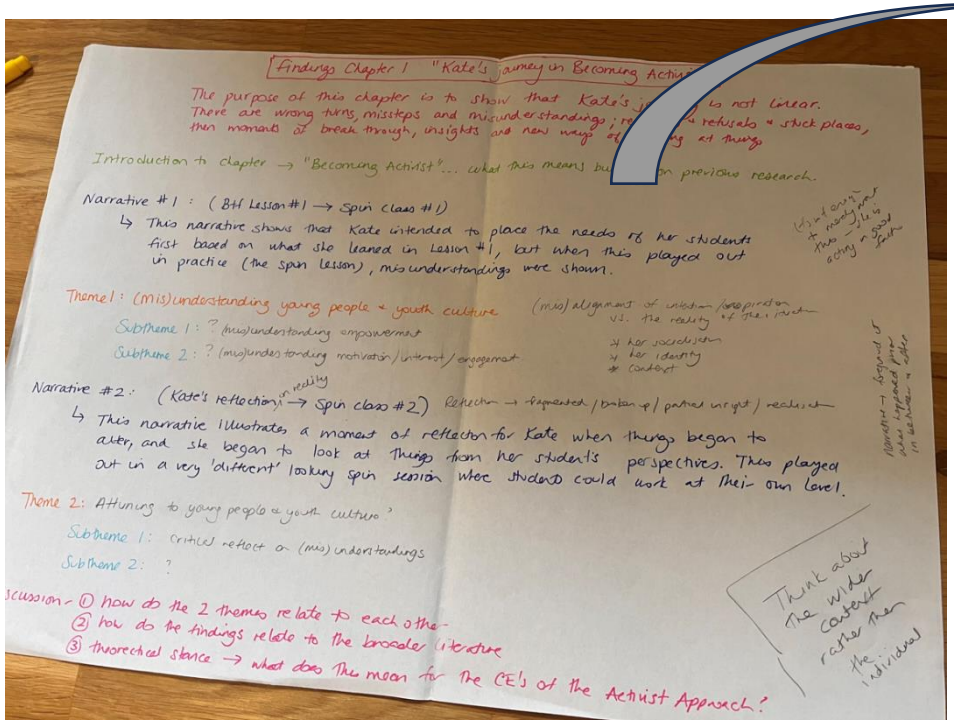
Theme 1: Meaningful intentions / reality

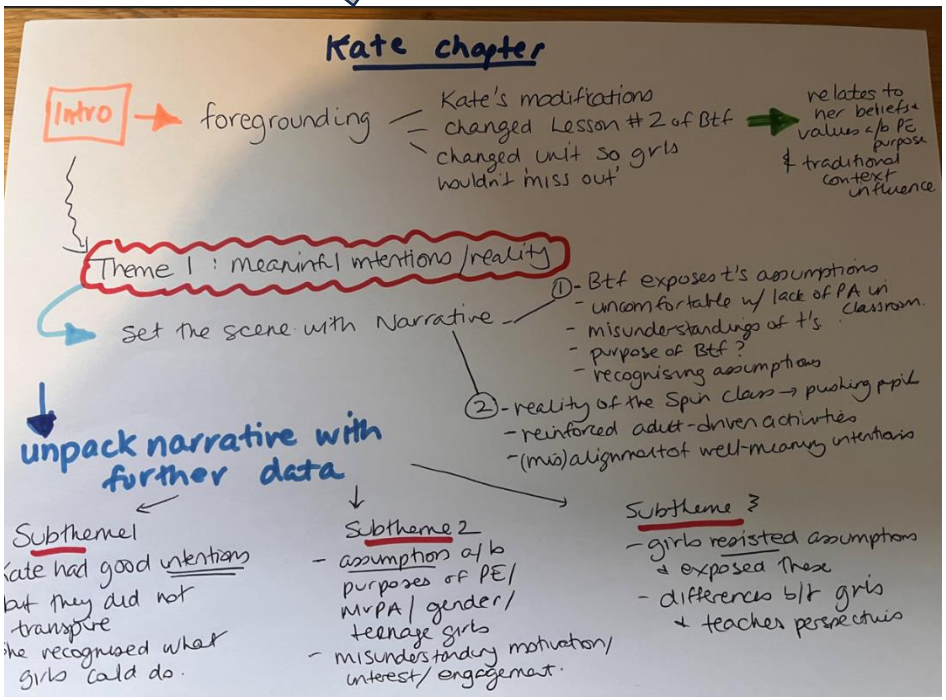
CONCEPT CODE: MISUNDERSTANDINGS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Versus Code	Data (including timeframe)	Relation to Activist Theory (4 CE's)
Teacher Expectations vs Student Expectations	August (first BtF lesson) Observations / discussions with pupils Jenny & Maeve during free writing tasks (Field Notes, August) Examples of comments from pupils: *"... teachers keep telling you to work harder but you are doing the best you can."* *""...teacher keeps shouting at you to go faster"* *"...her teacher tells her to keep going but you can't go any faster as you are trying your hardest"*	Starting from where they are Building the foundation and understanding pupils' perspectives
Teachers Assumptions vs What girls can actually do	August (first BtF lesson) Kate's discussion with the class (Field Notes, August) Kate's comments to the class about what they are telling her in the lesson: *'maybe it's about the teacher being more aware of what your individual strengths and weaknesses are rather than just grouping you all together'* *"...so that was a good point to make that you'd like more team sports. We always assume as teachers that girls don't like team sports and we also assume that if they want to do a team sport it would be netball. Okay, that's a really bad assumption but that's what we do... What we'd like to know is do you like team sport and what would you like to do and when we come of creating the curriculum later on that's bits of ideas you can give me there"*	Listening to respond? Student-centredness? Kate recognised the differences between teachers and pupils' perspectives on how hard they are working by engaging in this exercise. By hearing this from the girls and discussing some possible changes that she could make y knowing this information, Kate is showing that she is trying to become more student-centred. Assumptions teachers make about girls and what they like about PA/sport – the AA allowed Kate to begin to break down that barrier
Teachers Assumptions vs What girls can actually do	Kate's discussion with the class (Field Notes, August) Kate's comments to the class about what they are telling her in the lesson: *'Maybe it's about the teacher being more aware of what your individual strengths and weaknesses are rather than just grouping you all together'* *"...so that was a good point to make that you'd like more team sports. We always assume as teachers that girls don't like team sports and we also assume that if they want to do a team sport it would be netball. Okay, that's a really bad assumption but that's what we do... What we'd like to know is do you like team sport and what would you like to do and when we come of creating the curriculum later on that's bits of ideas you can give me there"* *"and this is really about what this whole thing is about, it's about giving you choice, giving your own opinion, your own voice to make PE better"*	Kate recognised the differences between teachers and pupils' perspectives on how hard they are working by engaging in this exercise. By hearing this from the girls and discussing some possible changes that she could make y knowing this information, Kate is showing that she is trying to become more student-centred. Assumptions teachers make about girls and what they like about PA/sport – the AA allowed Kate to begin to break down that barrier Kate commits to hearing their voices etc to make PE better. We can assume that their previous PE programme (i.e. multi-activity) did not do this.

Appendix O: Constructing the Narrative

An overview of the chapter, which leads to the development of narratives and subthemes to explore these narratives in greater depth.





Appendix P: Applying the Theoretical Framework

An overview of one of the critical elements of an activist approach. I used this overview for all four critical elements as I developed the narrative and analysed the codes. Appendix N reflects some of this thought process, showing how I connected the codes to activist theory.