

# Flexibility and Unpredictability in Participatory Research with students as co-researchers in a PE for Wellbeing (PE4W) Intervention



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## Problem Statement

There are ongoing debates about the potential of PE to bring benefits in a range of domains of children's development, (e.g. physical, mental and social). But despite this, there is still a general lack of programmes and innovations that target specifically the **wellbeing** of students through PE.

## Participatory Research Approach

**Participatory research approaches** consider students as contributing agents in all the key steps of the research process – purpose, design, implementation, analysis and diffusion of results (Clavering and McLaughlin, 2010). The involvement of students in participatory research stretches along a continuum, starting with the students themselves choosing the area to be researched and designing the research questions, and ending with the same children interpreting results and choosing whom to disseminate with (Coyne and Carter, 2018).

## Flexibility and Unpredictability issues

### • The positionality of the researcher

As student-researchers actively contribute to the research process, assuming different roles, responsibilities and degrees of ownership in different phases, their insights and experiences might lead to unexpected discoveries, fresh insights and novel ways of understanding complex issues.

How flexible will the primary researcher be to **amend** the research **focus** and the research **tools** according to the student-researchers' insights?

### • Power issues

It's not excluded that power issues might arise amongst the students themselves – students of different nationalities, introverts vis-à-vis extroverts, student-athletes and students who are not that keen on PE.

How will the primary researcher strike a balance amongst the students, so they all feel valued and have legitimacy, without interfering and without allowing more space to certain students than to others?

### • Task issues – Organizational issues – Emotional issues

The complexity of the school context cannot be ignored, and researchers can be easily faced with disruptions that might distort the research process – school activities, school outings, changes in schedules. There might not only be logistical hurdles but also emotional reactions and ethical dilemmas.

What if student-researchers drop out? What made them withdraw: lack of commitment and / or interest, or maybe the approach implemented did not allow them to feel fully participative?

## Research Objective/s

1. To explore whether and how **PE provision within schools can be reimagined to promote wellbeing for all students – PE4W.**
2. To examine **the feasibility of a novel participatory research approach**, where students **co-construct** their educational experience with their teachers.

## Participatory Research in PE

Studies within PE utilising Participatory Research have been grouped in four categories:

- Studies that encourage students to voice their opinions using a range of both traditional and innovative participatory methods (Howley et al., 2012).
- Studies during which students are placed as main negotiators of the curriculum itself (Enright and O'Sullivan, 2010).
- Studies involving students in the dissemination of their own constructed knowledge (Quarmby et al., 2020).
- Students trained to be researchers to collect evidence from their peers, to subsequently work with their teachers to co-design research lessons (Makopoulou et al., 2022).

## Research Propositions

### Participatory research contributes towards.....

- The **VALIDITY** and **RELEVANCE** of research
- The general **WELLBEING** and **ENLIGHTENMENT** of participants
- A **FLOURISHING EXPERIENCE** for all involved and their communities
- An **UNPREDICTABLE** and **ENJOYABLE** learning experience

### The importance of ongoing action – reflection – action:

- *To what extent should the primary researcher change the research direction and focus if it misaligns to new insights brought up by the students?*
- *How can the benefits of such an approach and its feasibility in reimagining PE for wellbeing be measured in a way that policy makers will be convinced to make space for student interpretation?*

## Key Figures & Visuals

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
<b>WHO</b>	A group of student-researchers, one from each class of the Year 10 cohort in a local state, senior school	(i) Same group of student-researchers (ii) Whole Year 10 cohort	(i) Same group of student-researchers (ii) One Year 10 class chosen conveniently by a PE teacher	(i) Same group of student-researchers (ii) PE teacher
<b>WHAT</b>	i. Trained as researchers ii. Explore the meaning of wellbeing iii. A consensual definition – How do 14–15-year-olds define 'wellbeing'?	Designing, distribution and analysis of a survey to explore perception of wellbeing and PE experiences of all Year 10 students (TBC based on phase 1 conclusions)	Co-constructing a set of 6 PE lessons based on the survey analysis	Feedback through focus groups Dissemination decision
<b>HOW</b>	<b>ENGAGEMENT</b>	<b>EMPOWERMENT (i) + ENGAGEMENT (ii)</b>	<b>EMPOWERMENT (i) + ENGAGEMENT (ii)</b>	<b>EMPOWERMENT (i) + ENGAGEMENT (ii) = OWNERSHIP</b>

Table 1: The phases of the PE4W intervention

Levels of Participation	PE4W Intervention
Students as Informants (Smit et al, 2020)	The students answering the survey (Phase 2)
Students as Respondents (Smit et al., 2020)	The student-researchers during introductory sessions and concluding evaluation sessions. (Phase 1 and 4) The students taking part in the PE lessons (Phase 3)
Student-Researchers	The student-researchers during the construction of the survey, the data analysis and the construction of the lessons. (Phase 2 and 3)
<b>Students as Owners (Phase 4)</b>	

Framework of Levels of Participation within the PE4W intervention

## Key References

- Clavering, E., & McLaughlin, J. (2010). Children's participation in health research: From objects to agents? *Child-Care Health Development*, 36(5), 603–611
- Coyne, I., & Carter, B. (2018). *Being participatory: Researching with children and young people: Co-constructing knowledge using creative techniques*. Springer.
- Smit, B. H., Meirink, J. A., Berry, A. K., & Admiraal, W. F. (2020). Source, respondent, or partner? Involvement of secondary school students in participatory action research. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 100.