# Does giving pupils leadership roles within extra-curricular PE clubs improve their leadership skills

## within curriculum-time PE lessons?

Liam Henry
University of East London

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this enquiry is to identify if there is a link between pupils being given the opportunity to develop their leadership skills in extra-curricular clubs and then using them within curriculum-time physical education (PE) lessons. To investigate this question, four pupils were identified as attending extra-curricular clubs regularly and not displaying acts of leadership within PE lessons. An intervention was put in place in which the pupils, with teacher support, organised drills to teach to their peers in the extra-curricular clubs. Pupils were then consulted on their opinions of leadership and re-observed to see if there was any improvement in their leadership ability or confidence to be a leader. The results of this study could have practical implications for PE teachers' practice within extra-curricular clubs.

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this active enquiry was to validate or adjust practice to best suit the young people with whom I work. The question I planned to investigate explored if there was a correlation between giving students a leadership role in extra-curricular sports clubs and how this impacted on their display of leadership skills in curriculum-time physical education (PE) lessons.

This enquiry will initially outline my opinions on the question, and will then address what literature has said about the subject before moving on to what action research is and means. This will lead on to describing the intervention, which will be followed by the steps taken in conducting the enquiry, an evaluation of the findings and the implications it will have for future practice.

I have worked within a mainstream school for nine years and I believe that within PE there are a number of non-academic skills that students need to learn in order to holistically support them. This can be achieved through structured tasks or unstructured time within a physical context. The particular skills I am referring to are things like teamwork, leadership and problem solving. They are not only essential in PE but in all areas of the curriculum and life when students leave education. Kuh et al. (2011) state that it is the job of schools to make

classroom experiences more productive in order to encourage students to devote more of their time outside of school to educationally purposeful activities. Particularly in PE where the long-term goal is for students to enjoy exercise and join local sports teams, these skills will play an integral part. I believe that leadership roles can help to improve leadership skills amongst young people; however, I was unsure whether structured roles in the more relaxed environment of an extra-curricular club would benefit students.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The intervention chosen as a focus was extra-curricular clubs and the leadership skills that can be developed through them. There are a number of benefits to attending these clubs that pupils can potentially gain access to. Reeves (2008) states that attendance at extra-curricular clubs can improve behaviour, academic performance and personal skill development. This could potentially be an advert for the clubs, aimed at increasing pupils' attendance.

There is a plethora of literature to support the promotion of leadership, amongst other things, within extra-curricular clubs. Haensly et al. (1985) argue that these clubs may provide students with a chance to develop psychomotor talents alongside leadership skills. Massoni (2011) adds to this by stating that lessons in leadership learned by pupils will help them to become successful adults. Lau et al. (2014) proclaim that PE clubs are the most prominent club within a school in boosting leadership skills. Collectively these authors identify that PE extra-curricular clubs can be one of the most important spaces to learn and develop leadership skills. However, it is important to look at what might affect a pupil's leadership skills before they enter a club. Hancock et al. (2012) find that young people's views on leadership are affected by activity roles and the support of their parents and others around them. They therefore recommend that adults should facilitate leadership within extra-

curricular clubs in order to develop their skills. So, holistically, pupils need support to build leadership skills, and maybe PE clubs are not enough.

It is important to consider why leadership is important for young people and how PE can affect this. Boyd (2001) rates leadership skills as being essential for young people to feel satisfaction and contribute to society. Karnes & Stephens (1999) add that leadership experiences can motivate young people, which benefits students holistically as they can apply this motivation across the school. Mitra (2006) identifies that leadership opportunities can strengthen pupils' ownership of their learning. This is important for secondary students, who are expected to study for exams independently.

In relation to PE, Gould & Voelker (2012) highlight that sport and PE are socialisation vehicles for young people, with opportunities being presented in an interactive and enjoyable way to develop leadership skills. This links closely with the previously mentioned opinion of Lau et al. (2014) and can go some way to identifying PE extra-curricular clubs as being a great place to develop young people's leadership skills.

Despite the large amount of literature to support the promotion of leadership within extra-curricular clubs, there is a lack of studies into whether actively giving students leadership roles within clubs can improve upon pupil leadership skills in curriculum-time PE lessons. Moriss (2017) conducted research into providing students with the chance to adopt leadership roles within information and communications technology (ICT) lessons. He noted that not only did it improve the pupils' leadership skills, but in some situations the pupils were more knowledgeable than him about certain technologies. He provided space for them to inform him, which improved his relationship with pupils as well as their skills as a leader. Although Moriss's research is not directly linked to extra-curricular clubs, it shows the value in

giving students opportunities to be leaders. Jenkinson et al. (2012) conducted research in which pupils were given leadership roles within PE curriculum-time lessons. They were pre-trained in an intervention, similar to that used in extra-curricular clubs, about leadership skills and they were able to apply them within the lesson. These pupils were then identified as being able to facilitate, activate and motivate their teams in the lesson. This study showed an exclusive link between being provided with an opportunity to develop leadership skills outside of curriculum-time PE lessons and pupils being able to deploy them during lessons. Both of these studies found that leadership skills helped within lessons and they both placed value on leadership opportunities for pupils.

## ACTION RESEARCH

Action research is a piece of research conducted by a professional within their setting. Bourke et al. (2012) argue that reflective professionals need to deliberate about their skills and knowledge in relation to the conditions and the context in which they operate. Action research can help to provide support for professionals as it provides data or a hypothesis related to a particular question they would like answered. Beal (2018) states that data-driven instruction for practitioners in its simplest form is good educational practice. There are a number of benefits of conducting action research, with the overriding benefit appearing to be that there is potential for it to bridge the gap between practice and theory. By conducting action research, a practitioner is able to try to make meaning of theory having seen it in a practical scenario. Schön (1987) calls this reflection-on-action, in which a professional will reflect on something after it has happened in order to perceive its value or how they could improve it. For these reasons, this active enquiry followed the structure of Kemmis & McTaggart's (2000) 'Action Research Spiral' model. This model was adopted to implement change within

practice, make observations and then reflect on the findings. This can then be used to influence practice, and then can be repeated, beginning the spiral again.

Data collection and teacher reflection on this data are seen as being critical for meeting the learning needs of the student population. Data-driven decisions can be the catalyst for student achievement. By teachers taking on the role of an action researcher they are able to reflect upon their practice and begin to make curriculum data-driven decisions, which is a very important role for teachers. There are two types of data, qualitative and quantitative. Attride-Stirling (2001) discusses qualitative data as being detailed and specific to the participants in the research. Questions and interviews must include open-ended questioning so that the data collected is rich and opinion-driven and should be conducted through small group interviews, observations or open-ended questionnaires. Contrastingly, quantitative data is outlined by Creswell (2012) as being both informal and statistical and suits a large-scale enquiry as it can give you a bigger snapshot of what is being researched. Both forms of data have strengths and weaknesses associated with them and would be worthy of their own investigation.

This research uses quantitative data collection methods, by means of questionnaires and observations. The study included four participants who were each given a questionnaire to fill out both at the beginning and end of the study to see if there was a change in the statistical data after the intervention was completed.

By seeking participant opinions of leadership, they may feel empowered, which may help them to see value in the study. Quantitative observations were also conducted, in which each participant was observed in a lesson before and after the implementation of the intervention. Acts of leadership were recorded during the observed lessons and then combined to identify any trends or any emerging



*Figure 1: An example of the questionnaire pupils filled out*

patterns in the data. This is then related back to the research question, and the data collected is used to reflect upon and adjust teaching practice.
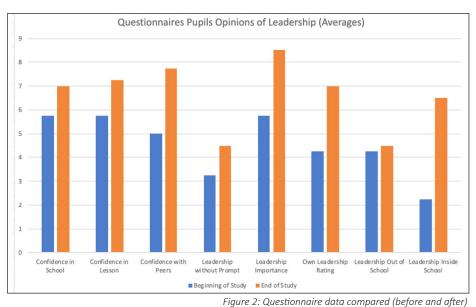
## THE ENQUIRY AND INTERVENTION

This enquiry relates to PE, as there is a hidden curriculum that teachers of the subject either knowingly or unknowingly convey to pupils. Halstead & Jiamei (2009) outline the hidden curriculum as being the values, skills and norms that are not formally on the curriculum. Leadership is not formally on the curriculum within PE lessons but is something lessons can coax out of pupils. Focusing on leadership

intentionally during extra-curricular clubs can not only provide students with a positive experience but can help them to learn a key life skill that they can take into being an adult member of society. However, gender roles are also an important factor to consider, Hatton & Smith (1995) highlight the perception that men make better leaders than women. In this study, girls at the school will be asked to take part in order to obtain a more holistic answer to the posed question. There is also an opportunity for the girls taking part to potentially enhance their ability and confidence in terms of their leadership, which can aid them in applying for leadership roles in the future.

**Does giving pupils leadership roles within extra-curricular PE clubs improve their leadership skills within curriculum-time PE lessons?**

Before starting the research, a plan was constructed to identify how data and participants would be gathered, and which ethical considerations would need to be taken into account. Four students who had been observed in extra-curricular clubs previously were identified and invited to participate in the study. Prior to participant agreement the BERA (2011) guidelines were consulted which outline the importance of confidentiality, the right to withdraw and consent. The research enquiry obeyed these guidelines, as participants remained confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Participants were clearly informed before beginning participation that they had a right to withdraw at any time and were reminded of this right throughout the commencement of the study

Initially all students were given a questionnaire to fill out exploring both their opinions of leadership and their perception of their own leadership skills (Figure 1). They were then formally observed within a curriculum-time PE lesson. The observation focused on acts of leadership and whether students were being prompted to use leadership or not (Figure 2). The number of times students used leadership skills and whether these were prompted or unprompted were recorded. Tennis extra-curricular sessions were used to complete the intervention. Each student was required to pre-plan three different and unique drills in which to lead their peers during three consecutive sessions. Students could not repeat a drill they had already seen done by a peer. They then carried out the prepared drills alongside the researcher's pastoral support; this remained limited, however, so as not to interfere with the intervention findings. Students were required to complete the same questionnaire filled in at the beginning of the enquiry, and a further observation was carried out during curriculum-time PE lessons. Finally, preliminary and subsequent findings were compared and contrasted to identify patterns within the data (Figures 2 & 3).
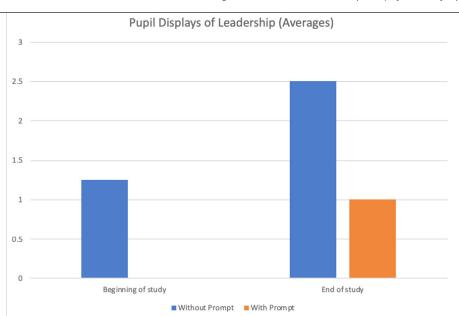


*Figure 2: Questionnaire data compared (before and after)*



*Figure 3: Acts of leadership within lesson (before and after)*

## FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

There was a clear correlation between the leadership skills developed during the intervention and student leadership development within mainstream PE lessons. Through participants being supported to lead parts of extra-curricular clubs there was an improvement in all of their perceived abilities and opinions of leadership. Furthermore, all participants displayed more acts of leadership in curriculum-time PE from the initial lesson observations to the final ones conducted. Thus, within the research setting, leadership roles in extra-curricular PE clubs can improve leadership skills in curriculum-time PE for students.

However, upon reflection a mixed methods approach, which includes both quantitative and qualitative data collection (Bryman 2006), could have been adopted. This might have provided a more accurate representation of pupils' leadership development throughout the intervention. Qualitative data collected might have provided a clearer indication as to why the pupils running part of the extra-curricular clubs improved their skills as leaders. It might also have outlined some negatives that they may not have been able to convey in the questionnaires.

There is also the observer's paradox to consider. Labov (1981) outlines this as participants in a study acting unnaturally because they know they are being

observed. Therefore, data recorded may not have been completely accurate; this may have been the case during the enquiry's lesson observations. To help combat this, observations could be conducted more frequently to increase the naturalness of the research setting. Alternatively, more observations and longer intervention sessions could have been conducted to collect more data to analyse. With regard to sample size, more participants within this enquiry would have increased the reliability and validity of the findings, thus reducing extraneous variables and verifying a causal relationship between leadership in intervention and mainstream PE.

## CONCLUSION

As a result of this enquiry, the extra-curricular clubs on my timetable can now be focused on providing students with an opportunity to learn a life skill which can also be used by the pupils during my lessons. During a study of leadership, Moriss (2017) found that giving students leadership roles in the classroom can build a positive relationship between teacher and pupil, which, after all, is the aim of every teacher. Halstead & Jiamei (2009) define the hidden curriculum as being experiences that are not on the formal curriculum and are underlying structures that underpin the social relations of a school as well as classroom life. This enquiry has put a part of the hidden curriculum under the microscope and given me some form of support for my practice within extra-curricular clubs. I can give students opportunities to learn more than just sport within my extra-curricular clubs, which adds more meaning to them attending. I can also use this new knowledge to help develop students who may lack in leadership or be too shy to use it. This can help provide the pupils with positive experiences of PE which can shape their long-term opinions of the subject. ■

## REFERENCES

Attride-Stirling, J. (2001) 'Thematic networks: an analytic tool for qualitative research'. *Qualitative Research*, 1(3), 385–405.

Beal, J. S. (2018) 'Effective practices in teacher preparation programs: reading action research projects'. *Odyssey: New Directions in Deaf Education*, 19, 34–7.

BERA (British Educational Research Association) (2011) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research.* London: British Educational Research Association.

Bourke, T. Ryan, M. & Lidstone, J. (2012) 'Reclaiming professionalism for geography education: defending our own territory'. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 28(7), 990–8.

Boyd, B. L. (2001) 'Bringing leadership experiences to inner-city youth'. *Journal of Extension*, 39(4), 1–5.

Bryman, A. (2006) 'Integrating quantitative and qualitative research: how is it done?'. *Qualitative Research*, 6(1), 97–113.

Creswell, J. W. (2012) *Educational research: planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*, 4th edn. Boston, MA: Pearson.

Gould, D. & Voelker, D. K. (2012) 'Enhancing youth leadership through sport and physical education'. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, 83(8), 38–41.

Haensly, P. A. Lupkowski, A. E. & Edlind, E. P. (1985) The role of extracurricular activities in education. *The High School Journal*, 69(2), 110–19.

Halstead, J. M. & Jiamei, X. (2009) 'Teachers' surveillance and children's subversion: the educational implications of non-educational activities in the classroom'. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 1(1), 2264–8.

Hancock, D. Dyk, P. H. & Jones, K. (2012) 'Adolescent involvement in extracurricular activities: influences on leadership skills'. *Journal of Leadership Education*, 11(1), 84–101.

Hatton, N. & Smith, D. (1995) 'Reflection in teacher education: towards definition and implementation'. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 11(1), 33–49.

Jenkinson, K. A. Naughton, G. & Benson, A. C. (2012) 'The GLAMA (Girls! Lead! Achieve! Mentor! Activate!) physical activity and peer leadership intervention pilot project: a process evaluation using the RE-AIM framework'. BMC Public Health, 12(1), 55. doi: 10.1186/1471-2458-12-55.

Johnson, R. B. Onwuegbuzie, A. J. & Turner, L. A. (2007) 'Toward a definition of mixed methods research'. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 1(2), 112–33.

Karnes, F. A. & Stephens, K. R. (1999) 'Lead the way to leadership education'. *The Education Digest*, 64(8), 62–5.

Kemmis, S. & McTaggart, R. (2000) 'Participatory action research'. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln, (eds) Handbook of qualitative research, pp.567–605. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Kuh, G. D. Kinzie, J. Schuh, J. H. & Whitt, E. J. (2011) *Student success in college: creating conditions that matter.* Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.

Labov, W. (1981) 'Field methods of the project on linguistic change and variation' (Sociolinguistic Working Paper no. 81) Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Lau, H. H. Hsu, H. Y. Acosta, S. & Hsu, T. L. (2014) 'Impact of participation in extra-curricular activities during college on graduate employability: an empirical study of graduates of Taiwanese business schools'. *Educational Studies*, 40(1), 26–47.

Massoni, E. (2011) 'Positive effects of extra curricular activities on students'. Essai, 9(1), article 27.

Mitra, D. (2006) 'Increasing student voice and moving toward youth leadership'. *The Prevention Researcher,* 13(1), 7–10.

Moriss, A. D. (2017) 'Giving pupils licence to lead: supporting teachers' continuing professional development in the use of ICT'. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of East London.

Reeves, D. B. (2008) 'The learning leader/the extracurricular advantage'. *Learning*, 66(1), 86–7.

Schön, D. A. (1987) *Educating the Reflective Practitioner.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.