

## Chapter 11 – Democratic pedagogies in PE & YS

Throughout this chapter we emphasise that at the heart of your curriculum/program planning, should be what you want young people to learn at the end of your class/program, which might center an element of social change immersed within the activity chosen. For us, this includes skills such as learners participating fully in class decisions/discussions, listening to their voice to make choices, learning to negotiate and respecting others. Centering these socio/emotional skills as learning intentions can be a useful directive when changing one's curriculum from a physically orientated focus or a program that rotates activities/sports each term (e.g., autumn football, winter hockey, spring cricket, summer athletics), which privileges motor skills.

### Democratic pedagogies in PE & YS

Planning involves pre-arranging pedagogies to implement and considering what you want young people to learn. Of course, a contextual specific endeavor, what works in the rural parts of Wisconsin, USA in comparison to the coast of Sao Paulo, Brazil are bound to be vastly different. For example, the ecological environment such as the terrain, weather, and access to facilities will vary. Furthermore, the sociocultural aspects such as ethnicity, culture, socioeconomic means, and individual needs will also need to be considered in each context. Thus, planning for a young person's background is highly important and educators need to research the complex lives and identities of our young people. When a democratic approach is taken, young people's voices, choices, responsibilities, and negotiation skills, are harnessed. Furthermore, such an approach to education aims to create spaces for empowerment where young people and educators learn to be critically conscious, but also active democratic citizens. Learning becomes a problem posing endeavor (see Figure 3, Chapter 15; Freire, 1987) where young people find the answers and solutions to issues raised with autonomy. Problem posing is opposed to regurgitating information, such as learning the BEEF (bend, eyes, elbows, follow-through) acronym in basketball and specific sporting terminology. Instead, young people could be asked to create an equitable game (e.g., striking and fielding, target, invasion) and the parameters of the game can be negotiated between team members. Rather than learning the BEEF acronym, young people are required to plan, discuss, negotiate, deliver (to peers), evaluate, re-design, bargain, etc. and peer teaching becomes daily practice. Additionally, instead of setting learning objectives, educators can begin each lesson/session with learning questions to set the scene. For example, What steps do I need to take to go out of my comfort zone? What skills are needed in order to work successfully in a team? What types of games do I enjoy?

Below we share a case study and several strategies that can be used in PE settings. While some are relevant to YS and can easily be adapted, chapter 15 entails more specifically how critical pedagogies can be enacted in YS settings.

#### ***Case study 1: A negotiated curriculum in action, Maariyah Karim, Pre-service Teacher, University of East London***

*When given the opportunity to implement an intervention to try to increase participation in PE, I opted to negotiate the curriculum with eleven year 9 (age 13-14) girls for 5 weeks. Curriculum negotiation intentionally allows students to contribute to the planning of their educational*

*program. Negotiation was done through a pre-focus group; through this focus group it was important to make sure students understood the choices they had. Girls in this particular study had the chance to negotiate activities they wanted to include in their lessons, who they wanted to work with, leadership roles and a music playlist. After each lesson, exit tickets were given out to gain feedback on how the lesson made them feel and what activities they wanted to do the following week. Lessons were then planned according to student responses. A post intervention focus group then took place to find out how negotiating PE lessons made the girls feel and the influence it had on their engagement towards PE in comparison to how they were initially taught (direct instruction). The findings from this study showed that girls were eager to participate in PE and embraced having choice in their curricula. They took accountability for their learning and took their roles and responsibilities seriously. Engagement, enjoyment, and confidence in PE significantly increased during the negotiation process. The girls improved their decision-making skills and became proactive in their learning. On several occasions, unsurprisingly, the girls showed that they are more than capable when given the opportunity.*

*To overcome the many barriers faced by students in PE, it is vital to collaborate to produce a more appropriate, positive PE environment. Negotiating the curriculum allows students to be the main vehicles for construction of their experiences and understandings. It is important that teachers support students' autonomy rather than controlling their behaviour to increase engagement and attitudes within PE. Curriculum negotiation allows students to communicate and be listened to, building a supportive environment between student and teacher. Being a supportive teacher often promotes enjoyment, which influences engagement.*

#### *Tips for implementation*

- *Educators should be aware that there are many ways to approach curriculum negotiation and should adapt to suit the needs of their students – this approach may not work for every class*
- *Make it clear when introducing the approach that you are 'negotiating' and that you might not be able to say yes to everything*
- *Have collaborative rules in place for students – decided as a group. Make sure all students feel comfortable and listened to. Reiterate the importance of respecting one another's choices, opinions, and views*
- *Negotiating the curriculum is like designing a curriculum from scratch. Make sure you plan thoroughly. What do you want to negotiate? How much choice are you willing to give the students? What do you want the outcomes to be? For example: Learning? Engagement? Enjoyment?*

#### **Strategies**

Democratic pedagogies are critically orientated in their nature (voices, choices, responsibilities, negotiation skills are harnessed) and when implementing critical pedagogies, it is important to set a welcoming and inviting tone/environment. Thus, critical pedagogies should be trauma informed and take restorative approaches. Next, we explain several strategies that we have used that can be adapted for your context.

### *Collaborative expectations*

Cultivating healthy social relations is a process and takes patience by all involved. Often, on day one of class/program educators traditionally set out ‘ground rules’ and the ‘expectations’ they require young people to adhere to. Fundamentally, this is an authoritarian hierarchical view of setting expectations and highlights the ongoing learning space dynamics. Instead, creating expectations *with* young people is one way that the environment can be more democratic. It invites young people to have a voice and choice in their program. Below are two ways on how you could create expectations with young people:

A)

1. Before young people come to PE/YS program have them complete a quiz on what they think the expectations should be for the learning space
2. Anonymise these responses
3. On day one of the class have young people decide which one’s they all agree with (without disclosing who came up with what expectation)

B)

1. On the first day, have young people write on a piece of paper three expectations they would like for the class/program
2. Read them out and decide as a group which one’s everyone/majority agree with

Creating expectations with young people can be a useful and productive process, giving them responsibility for their learning environment. It also allows young people to hold others accountable. For example, you may hear peers reminding each other: ‘hey, we didn’t agree to bring phones to class’. However, as the educator you must tread carefully and discuss with students what you are doing rather than just implementing the steps. Discuss how expectations are traditionally set and ask young people why they think that can be problematic/useful. Engaging young people within this process is helpful. You may also wish to include some of your own expectations for the class. Below are some that we have used in our spaces:

- ✓ Actively listen to others, have an open mind and be willing to learn
- ✓ Allow yourself to be critical thinkers of PE/YS ideologies and traditional practices
- ✓ Challenge by choice - you have a responsibility to choose to the level in which you challenge yourself
- ✓ Keep the conversations in the room – confidentiality of sharing
- ✓ Collaborative and communicate – dialogue rather than debate
- ✓ Act as you would like people to act to you – be kind
- ✓ Be prepared for discomfort
- ✓ Be respectful that everyone has diverse experiences, views and levels of understanding topics
- ✓ Share comments of support, encouragement, and feedback
- ✓ Go to the toilet if you need to, you are human
- ✓ Eat if you are hungry, no one can learn when hungry [avoid allergy foods for others]

Throughout this process there will inevitably be negotiations that need to take place, both with you as the educator but also peer to peer. It may be that as the educator you don't necessarily agree with some of the expectations but letting go of 'control' over young people is important to promote socially just values. Sometimes, how educators have been taught to give rules, routines and regulations simply don't fit with what young people need. When the expectations are agreed upon by all, ask the young people to sign a 'learning space contract', which holds them accountable formally. You could ask learners to create a poster of the class expectations and each lesson/session bring it out as a reminder. Finally, remember, it is worth coming back to the expectations frequently throughout the year/program and be willing to adapt them.

### ***PE and sport councils***

At first, when changing learning from a motor focus, it can seem daunting and approaching each class/program to seek opinions on what young people want to learn about through their PE/YS program can be a timely endeavour. PE and YS councils are a highly beneficial strategy to support young people in their leadership skills, but also to make large scale curriculum changes including the voices of your learners. Asking young people to self-nominate and complete an application form (could be a couple of bullet points for primary aged children) is a useful skill and practice to be successfully appointed on the council. The decisions young people make can be related to:

- Sports kit/uniforms
- Surveying their year group on extracurricular/holiday clubs they want offered
- Surveying their class on curriculum choices
- Changing rooms and sports facilities
- Organising sport/field days
- Represent their year group in assemblies
- Organize competitions
- General liaising between educator and learner
- Responsible for display boards

Young people are given an opportunity to practice sharing their ideas in coherent ways and put leadership skills into action. Of course, any council should be representative of the student body and represent the views of their classmates (not just their own views). Thus, an equitable recruitment panel for such a post should take place – not simply the favorite or most motor competent young person should be appointed. Finally, as the educator you must be prepared to learn and adapt your knowledge and pedagogies based on young person feedback. This journey is a constant cycle, however, highly worthwhile. Below we share a case study that highlights the power a positive experience school leadership can have as a student.

### ***Case Study 2: A reflection on council opportunities, Charlotte Bevan, Pre-service Teacher, University of East London***

*During my time at school, I was Head Girl of the Sports Committee. I was responsible for organising various sporting events, such as fixtures, sports days, and sports week. I ensured students were present for their events, noted scores, prepared equipment, and assisted with*

*different activities. I saw first-hand the amount of preparation and organisation that went into these events and I enjoyed being part of the process as a student. We led sporting events for other primary and secondary schools, which allowed me to gain teamwork and leadership skills by managing groups and planning lessons from an early age.*

*I worked closely with the PE department to improve communication between staff and students and proposed ideas regarding new kit and curriculum design. I gained confidence and communication skills, which has helped me in interviews, group work and overall teaching. I was always very shy during my time at school and I believe that being part of my school's Sport Committee allowed me to come out of my shell and gain essential social skills. We also prepared school assemblies, which provided me with confidence and pushed me out of my comfort zone, as public speaking was something I found very uncomfortable. Being able to represent my school for something I was so passionate about made me feel valued and allowed me to form positive experiences of PE. My PE teachers provided me with a platform to share my voice and allowed all students to have an input into the curriculum and events, which made them more enjoyable as we had chosen them. We were able to organize a Sports Week, in which we chose activities that we wanted to take part in and organized for external companies to take sessions for all classes. These activities consisted of rock climbing, fencing, bubble football, inflatable assault courses and Zumba. This event was then organized every year because it had such a positive impact on students' participation and formed fun and enjoyable memories of PE lessons.*

*Because of my commitment to the PE department, I also became Sports Ambassador for a local London borough with five other students in the area, which really ignited my love for teaching. I represented the borough at external sporting events and festivals to help with the activities, coach groups, chaperone younger students and organise fixtures, allowing me to gain leadership, organisation, communication, and teamwork skills. I am so grateful for having these experiences during my time at school as they have really shaped my teaching career and ultimately led me to apply for teacher training.*

### ***Assessment as conversation***

Assessment in PE specifically is a contentious issue. Traditionally, PE assessments have included judgements against criterion that are focused on cognitive (know the teaching points of the chest pass in netball) and motor competencies (can demonstrate the badminton serve). We have also seen highly inappropriate practices such as PE assessments on student kit and a written examination. When learning is democratically reoriented and focuses on highlighting respect, showing exemplary teamwork and empathetic listening skills, the norms of standardized assessments are not appropriate. Instead, assessment should be focused on social and emotional domains that privilege reflection, personal growth, awareness of social issues and importantly ask young people to choose to demonstrate their learning through a given method. This can include giving options such as SeeSaw and Flipgrid (online learning platforms), exit slips, plagnets, journaling, photovoice, digital storytelling, discussions and the use of drawings. Each of these diverse forms of assessment tools encourage a conversation between educator and learner, which avoid privileging written/motor demonstration assessments. Research has indicated when using assessment as a conversation, it allows young people to reflect on their

learning, engage with the curriculum and can give parents/guardians a window in the classroom to understand practices as they can be invited into the learning space inquiring about the learning that occurred (Lynch & Curtner-Smith, 2019). Assessment is an important part of pedagogical practice, it informs the educator what needs to change to support learners, thus, assessment should be seen as an ongoing conversation: ‘this works, this doesn’t, I need to change X, Y, Z’. consequently, learning questions set the scene to lessons. For example: What are the skills I need to work cooperatively in a team? What type of movement activities do I like to pursue independently? How can I effectively communicate an idea I have regarding a game I want to create?

### **Links to philosophical principles**

Adopting democratic pedagogies accentuates several philosophical principles. Firstly, taking into consideration young people’s backgrounds when planning is part of the democratic process through individual participation/voice. Both of which can be harnessed through self-reflection. Through a negotiated curriculum offer, young people can learn to take responsibility for their education and make personal choices – a skill they will need beyond formal learning spaces (PE/YS programs). We note, that negotiation is not about doing everything students want to do. It is about inviting students to understand what facilitates their interests, motivation and learning in PE and YS (Oliver & Oesterreich, 2013). Initially, while other principles are relevant such as peer teaching, setting expectations for learning with an educator, the most integral is that the social, affective, cognitive, and physical domains are given equal importance within movement spaces – a radical change from traditionally oriented programs.

### **Top tips for implementation**

- High levels of goal setting and reflection are essential when employing democratic pedagogies. Educators must scaffold learning, especially with middle school aged children. Open/transparent and honest conversations about what students are learning are important for young people to realise the learning questions and intentions.
- Negotiation does not mean that you will accept all of young people’s suggestions, striking a balance and saying yes where appropriate is part of democratic participation – learning ‘no, we cannot do this’ can sometimes be as powerful as learning ‘yes, we can do this.’ Recommended scholarship that might help with implementing negotiation include Oliver, Hamzeh & McCaughtry (2009) and Enright & O’Sullivan (2010).
- Implement one thing at a time, get used to one strategy with one class then seek to implement another or try it with another class. Things might go pear-shaped if all is tested at once!

### **References**

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