

Peter Bilsborough Student Award Entry

Inclusion through Islam: Muslim girls' experiences within Physical Education Jill Ferguson

For many years there has been a large emphasis on inclusion, engagement and participation of all pupils within the physical education (PE) environment, whether through primary or secondary school (Slee & Allan, 2001). Countless research articles and academic literatures such as Slee & Allan (2001); Green (2008); and Penney et al (2018) have been published with the intention of providing educators the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding on how to improve their personal practice to create a more inclusive learning environment. However, little research has been carried to explore the position of culture and religion in relation to young peoples' experiences of PE, especially in the context of PE in Scotland. Therefore, the aim of this journal entry is to review a paper that explores the role of physical activity on the lives of young Muslim women. The aim of this review is to draw out some of the key issues that might inform PE teachers and researchers in Scotland and make some suggestions to develop this area in the future.

Europe has recently seen a substantial increase of cultural and religious diversities, specifically in Islam (Benn & Pfister, 2013). This topic has become more prominent for teachers and highlights fundamental difficulties that we may become exposed to as a result of this. Difficulties may be centred on issues such as clothing, religious festivals, dress codes, swimming, diets and parental attitudes to PE (Green, 2008). As educators, it is essential for us to understand or be aware of all individual pupil backgrounds and beliefs in order to reduce conflicts and creating the most positive learning environment possible. To discuss the significance of pupil beliefs and cultures, Walseth (2015) provided insight to the relationship between young Muslim women and their involvement in physical activity (which included their experiences of PE). The author carried out life-history interviews with 21 participants, all of whom were Muslim women aged from 16-25 years old. The interviews consisted of three parts:

1. Personal information (date of birth; family size; background; parents' education)
2. Life story (Description of their life 'as a book')
3. Questions about topics of interest relating to the study.

Drawing on her findings, Walseth (2015) highlighted many cultural and religious issues that are relevant to physical education. The key issues highlighted were that Muslim girls who participate in competitive sports clash with the 'ideal hegemonic femininity identity' within their ethnic group (Walseth, 2015) which is described as shy, passive and non-competitive. There is high value placed upon the role of the woman as wives and mothers in many Muslim communities and therefore sport is seen as a distraction in terms of a familial role (Dagkas, Benn & Jawad, 2011). When they discussed their levels of physical activity, low participation was evident. This was especially the case in mixed gender classes which were male-dominated (Hargreaves, 2007), and therefore, limited Muslim girls in the physical education setting as they do not want to misrepresent

themselves in front of males. This links to the above point made around the 'ideal identity' and influences female participation in schools with co-ed PE as the norm. Secondly, religious festivals (such as Ramadan) can also have an effect on participatory levels in physical activity. For example, if a class is on 'a block of swimming' during Ramadan, then the Muslim pupils can be affected as they would not be able to get in the pool due the possible consumption of water. This, in turn, could make them feel isolated or like 'the odd one out' in the social setting. Although this highlights just two conflicts, there are many more to consider such as parental influences, dress codes and diets – to name a few.

To conclude, through the research by Walseth (2015), we are able to gain an understanding and insight into to religious and cultural beliefs and the role that this has within physical education. Although the research provides a link between pupil participation and their experiences, we must note that this research is limited to Islam only and does not account for everyone. From this research, we can identify some key issues that may could be addressed to create a more inclusive PE environment. Suggested methods to address these issues within schools include celebrating cultural diversity; whole school health and well-being days; providing the option of all-female spaces to engage in physical activity; and for teachers to engage in academic literature to fill gaps of knowledge.

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