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Pedagogical principles that support the prioritisation of meaningful experiences in physical education: conceptual and practical considerations

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ABSTRACT

Background: An emphasis on meaningfulness may facilitate the types of experiences that are more likely to lead children towards a commitment to physical activity participation in ways that enrich the quality of their lives. While several authors have highlighted the importance of prioritising meaningfulness, direction is lacking on *how* teachers can consistently and intentionally foster meaningful experiences for pupils in physical education.

Purpose: Our purpose in this paper is to draw on conceptual understandings of *meaningful experiences* to propose a coherent set of pedagogical principles that can support teachers in making decisions that facilitate meaningful experiences for pupils.

Pedagogical Principles: Interrogation of the concepts *meaningful experiences* provides two preliminary pedagogical principles for teaching for meaningfulness. First, the personal nature of identifying experiences as meaningful indicates the value of adopting democratic approaches that allow for ownership and individualisation of experience. Democratic principles include teachers fostering inclusive environments and helping pupils actively make authentic connections between their lived experiences inside and outside of their classroom and communities. Second, the introspective and retrospective characteristics of meaningful experiences points to the central role of reflection. Reflective principles capture the continuity of experience (past-present-future) to help pupils look back and generate awareness of what makes an experience meaningful while also moving toward future meaningful experiences. These principles also provide insight into ideas and actions that do *not* represent an approach where personal meaningfulness is prioritised.

Conclusions: Reflective and democratic pedagogical principles provide concept-based practical direction for teachers in facilitating meaningful experiences for pupils in physical education and for future research on meaningfulness in physical education.

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Meaning; democratic; inclusive; reflective; pedagogy; autonomy

Summary for practitioners

Recently, much attention has been given to the need for pupils to find meaningfulness in their physical education experiences. Clear guidance is lacking on how teachers might design, select and

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implement teaching strategies that facilitate these experiences for pupils. Our purpose in this paper was to draw on conceptual understandings of *meaningful experiences* to propose a coherent set of pedagogical principles that can support teachers in making decisions that facilitate meaningful experiences for pupils. Guided by the personal and retrospective nature of identifying experiences as meaningful, democratic and reflective approaches have the potential to form the foundation for a coherent set of pedagogical principles to help teachers intentionally and consistently prioritise meaningful experiences for pupils. These ideas provide initial direction for teachers aiming to promote meaningful experiences for children in physical education.

Few would disagree with the prioritisation of meaningful experiences as a valuable goal in physical education (Jewett and Bain 1985; Kretchmar 2000; 2007; 2013; Metheny 1968; Rintala 2009; Standal 2015; Thorburn 2018; Wehner et al. 2020). However, there are several reports that many children find current forms of physical education lacking in meaningfulness and irrelevant to their lives (Lodewyk and Pybus 2012). Greater and direct emphasis on meaningful experiences in physical education has been proposed to address this problem, (Ennis 2017), however, a coherent and practical articulation of principles that can guide teachers' implementation of pedagogies that prioritise meaningful experiences is missing. Recent developments have shown how the development and articulation of pedagogical principles can support how teacher educators can teach pre-service teachers about prioritising meaningful experiences (Ní Chróinín, Fletcher, and O'Sullivan 2018b; Lynch and Sargent 2020), and we feel that articulating a similar set of principles might be useful for both teachers and researchers whose work is based in schools. In addition to an absence of a coherent set of pedagogies, there is a lack of agreement on the boundaries of what meaningful experiences might entail. This makes it challenging for researchers to articulate approaches that might lead to a shared understanding and unhelpful for teachers who seek suggestions for their practice that are research-informed, practical, and accessible. To address this gap and to promote dialogue and debate about possibilities for pedagogical approaches, our purpose in this paper is to draw on conceptual understandings of *meaningful experiences* to propose a coherent set of pedagogical principles that can support teachers in making decisions that facilitate meaningful experiences for pupils. We first examine conceptual literature related to *meaningful experiences* in physical education. Next, we contextualise meaningful experiences within the educational purpose(s) of physical education. Then, we draw on the distinct facets of the concepts of *meaningful experiences* to outline and illustrate pedagogical principles for teaching in ways that prioritise meaningfulness for pupils.

Conceptualising a *meaningful experience*

The terms *meaning* and *meaningful* are widely used in the academic literature and their conceptualisation has remained somewhat elusive and contested. Thus, the concept of meaningfulness itself may provide an obstacle to identifying coherent approaches where meaningful experiences are key outcomes. We draw from Kretchmar (2007), who defines meaning 'in a broad, common sense way. It includes all emotions, perceptions, hopes, dreams, and other cognitions – in short, the full range of human experience' (382). All experiences therefore have meaning in that the individual interprets and makes sense of the experience through attaching a value, symbol or emotion. However, often the noun *meaning* has been conflated with the adjective *meaningful*. In this way, an experience may have meaning in that the individual is aware of the experience but they may not care about it a great deal or see how it can motivate them toward action. Moreover, the individual may not see its significance in their lives or have an emotional attachment to it – that is, the experience is not personally meaningful (Kretchmar 2007). Metheny (1968) suggests an experience becomes meaningful when 'we seize upon it, take it into ourselves, and become involved with it' (5).

Recent developments in the wider literature on meaningfulness suggest a growing consensus among some researchers on one line of inquiry and interpretation of meaningfulness related to life (Martela and Steger 2016), work (Martela and Pessi 2018; Steger, Dik, and Duffy 2012), and

sport (Luzzi and Chow 2020; Ronkainen et al. 2020). Specifically, a tripartite conceptualisation of life-related meaningfulness involves: (a) *purpose* as a motivational component, related to goals, aims and direction, (b) *feelings of significance* as an emotional component involving evaluation of life's inherent value and worth, and, (c) *coherence* as a cognitive component related to understanding of one's life making sense and being comprehensible (Leontiev 2017; Martela and Steger 2016). Extrapolation of these facets to a physical education context therefore involves attention to the purpose and goals of movement for an individual, personal judgements related to the significance of the emotional value of the experience, and a sense of coherence where physical education can be connected to other life experiences (Chen 1998).

We see that each of the three parts of the tripartite conceptualisation of life-related meaningfulness are evident in the definitions proposed by Kretchmar (2007) and Metheny (1968). That is, the definitions of meaningfulness include and specify purpose, feelings of significance, and coherence (Leontiev 2017; Martela and Steger 2016). The positioning of purpose and value within this definition highlights meaningfulness as an individual and subjective concept (Chen 1998) where attention is drawn to its quality. If the quality of the experience is deemed to be significant to the individual, this will influence the likelihood of the experience being sought again or avoided. Judgements about the quality of experience are therefore time-bound, and involve the individual becoming aware and making sense of the experience in relation to past, present, and future experiences through a process of synthesis and reconciliation (Jarvis 1987).

While we acknowledge that alternative conceptualisations of meaningfulness are present and offer potentially different possibilities and interpretations, our starting point is a tentative, provisional acceptance and adoption of a tripartite conceptualisation of meaningfulness due its clarity and accessibility of ideas and concepts (Martela and Steger 2016). This provisional acceptance allows us to progress past these debates in order to propose pedagogical principles that can support teachers' pedagogical decision-making in ways that facilitate meaningful experiences for pupils. This may allow us to offer one version of the concept of meaningfulness sufficiently and frame it within an educational context. Moreover, this may lead to further debate in the field about how other interpretations of meaningfulness could possibly lead to alternative approaches. Indeed, we are offering an alternative to previous representations of meaningfulness in physical education where the complexity of representations of personal meanings may have, in some cases, acted as a barrier to teacher's further exploration of the topic in physical education. For example, we believe that the complex theorising and representation of meaningfulness was a factor in the demise of Jewett and Mullan's (1977) *Purpose Process Curriculum Framework*, which was adapted later to become a generic personal meaning model (Jewett and Bain 1985). Besides a monograph in the *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education* in 1987, there are few reports of its use by teachers anywhere in the literature.

To be clear, we do not believe our proposal is 'the' answer to questions about how to prioritise meaningful experiences but offer it as one potential way to address the research problem that requires further examination and interrogation in school-based settings. These definitions and related conceptual ideas we use can guide how meaningfulness in physical education might be prioritised. This conceptual grounding can act as an important starting point to propose a coherent set of pedagogies that support meaningfulness in physical education. Given the current interest in meaningfulness within the wider teaching profession, agreement, even provisionally, on what pedagogies of meaningfulness entail can help provide teachers with practical direction for their practice.

Our interpretation of meaningfulness provides one part of a conceptual foundation to identify and develop complementary pedagogies that support meaningful experiences. The other part to consider is a conceptualisation of experience. We define *experiences* using Dewey's (1938) theory of experience, whereby the principles of interaction and continuity 'are fundamental to the constitution of an experience' (51). According to the principle of interaction, individuals attach value to an experience 'because of a transaction taking place' (43) between an individual and aspects of the environment, which in physical education could be: other pupils; the teacher; the gymnasium, swimming pool, dance studio or playing field (or other site of movement); objects such as balls,

nets, or apparatus, and; the tasks that represent subject matter and the role of movement in the pupil's lived experience and surrounding sociocultural context (Quennerstedt, Almqvist, and Öhman 2011a; Quennerstedt, Öhman, and Öhman 2011b). Jarvis (1987) emphasises the point of interaction in meaningful experiences, suggesting that regardless of the value of the experience, all experiences occur in interaction with others and in an environment, or a social milieu. Similarly, interpretations of meaningfulness are not constructed solely within but in relation to a broader culture, where individuals make connections to 'something that reaches beyond the actual experience, linking it to something else' (Leontiev 2013, 462). Thus, attending closely to the meaningfulness of experiences necessitates consideration of a complex mix of individual cognitive and affective elements as well as relational, social and cultural dimensions (Kretchmar 2000; Leontiev 2017; Quennerstedt et al. 2011a).

The principle of continuity means that each experience involves the drawing together or interaction of previous experiences and the modification of the quality of future experiences. While teachers would want to emphasise the positive qualities and values of an experience that is meaningful (personally significant experiences that encourage further exploration and participation), at times, a meaningful experience might also have negative qualities or values attached to it (e.g. unpleasant interactions or finding a challenge 'beyond reach'). Dewey (1938) distinguishes these experiences by describing them as educative and miseducative, with educative experiences being those that the individual would seek continuity of the experience rather than avoidance while miseducative experiences are those that hinder the growth of further experiences because they may be harmful or lead to boredom or insensitivity (Dewey 1938). In order to make pedagogical sense of this conceptualisation of meaningful experiences, it is important to anchor these ideas within our views of the educative purpose of the subject, which we outline below.

In terms of the purposes of teaching physical education, we align ourselves with the purpose of democratic transformation (Ennis 2017), where 'different ways of being in the world as some-body are both possible and encouraged' (Quennerstedt 2019, 611) and where individuals will find meaning and significance from participation in movement activities (Jewett and Bain 1985). From this perspective, having learners seek and become aware of the personal meaningfulness of physical activity and physical culture becomes part of the core purpose of physical education, where it is understood as a 'suitable learning context for initiation into a range of worthwhile social and cultural practices' that enrich an individual's lived experience (Thorburn 2018, 26). The facilitation of meaningful experiences for pupils is aligned with democratic transformative purposes of physical education (Ennis 2017; Quennerstedt 2019; Thorburn 2018) in which knowledge is socially constructed based on a reflective analysis of previous experiences, and is mediated with others, symbols and environments (Dewey 1916; 1938). In Quennerstedt's (2019) claim that one of the main aims of physical education should be 'more physical education', a view of education as a continual transforming of experience (Dewey 1938) is presented, whereby meaningful physical education experiences are those that would encourage pupils to search for further experiences rather than to avoid them. When pupils seek further experiences that are meaningful, this can lead to changes in how they become self-motivated to actively engage in movement, identify themselves in relation to movement (e.g. from a person who can dance to a dancer), and improve the quality of their existence (Kretchmar 2008). When the main role of physical education teachers is to help pupils find what is personally meaningful in an experience, a focus is directed more toward the learners' experience of physical education content rather than the content itself. For some, achieving personal fitness levels may be what drives their motivation to participate; for others, the main source of meaningfulness in movement may come from opportunities it provides for fostering new or existing friendships.

The emphasis on the personal nature of meaningfulness in our conceptualisation is not intended to promote a selfish individualism, nor is it intended for individuals to dismiss or disregard the collective and social nature of physical education. We agree with Thorburn (2020), who claims there is coherence in both theory and practice to outline and advocate for forms of physical education that

are simultaneously focused on the self and the social, and that these offer ‘a plausible basis for arguing that in educational terms, physical education is capable of being meaningful’ (11). To this end, we believe that physical education should be positioned as an opportunity for pupils to individually and collectively engage in active participation in meaningful ways that enrich the quality of their lives.

Pedagogical principles that support the prioritisation of meaningful experiences in physical education

Conceptual understanding of *meaningful experiences* and identification of our view of the main purposes of physical education within an educational context provides practical direction on how meaningful experiences might be prioritised. Specifically, two foundational pedagogical principles to facilitate meaningful experiences for pupils in physical education are proposed: democratic and reflective principles. These principles are not radical or new in an educational sense. It is the explicit and collective use of these principles towards the goal of meaningfulness that makes a contribution to the literature. Moreover, these proposals have not been made in a vacuum; we lean on a wide body of research on quality teaching in physical education to illustrate how these principles might be enacted within an approach that prioritises meaningful experiences.

Democratic approaches facilitate personalisation of experience

Increased agency and personalisation, aligned with ownership and the ability to direct the quality of experience, can increase individual perceptions of meaningfulness in terms of purpose, related value-judgments (i.e. assessing significance), and coherence of experience (Martela and Steger 2016). A democratic classroom environment and approach complements these aspects of meaningful experiences, where pupils are actively engaged, agentic, take ownership of their learning, and are willing and able to use their voices to advocate authentically for their own experiences and those of others (Dewey 1916; 1938). An emphasis on meaningful experiences through democratic approaches entails (a) attention to inclusivity (Azzarito and Ennis 2003; Walseth, Engebretsen, and Elvebakk 2018) and (b) opportunities for pupils to contribute to individual and collective decision-making regarding their learning (Dewey 1916; Enright and O’Sullivan 2010; Rovegno and Dolly 2006; Thorburn 2018).

Inclusivity. Attention to inclusivity is an inherent part of an approach that prioritises individual meaningfulness of experience in physical education. By extension, consideration of individual meaningfulness of physical activity participation is an important element in promoting inclusive approaches to physical education (O’Connor 2019). Schools are a key site for opportunities to engage in physical activity for those at the margins, without which ‘their lives and learning are diminished’ (Azzarito et al. 2017, 208). Recently, Walseth, Engebretsen, and Elvebakk (2018) demonstrated how activist approaches that incorporate the spirit of inclusivity (e.g. by involving all pupils in the curriculum development process so that it meets their specific interests and needs) can help pupils experience meaningfulness in physical education. Moreover, Beni, Fletcher, and Ní Chróinín (2019) showed ways that, for example, competition can lead to some pupils feeling excluded, which negatively influenced how they experienced meaningfulness in a primary physical education class. A focus on inclusivity can promote individual and collective ownership of the purpose/s of tasks and experiences, enhance value judgments, and increase feelings of coherence (Lynch and Sargent 2020; Walseth, Engebretsen, and Elvebakk 2018). Taken together, these may result in pupils becoming aware of how meaningfulness is experienced by themselves and others in physical education.

When pupils are actively involved in their learning, it is thought that they may be able to act politically and ethically to transform and improve their lives and those of others in the schools and communities in which they learn (Azzarito and Ennis 2003; Landi, Lynch, and Walton-Fisette

2020; Lynch, Sutherland, and Walton-Fisette 2020). Given that meaningful physical education warrants the prioritisation of subjective and personal experiences, we suggest that teachers should position themselves as responsive to and supportive of a variety of learning needs and interests, and be willing to problematise structural inequalities that stand in the way of pupils experiencing meaningfulness in movement inside and outside of school. For example, physical education provides an opportunity to acknowledge and potentially address challenges and inequalities related to gender, race, ability, socioeconomic status, sexuality, and age in our communities. Consideration of embodiment also provides important insight into an individual's experiences in physical education and creates the possibility of interrupting articulations of the body that are narrowly understood in exclusionary ways related to, for example, gender (Fisette 2011) and ability (Fitzgerald 2005). Through reflective processes, teachers may be able to facilitate discussions where attention can be drawn to participation, considering for example: How are people in our communities given accessible opportunities to participate? Who has access? Who benefits? Who is disadvantaged? These discussions can help individuals make sense of their own experiences as well as promote actions towards a more socially just world and the achievement of authentic and pluralistic outcomes in physical education (Quennerstedt 2019).

Pupil contributions to individual and collective decision-making. Active involvement in decisions related to their participation, using approaches 'as close to the learners as possible' (Ennis 2017, 247) can increase ownership, investment and meaningfulness of physical education (Beni, Fletcher, and Ní Chróinín 2017; Enright and O'Sullivan 2010; Gray, Treacy and Hall 2019; Mikalsen and Ligestad 2020; Walseth, Engebretsen, and Elvebakk 2018). Pupils want increased opportunities and autonomy to make choices about their experiences, and to contribute to the planning and delivery of physical education (Harvey et al. 2018). Following Quennerstedt (2019) we agree that 'children should not be positioned as not-yets, or as in-need in education ... Instead children's views, needs and perspectives should be taken into account released from a pre-determined notion of adulthood' (613). That is, children's perspectives should be treated as legitimate and worthy of notice. The involvement of pupils in genuine dialogue with democratic processes can help them learn to mediate personal and cultural elements, and to negotiate with each other and with teachers to compromise in making and enacting individual and collective decisions (Landi, Lynch, and Walton-Fisette 2020; Light and Harvey 2017). These approaches help pupils to invest in goals over which they have ownership, see the relevance and coherence of experiences and make positive judgments about the value of experiences.

In taking on this responsibility, teachers are tasked with facilitating the diversity of interpretations and attitudes, feelings and knowledge of all pupils in the class in ways that help children feel supported and safe. The teacher would shift from the authoritarian role of 'instructor' to what Kretchmar (2000) describes as the more liberal role of 'activity broker'; someone who actively seeks opportunities to promote children's autonomy by encouraging them to make decisions and choices about their own participation (Mandigo et al. 2008) in ways that are personally relevant (Beni, Fletcher, and Ní Chróinín 2017; Ní Chróinín, Fletcher, and Griffin 2018a).

There are multiple ways that teachers can involve pupils in making decisions that span from relatively simple considerations about, for example, who they want to play with (Koekoek and Knoppers 2015) through to highly complex and demanding processes of co-constructing the curriculum, including considerations about content, pupil roles, and so on (Enright and O'Sullivan 2010; Lynch, Sutherland, and Walton-Fisette 2020). Importantly, teachers should provide opportunities for pupils to make contributions and decisions that 'go beyond mere preference, reflecting concerns about the quality of their own participation, ability, learning, achievement, and social/emotional well-being' (Beni, Fletcher, and Ní Chróinín 2017, 298). When pupils can exercise autonomy and agency in their learning they can show greater levels of intrinsic motivation (Moreno-Murcia and Sánchez-Latorre 2016), which may be reflected in feeling more empowered and taking on greater risks with and ownership of their learning (Beni, Fletcher, and Ní Chróinín 2019; Enright and O'Sullivan 2010; Gibbons and Gaul 2004; Gray, Sproule, and Wang 2008). Ensuring children

have the tools they need to help them make decisions about their participation is an important consideration for the teacher, where some scaffolding of these processes may be helpful, at least initially, as the opportunity and responsibility to be autonomous may be unfamiliar to them (particularly for those in the primary years) (Beni, Fletcher, and Ní Chróinín 2019).

This exploration of democratic pedagogies illustrates how fostering inclusivity and providing pupils with opportunities to contribute in authentic ways to individual and collective decision-making in the class can enhance interpretations of the meaningfulness of experience. Specifically, such approaches can help teachers and pupils become aware of and emphasise the purpose of an experience, assess its significance, and understand how it may help pupils make sense of the experience in their lives inside and outside of schools (i.e. its coherence). However, the time-bound nature of meaningful experiences demands attention to retrospective engagement and analysis of experience in order for pupils to make sense of how an experience is continuous with past, present, and future experiences. For this reason, reflective approaches represent an important pedagogical principle for the prioritisation of meaningful experiences.

Reflective processes facilitate evaluation of experience

‘In order to live in the world as reflective beings, humans seem to need three things: they need to comprehend the world around them, they need to find direction for their actions, and they need to find worth in their lives (Martela and Steger 2016, 541). Examination of meaningful experiences suggests that goal-setting and reflection are ‘bookend’ pedagogies of meaningfulness. That is, a tripartite conceptualisation of meaningfulness suggests that through a cyclical process of goal identification and reflection on those goals, pupils can (a) identify the purposes of their participation, (b) ascribe value to their efforts, and (c) connect their participation to their wider lives. Goal-setting and reflective processes provide a mechanism by which meaningful experiences are evaluated and ascribed by making sense of past, present and future engagement, or what Dewey (1938) outlined as the continuity of experiences. Ascribing meaningfulness to experience is therefore a process that is time-bound and introspective. It follows that reflection plays a major role in helping pupils become aware of, evaluate, and attach personal significance to physical education experiences (Thorburn 2020). According to Beni, Fletcher, and Ní Chróinín (2017), goal-setting and reflection can play important roles in shaping how pupils understand the meaningfulness of physical education experiences. O’Connor (2019, 1093) suggests that the facilitation of meaningful experiences in physical education necessarily ‘involves supporting students to explore their personal experiences in movement and to use these to derive a greater understanding of themselves and the world in which they live’.

We position reflective activities as a core part of the physical education experience, rather than as an optional ‘add on’. There is potential to integrate reflective activities more intentionally in many current models and approaches used in physical education. For example, within a Sport Education season there is scope to extend team rituals to include post-match reflections to mirror team debrief sessions often held after sporting matches or practices. Several examples from the empirical literature illustrate how to scaffold reflection post-physical activity (O’Connor 2019; Nilges 2004). For instance, both O’Connor (2019) and Lambert (2020), fore-front embodied experiences ‘in movement’ as part of the reflection process, using ‘pre-text vignettes’ (Lambert 2020) to help learners and teachers generate a shared language of meaning, which could then lead to the exploration of personally significant movement experiences inside the classroom. Rintala (2009, 287) provides some practical guidance on how teachers might help children notice their responses within activities as a springboard for subsequent reflection:

What was your favorite shot of the day? What made it special? What did it feel like? What did you enjoy the most about playing today? Part way through a run or a bike ride, reflect on the sensations in your arms or legs. Mention the beauty of the surroundings, in case someone hasn’t taken time to notice.

Sharing accounts of affective, bodily sensations holds potential for children to gain insight into the experiences of others; to understand that others experience the world similarly and differently to them. Dewey (1916) also makes specific connections between reflection and educative experiences in the form of ‘correcting unfair privilege and unfair deprivation’ (119). For example, reflective pedagogies can also be used to help children acknowledge privilege, notice power structures and inequalities, interrupt assumptions, and identify actions to promote social justice and other ways to engage in democratic processes (Landi, Lynch, and Walton-Fisette 2020).

Dewey’s (1938) principle of continuity of experience emphasises the importance of not only reflecting back to make meaning of experiences but also to think forward to future experiences and possible ‘ends-in-view’ (Ward and Quennerstedt 2015). According to Rodgers (2002), ‘without continuity learning is random and disconnected, building toward nothing either within the learner or the world’ (847). While the reflective processes outlined previously can help pupils make sense of past experiences, engaging in goal-setting as a future-oriented form of reflection may allow them to actively connect those past experiences with those they would like to experience in the future (Rovegno and Dolly 2006). Kretchmar (2000) highlights the importance of pedagogical strategies that move pupils ‘away from, toward, or along’ (23); of taking a future-oriented perspective to pupils’ movement journeys that allows them to make sense of past, present and future experiences and develop the intrinsic forms of motivation that appear to support ongoing participation (Gillison, Sebire, and Standage 2012; Teixeira et al. 2012). For example, goal-setting can provide a scaffold for pupils to identify an appropriate level of challenge for themselves or to help them find personal relevance in their experiences and to make connections to their lives outside of school, hence attributing value (or significance) to their physical education experiences (Beni, Fletcher, and Ní Chróinín 2019; Ennis 2017; Gillison, Sebire, and Standage 2012; McCaughtry and Rovegno 2001). Moreover, it may also be important for teachers to collaborate with pupils in order to understand how their goals do or do not relate to one another. As Redelius, Quennerstedt, and Öhman (2015) showed, teachers and pupils are often unaware of the goals one another has in physical education. If the teacher does not understand what goals pupils have in physical education, it may be difficult for teachers to create an environment where pupils feel they are being listened to or supported in experiencing meaningfulness (Lyngstad, Bjerke, and Lagestad 2020).

A variety of representational forms, including pupil diaries, portfolios, video, storytelling, writing and drawing tasks, and photographs can help children document and share personally significant moments in their learning in ways that reflect both an individual and collaborative approach to setting and reflecting on goals (McCaughtry and Rovegno 2001; Ní Chróinín, Fletcher, and Griffin 2018a; Nilges 2004). Documenting goals and other forms of reflection can also provide teachers with an appropriate form of communication to better understand pupils’ experiences and make pedagogical decisions that are based on pupils’ needs, desires, and interests (Landi, Lynch, and Walton-Fisette 2020). Authentic engagement in goal-setting and reflection at individual and group levels may require a shared language related to meaningfulness. For example, Metheny (1968) offers a wide variety of learning tasks designed to help generate a shared language of meaningfulness for undergraduate and graduate pupils. These tasks included verbal and non-verbal activities that served to improve communication between pupils about the nature of the task, and its meaning and relevance to them. Using the idea of generating a shared language and using it consistently may support children in becoming aware of how they experience meaningfulness in relation to their physical education participation and identities as physically active individuals (Beni, Fletcher, and Ní Chróinín 2019; O’Connor 2019; Walseth, Engebretsen, and Elvebakk 2018).

Conclusions

Our purpose in this paper was to draw on conceptual understandings of *meaningful experiences* to propose a coherent set of pedagogical principles that can support teachers in making decisions that facilitate meaningful experiences for pupils. Adoption of one conceptualisation of meaningful

experiences (Martela and Steger 2016) provided clarity to inform the selection of aligned pedagogies that promote meaningful experiences with attention to purpose, value judgments and coherence of experiences. Encouragingly, our analysis demonstrates that the subjective and idiosyncratic nature of meaningfulness does not imply that broad approaches to meaningfulness are out of reach for teachers. Instead, tying down what we mean by meaningful experiences offers one direction on how experiences might be framed in their classes in ways that accommodate individuals within a collective endeavour. We acknowledge that others within the field might argue for alternative understandings of meaningfulness and we are open to debating and developing nuanced interpretations. Our proposal provides a concrete starting point for these debates. In addition, in this paper two pedagogical principles are proposed. The possibility of other pedagogical principles being identified, based on these and alternative interpretations of meaningfulness therefore remains open. In particular, the possibility of principles that consider the embodied nature of experiences in physical education may be worth exploring further (Lambert 2020; Thorburn 2020).

On the premise that democratic transformation is identified as one of the key purposes of physical education (Quennerstedt 2019), we propose democratic and reflective approaches as foundational pedagogical principles to help teachers intentionally and consistently prioritise meaningful experiences for pupils. Specifically, democratic principles support teachers fostering inclusive environments and helping pupils actively make authentic connections between their lived experiences inside and outside of their classroom and communities. Reflective principles capture the continuity of experience (past-present-future) (Dewey 1938) to help pupils look back to generate awareness of what makes an experience meaningful while also setting goals to help them move toward future meaningful experiences (Kretchmar 2000). Enacted together, these principles have the potential to influence pupils' engagement with physical education as an important contributor to the quality of their individual and collective lives (Quennerstedt 2019). We believe we have made explicit connections between conceptual understandings of meaningful experiences and the selection of democratic and reflective principles as foundational pedagogies of meaningful experiences. For example, attempts to generate both a shared understanding and a shared language of meaningfulness necessarily involves extensive collaboration and consultation with individual pupils, and giving pupils support in how they can both advocate for themselves and others, as well as how they can explore their own opportunities for movement.

Our stance that democratic transformation is a key purpose of physical education leads us to acknowledge that we lean towards the potential of pedagogies that fall within a social justice agenda. While the scope and focus of this paper does not allow us to expand here, we do see much promise in the potential of prioritising meaningful experiences to promote socially just work. When tasked with sharing this message with teachers in schools, some may criticise our position as holding a naïve and impractical idealism that fails to capture the complexities of schools; however, we argue that our proposal opens up possibilities rather than constrains teachers. Our intent to make any proposal accessible to teachers in terms of both language and ideas holds a largely practical orientation. This, alongside the flexibility of pedagogical strategies within the pedagogical principles of democratic and reflective principles, gives teachers freedom to take up ideas and make decisions in their own contexts in responsive ways. Our approach is thus unapologetically pragmatic; our goal is to provide usable direction to teachers while also proposing a common base for researchers to progress an agenda for meaningful experiences.

These pedagogical principles form a proposal for future action, 'a heuristic to consider what meaningful physical education is and how to support young people to engage and thrive in our movement cultures' (O'Sullivan et al. 2021, 114). It is only in taking up, testing, and evaluating these ideas that we can understand how they may support an aim of prioritising meaningful experiences. The pedagogical principles we offer may provide a foundation for teacher educators and researchers to design both innovative and coherent approaches to support and examine how teachers facilitate meaningful experiences for pupils in different contexts and settings. The two principles of democratic and reflective approaches also offer boundaries around what may *not* represent

an approach where personal meaningfulness is prioritised. For example, when pupils are excluded from contributing to collective decision-making in how the classroom functions or when they are not provided with opportunities to reflect on their experiences and those of others to explore opportunities for movement in their communities.

In this paper, we have outlined how conceptualising *meaningful experiences* provides direction on identification of foundational pedagogical principles that focus on meaningful experiences for pupils in physical education. We have illustrated how democratic and reflective principles might be enacted and established a spirit for the future development of pedagogies of meaningful experiences in physical education. In these ways, our paper serves as both a guide for further exploration to teachers and teacher educators, and an invitation to researchers who are inspired by an agenda founded on meaningful experiences that focuses on providing pupils with experiences that enhance and enrich the quality of their lives.

Disclosure statement

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