

Chapter 1: Introduction

Context

Sport is deemed to be an important aspect of life in schools (Bailey 2006; European Commission *et al.* 2013). In Ireland the Gaelic games of hurling and football, administered by the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), are accorded a high status in community and school life (Cronin *et al.* 2009). The strength of the GAA at grassroots level results from the establishment of strong links within the local community. In rural areas in Ireland it is noted “you cannot separate the GAA from the parish, or the parish from the GAA: they are one and the same thing¹” (Lonergan 2010, p. 238). Bairner (2009, p. 232) points out that “a sense of place, and more particularly of small towns and rural communities, is common to the majority of evocations of Gaelic games”. The GAA has, historically, sought to promote a particular form of nationalism that celebrates this sense of place through sport, traditional music and the Irish language. This, in turn, led to prioritising Gaelic games within the school system in order to maintain a specific cultural identity in the local community and nationally. In that context O Rourke (2013b) contended “any school that does not make some effort to expose its students to Gaelic games is not giving a proper broad education. It is part of the wider cultural experience of music, language and games which is part of what we are”. The following comment from the general secretary of the Irish National Teachers’ Organisation (INTO), the dominant trade union in the Irish primary sector, illustrated the close connections between his organisation and the GAA:

One uniquely Irish way in which Irish primary teachers contribute to the affairs of the nation is through their work in the Gaelic Athletic Association. Indeed the INTO and

¹ Affiliation to a GAA club is generally based on a person’s place of residence, and club catchment areas align with the boundaries of Roman Catholic parishes

the GAA are similar in that they are to be found in the heartland of every parish in Ireland. The linkages are more than just geographical. Irish primary teachers through their work both in and out of school are the backbone of the GAA...Many past pupils will openly tell you that their participation in games organised by Cumann na mBunscol² was one of the highlights of their school lives and a memory that they will treasure throughout their lives...It is indeed a symbiotic relationship (Irish National Teachers Organisation 2008a)

In a similar way, the GAA President praised the work of primary teachers when he stated “we are deeply indebted to them [primary teachers] and grateful for their assistance and I know we would not be the organisation we are today without their help” (Gaelic Athletic Association 2014c).

The overt presence of a national governing body for sport (NGB) may have implications for the ways that sport and, by extension, physical education (PE), are organised in schools. As Reid notes, “governing body objectives are often primarily concerned with the survival and prosperity of their sport with a view to attracting and retaining the most talented players, rather than the goals of education” (2003, p.310). In the Irish primary school context, close ties between school and community sport have led some GAA members to take for granted the school’s role in promoting Gaelic games. The opinion of one media pundit typifies this view:

“With the greatest respect, the teachers in our national schools are primarily female, we don’t have young men, football men, taking up the national school teaching profession like we once did in the 40’s, 50’s and 60’s. That’s an issue that needs to be

² Cumann na mBunscol is a voluntary organisation of teachers that organises Gaelic games in primary schools

addressed and kids going to school are not getting football. We need quality coaching and we need it now” (Maughan 2009)

These comments articulate a commonly held view that teachers in Irish primary schools are giving insufficient attention to the promotion and development of Gaelic games, and are dismissive of the efforts of female teachers. They create the impression of a mythical golden age where children, or more specifically boys, received expert tuition in the skills of the games from an enthusiastic cohort of male teachers across the country. If this suggestion of a crisis based on a shortage of male teachers is representative of mainstream GAA opinion, it has potential consequences for the relationship between the organisation and primary schools, where female teachers are in an increasing majority. In addition, this viewpoint seeks to establish a privileged position for the GAA within PE and school sport practice.

Irish education policy, as articulated in the primary PE curriculum published by the Department of Education and Skills (DES), mandates that “Gaelic games should be given particular consideration as part of the games programme” (Government of Ireland 1999a, p. 4). This statement established a unique position for Gaelic games within primary schools as it affords these games a status not given to any other games. Furthermore, this affirmation of Gaelic games is reflective of general practice whereby invasion games generally hold a dominant position within primary PE content selection, resulting in a narrow range of activities during PE and extracurricular sport (Coulter and Ní Chróinín 2013; Fahey *et al.* 2005; Woods *et al.* 2010). Set against this backdrop of a vibrant games ethos within schools, the confidence and competence of teachers to teach the subject effectively has been called into question (Fletcher and Mandigo 2012; Joint Committee on Education and Science 2005). Although the class teacher is responsible for the delivery of the PE curriculum, many schools avail of the services of sports coaches and other external personnel to teach parts of that

curriculum and to deliver extra-curricular sport programmes (Broderick and Shiel 2000; McHugh 2008; Woods *et al.* 2010).

Penney (2011, p. 272) argues that not enough is known “about ‘the who’ and ‘the how’ of PESS [physical education and school sport] amidst contemporary policy developments” internationally. In Ireland, a number of large-scale quantitative studies have reported on contemporary trends in PE and sport (e.g. Fahey *et al.* 2005; Lunn *et al.* 2013; Woods *et al.* 2010). There has been a lack of research, however, into why and how these trends have come about. Accordingly, this study seeks to deepen our understanding of the processes affecting the implementation of Gaelic games activities in primary schools.

Significance of Gaelic games in Ireland

Understanding the significance of the GAA in Irish society is central to the focus of this thesis. The GAA is one of the largest sporting organisations in Ireland and Gaelic sports are popular among Irish emigrant communities worldwide. Despite the amateur status of GAA players, the association earns a higher level of commercial income than any other sporting organisation in the country (Sport for Business 2013). While the GAA caters for male participants in the games of hurling and Gaelic football³ in Ireland and in a growing number of countries worldwide, a number of other organisations are involved in the wider Gaelic games “family” (Gaelic Athletic Association 2014a, p. 44). The Ladies Gaelic Football Association (LGFA) organises Gaelic football for female participants, while the Camogie Association (CA) is the governing body for camogie, the female version of hurling. These organisations operate independently of the GAA in terms of administration, financial operations and coaching structures but generally depend on the GAA for access to playing facilities. In the primary school sector, external coaches working on behalf of the GAA provide a coaching programme for boys and girls in over 85% of primary schools (Irish

³ Handball and rounders are also governed by the GAA

Sports Council 2014). Interscholastic primary school competitions and related programmes are organised by Cumann na mBunscol, a voluntary organisation of teachers. This organisation operates as an independent entity, while at the same time receiving financial and logistical support from the GAA.

Overview of this study

Purpose of the study: outlining the research questions

This study investigates how national policies relating to PE and school sport are enacted in Irish primary schools. There is a specific focus on understanding why and how Gaelic games have become such a central part of PE and sport in Irish primary schools, and the study examines how the interplay between policy and practice shapes the PE and sport programmes offered to Irish primary school children. This study seeks to answer three research questions. Firstly, with particular reference to Gaelic Games, what are the factors that underpin PE and sport policy delivery in the primary school setting? Secondly, why do Gaelic games feature so prominently in Irish primary schools? Thirdly, how does the delivery of Gaelic games impact on PE and school sport provision?

Because of the deep historical connections between the GAA and the Irish primary school system, and the complex array of individuals and groups involved with school Gaelic games, I decided to draw upon a theoretical framework informed by figural theory in order to enhance our understanding of these contemporary and historical connections. This perspective is based on the work of Norbert Elias, who suggested that, rather than seeking definitive or absolutist answers, sociological studies should instead focus on the development of “theoretical and empirical knowledge [that] becomes *more extensive, more correct, and more adequate*” [italics in the original] (Elias 1978, p. 53). Figurations have been described as “dynamic networks of relationships” (Bloyce and Smith 2010, p. 12). Hanstad and Skille

(2008, p. 551) explain how the work of Elias “recognizes that human action is intentional and directed towards achieving certain goals”. Examples of ‘human action’ examined in this study include the work of educational and GAA policymakers and the promotion of Gaelic games activities by teachers and coaches. While each of these groups works towards specific objectives, it must be remembered that the attainment of these objectives is dependent on complex and unpredictable social processes. Consequently the analysis of these processes through a figurational lens proposes that:

the outcomes of social processes cannot be explained simply in terms of the intentions of individuals. Outcomes which no-one had intended, denominated by Elias ‘blind social processes’, should rather be recognized as a normal result of complex processes involving the interweaving of a large number of actors (Hanstad and Skille 2008, p. 551).

I propose that this framework can help increase our understanding of how national policies designed by the GAA and other organisations are implemented at school level as it allows for an examination of the complex processes that are involved.

Thesis structure

Chapter two of this thesis provides a review of the literature that relates to the development and implementation of policies related to primary school PE and sport. The policies are examined separately and then connections between PE and school sport are explored. The part played by NGBs in primary schools is an important facet of the relationship between PE and sport, as their presence can blur the distinctions. The chapter shows how the presence of NGB coaches has become more widespread in many countries in recent years, raising questions about the role of generalist class teachers and the impact on curricular PE (Griggs 2012a; Petrie 2010; Smith 2013; Benjamin J. Williams *et al.* 2011). It explores how contemporary policies on competitive games structures for school and community sport tend

to favour models that maximize participation through small-sided games (Gaelic Athletic Association 2011; Government of Ireland 1999a; The Football Association 2009). The implementation of these policies is sometimes contested, and the manner in which policy is implemented is dependent on complex power balances involving a range of interconnected groups. This chapter will summarize the existing literature on how these policies are contested, by whom, and for what purpose.

Chapter three outlines firstly how aspects of figurational sociology were used to construct a theoretical framework for this study. I adopted a perspective that focused on how the actions of interdependent people “are heavily circumscribed, not to say constrained, by their habituses (both individual and group) and by broader social networks” (Ken Green 2006a, p. 652). Secondly, investigating the power balances present in the enactment of policies involves an awareness that tensions between groups are more evident as power differentials become more equal (Elias *et al.* 1997). The second part of the chapter outlines how my personal experiences impact on the study. Having taught in primary schools for almost twenty years, and with extensive experience of the GAA as a player, coach and administrator, I possess a great deal of what might be termed “insider knowledge” (Perry *et al.* 2004, p. 138). In this section I attempt to show how this knowledge adds to the overall study. I also acknowledge how my familiarity with the subject matter influences my perception of issues during the research process (Baur 2008). Consequently, my reflections “imply acts of self-distancing” (Elias 1978, p. 122) that enable me to achieve a more adequate representation of the findings.

Chapter four sets out the methodological decisions taken during the course of the study. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to recruit teachers, coaches and administrators who were heavily involved in the promotion of Gaelic games in primary schools. Semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation and document analysis were used to gather

information on policy formulation and implementation. Data were analysed using a process of thematic analysis.

The main findings of this study are presented in chapters five, six and seven. Chapter five examines the national policies designed by NGBs, government departments and other organisations relating to primary school PE and sport. This macro level examination of policy provided the context for Chapter six. There I investigated how different groups interpreted and enacted GAA policy as part of PE and sport provision in primary schools. A central aspect of this chapter is the exploration of a complex network of interrelationships where decisions taken by one group can have implications for others in the provision of primary school sport and PE. This might be described as the meso level of the policy process. The focus in Chapter seven is a micro level examination of the relationship between teachers and GAA coaches in the provision of GAA games in schools. The role of GAA coaches in the delivery of large portions of the PE programme and school sport is explored and critiqued. Chapter eight positions the findings from the previous three chapters within the literature, and interprets what the data reveal about how the GAA's powerful position impacts on practice in schools. It demonstrates how policies are subject to negotiation and may be implemented in ways not originally envisaged. Chapter nine provides a final summary of the research findings and discusses how policy processes based on complex relationships result in planned and unplanned outcomes (Ken Green 2008; Patrick Murphy 1998a). Some policy recommendations are suggested for the GAA and for education policymakers.

Summary

By focusing on the part played by the GAA and related organisations, this study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the factors that impact on the delivery of PE and sport in Irish primary schools. Because of the complex nature of the interdependencies that exist locally and nationally, adopting a long-term view is useful in order to explore fully how the

policy process has developed over time. This, in turn, has the potential to add to our knowledge of an area that has not been the focus of sustained research attention to date.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review is divided into four main sections. This introductory section includes some preliminary commentary on the relationship between PE and sport, in order to outline the context for the promotion of Gaelic games in Irish primary schools. The second section identifies key issues in primary school PE contexts nationally and internationally. The role of generalist teachers is examined in detail, particularly with regard to their interaction with coaches and other external providers. The concluding portion of this section identifies the blurred boundaries between PE and sport and what research has suggested as implications for PE provision. The third section focuses on school sport and critiques the narrow range of activities that sometimes is offered (e.g. Ken Green 2008; Penney and Harris 1997). Policy changes relating to the organisation of competitive structures is one facet of this criticism and is particularly relevant in the Irish context. Accordingly, aspects of this debate are presented with a view to this study addressing some of the gaps in the research. The final section examines the role of the GAA and related organisations in sport delivery in Irish primary schools, and discusses what is known about how and why NGBs establish positions within the primary school sector.

Sport plays a central role in the culture of most developed countries (Siedentop 2009), and has been an enduring theme in the sociological examination of sport and society (Goodger and Goodger 2003). The role of sport within education, and within PE in particular, had long been a cause for debate (Kirk and Gorely 2000; Talbot 1998) and the debate has been, in the words of Pope (2011, p. 273), “protracted and emotive”. This relationship has been characterised as one of “uncomfortable bedfellows” (Stothart 2000, p. 40). Flintoff (2008a, p. 145) argues that the practice of PE in schools is impacted on by “tensions between sporting and educational discourses”. Capel (2000, p. 133) has suggested that “it is the common-sense

view of many that physical education and sport are the same". Furthermore, Marsden and Weston (2007, p. 385) note that policy documents and media reports regularly "use the terms 'sport' and 'physical education' interchangeably" and the phrase "physical education and school sport" has become an accepted feature of the discourse (Capel and Whitehead 2013, p. 8). Accordingly, Swabey and Penney (2011, p. 71) suggest that "clarifying the distinction between PE and sport while at the same time not letting go of a sound linkage" is an important part of the debate. A different interpretation is proposed by Capel and Whitehead (2013, p. 8) when they argue that "sport is part of physical education, but only a part". Capel (2000, p. 132) explains why she believes "physical education is essentially an educational process whereas the focus in sport is on the activity" (2000, p. 137). These sentiments echo a similar distinction made in the Irish PE curriculum document which asserts that PE is about "the child's holistic development", while sport involves competition and "an emphasis on winning" (Government of Ireland 1999a, p. 6). There has been no research on how these distinctions are played out in Irish primary schools but an appreciation of the contested nature of the debate is important in order to understand how current practice has become established.

PE in primary schools

PE can provide children with valuable learning experiences but approaches to teaching the subject are varied and liable to change over time (Lawrence 2012). This section begins by exploring how contemporary views of PE have been shaped, before examining issues around how the subject is taught in primary schools.

What are the purposes of primary PE?

Although a legal requirement to teach PE exists in primary schools for at least 89% of countries worldwide (Hardman and Marshall 2009), formulating a precise definition for primary PE is problematic as the aims and objectives are varied and subject to negotiation,

suggesting that the purposes of PE vary over time. Indeed, this is an area that has provoked “animated debate” (Smith and Parr 2007, p. 37) among a range of interested groups. Houlihan and Green (2006) outline a historical context for policy change within PE and note that a lack of self-belief is characteristic of how members of the PE community have written about, and have advocated for, a clear rationale for the position of PE in the school curriculum. Marsden and Weston (2007) argue that the articulation of a definition for quality primary PE is particularly difficult, and they identify a range of competing discourses including health, fitness, sport and physical activity. Whitehead (2000) acknowledges a need to examine the aims of PE so that its place within education can be clearly defined and accepted. Although Wright (2004) argues that the intrinsic value of PE must remain central to the teaching of the subject, this aspiration is sometimes lost in the uncertainty caused by competing discourses. As Kretchmar (2008) observes, the subject’s involvement in issues like health promotion and sport has potential benefits in giving PE a higher profile, while at the same time causing a dilution of the subject’s core values. Redelius and Larsson (2010, p. 696) suggest that “the purpose of PE seems to lie somewhere between being healthy and being pleasurable”, while Griggs (2009) highlights the potential of PE to assist in the development of children’s creativity and self-expression.

Sport and health dominate discussions around curriculum content in PE (Coulter and Ní Chróinín 2013). Swabey and Penney (2011, p. 67) argue that “physical education (PE) has long been recognised as a contested entity and ‘political football’, regularly redirected and frequently in danger of being ‘kicked into touch’ from a curriculum perspective”. They outline, for example, how a narrow articulation on skill development and fitness came to prominence in Australian policy discourse in the early 1990s, leading to the relative neglect of other parts of the curriculum. The prominence that particular discourses assume at any given time reflects the evolving nature of the subject.

Graber *et al.* (2008, p. 152) argue that PE is “shaped by the forces of history” and “influenced by political events...contemporary culture and...health concerns”. Arguing that the development of “capacities for movement and expression in physical culture” should occupy a central position in PE, Evans (2004, p. 96) contends the PE community “has increasingly centred attention on and justified its existence discursively and pedagogically in terms of just about everything other than that which is distinctive and special about itself and its subject matter”. Bearing in mind the lack of clarity that appears to exist around definitions of the subject, it is understandable that Marsden and Weston (2007, p. 383) conclude that “physical education policy in the United Kingdom is [based on] largely uninformed rhetoric”.

Furthermore, this apparent lack of clarity in the purposes of primary PE has left a void that is often filled by sports coaches (Griggs 2010). While Talbot (2008a, p. 8) acknowledges “pressures that come from the power and strength of the sport culture”, she argues that an “assertive articulation” of the nature of PE is important so that children’s learning can remain central. Thus it might be argued that the lack of definitional certainty impacts on the implementation of PE in schools. On the other hand, Ken Green (2008, p. 21) argues that efforts “to define PE reflect a misplaced tendency to view the subject as made up of some timeless essence”. Moreover, Penney (1998, p. 117) suggests that definitions “are contested and contestable” and “that neither definitions nor curriculum frameworks are neutral”. In that context, maintaining a focus on the processes that shape PE over time would appear to offer potential to help increase our understanding of current issues relating to the subject.

Specifically, this project seeks to provide insights into the impact of GAA personnel’s presence in schools on the PE curriculum in Irish primary schools.

The mandatory provision of PE in Irish primary schools is a relatively recent occurrence. Prior to 1971, PE curriculum content included physical training, Gaelic games and dance, but implementation in schools was not compulsory (Duffy 1997). The publication of the Primary

School Curriculum in 1971 (Government of Ireland 1971), represented a significant watershed for the status of PE as the subject was accorded a formal position within the school curriculum and, for the first time, the holistic development of the child was prioritized (Frances Murphy 2008). A curriculum revision was published in 1999 builds on concepts articulated in 1971. It asserts that “physical education, as an integral part of the total curriculum, provides vital opportunities for the physical, social, emotional and intellectual development of the child” and it aims to help children “to lead full, active and healthy lives” (Government of Ireland 1999a, p. 2). The curriculum articulates the inclusion of six content strands, namely Athletics, Aquatics, Dance, Games, Gymnastics and Outdoor and Adventure Activities, and recommends that particular attention should be given to the teaching of Gaelic games as part of the Games strand (Government of Ireland 1999a).

PE Policy

Policy can be described as a multi-directional and negotiated process that is changing continually (Penney and Evans 1999). As Patrick Murphy (1998b, p. 73) points out, “there are bound to be many processes which impinge upon the policy process which are outside the control of the policy-makers”. Furthermore, it is worth noting “that moving policy into practice is contextualised by a process of interpretation and reinterpretation” (Fisher 2011, p. 278). This process may lead to outcomes that were not originally envisaged by the policy-makers. Ball (2010, p. 164) argues that contemporary education policy internationally is shaped by “economic rationality and international competitiveness, the twin bases of the ‘standards agenda’”. Similar trends have been noted in Ireland, where economists have become “the ultimate authorities on most areas of public policy, and GDP [Gross Domestic Product] accepted as an end of policy in itself” (Denis O Sullivan 2005, p. 87).

Many organisations have an interest in PE and school sport policy development. This may lead to policy statements that articulate complementary and competing priorities. The

development of policy implies a need for change, and policy statements become an articulation of how things ought to be (Penney and Evans 2005). Bloyce and Smith (2010) suggest that policies involve the articulation of particular objectives, the resolution of identified problems, or the maintenance or modification of existing practices. A traditional way of examining educational policy and practice has been to construct a hierarchical model where policy is transmitted from policy developers at the top of the structure, to teachers or ‘implementers’ at the bottom (Penney and Evans 2005). In this view of policy development, policy and practice are viewed as two rather distinct phenomena where those involved in the implementation of policy are afforded little or no say in its development. A more recent explanation of policy development has conceptualised it as a non-hierarchical process that is relational in nature (Flintoff 2008b; Penney and Evans 1999). This point is echoed by Ken Green (2008, p. 26) where he argues that recognising the ties between individuals and groups is “fundamental to understanding in policy formation and implementation”. He identifies economic, persuasive and coercive sources of power as factors that impact on policy design and delivery. Houlihan (1997, p. 3) defines public policy as “a set of interrelated decisions taken by a political actor or group of actors concerning the selection of goals and the means of achieving them within a specified situation where these decisions should, in principle, be within the power of these actors to achieve”. Lindsey (2009) argues that when policy is a result of collaboration between various groups, it can be difficult for all groups to have their voices heard if democratic procedures are not in place. As a result, there can be struggles regarding the manner in which certain voices are heard at all, and at what stage in the process (Penney and Evans 2005). It would appear that differential power balances will impact on which policy issues are to be prioritized within such collaborations, and on the extent to which particular groups and individuals are influential. Furthermore, in studying the development of policies, it is important to recognise the presence of “dynamic, complex

social processes or human figurations” (Bloyce and Smith 2010, p. 13). In that regard, it is important to acknowledge that PE policy is formulated in conjunction with a wider suite of educational and societal policy objectives that include “improving school ethos, academic attainment, health improvement as well as the development of participation and excellence in sport” (Thorburn and Gray 2009, p. 3).

Talbot (2008b, p. 6) contends that a considerable amount of PE policy internationally “is sport-led rather than educationally founded”. Furthermore, PE is presented in some policy articulations and practice, as being “at the service of national sport strategy...at the expense of children’s needs and PE’s place within education” (Talbot 2008a). In contrast, Thorburn *et al.* (2011, p. 396) present a more optimistic analysis, suggesting that a collaborative model of policy development in Scotland, involving teachers, researchers and government officials, has led to the formulation of a “pupil-centred whole school curriculum”.

As governmental demands for additional time for literacy and numeracy provision have increased, the space occupied by PE has become more contested (Pope 2011). Houlihan (2000, p. 181) has described this space as “crowded”, and reflective of patterns of power relations that become established as successive policies become embedded. This is emphasised by Petrie and Lisahunter (2011, p. 330) who suggest that “the boundaries of the education policy arena become blurred when sport and physical activity policy intersects or stakes a claim on schools in conjunction with curriculum policy”. Education policy and, in the context of this study, policies published by sports bodies and other organisations outside the educational system, can have a significant influence on the content of PE curricula and the way they are taught (Stothart 2002). Petrie and Lisahunter (2011, p. 326) highlight the “complex and non-linear nature of policy processes”. The complexity involved in situations where the policies of a range of groups address a common situation (for example, the primary school PE) can lead to outcomes that are unplanned and unintended (Bloyce and Smith

2010). This, according to Ken Green (2008, p. 29), is “because people’s intended actions take place in webs of unplanned interdependencies”. This complexity will be addressed in more detail later in the context of school sport policy, and the potential impact on PE.

Implementing Primary PE Curricula

The international perspective

Kirk (2004, p. 188) asserts that “school subjects are defined by their practices, not merely by their written policies”. In this context, it is worth examining research concerning PE implementation. A substantial body of literature presents negative findings about the implementation of PE in primary schools, and questions have been raised on the quality and quantity of PE provision. Bailey and Dismore (2004, p. 8) warn of “alarming discrepancies between the principles and policies of government...and the realities in schools”. Likewise, Carney and Winkler (2008, p. 13) note that “provision for physical education in primary schools continues to be a cause for concern” while Griggs (2007, p. 59) argues that “primary physical education [in England] is in a state of neglect and that relatively little attention is being given to it”. Furthermore, he describes a “worrying trend” where large elements of primary PE are delivered by sports coaches “often without any regard of the subject knowledge required in the NCPE [National Curriculum for Physical Education]” (Griggs 2007, p. 61). This issue is addressed later in this chapter.

It is argued that time pressures within the primary school curriculum in general impact negatively on the delivery of PE programmes internationally (Kirk 2005; Talbot 2008a). Significant amounts of PE time were lost in Britain, for example, due to literacy and numeracy initiatives in the early years of the last decade (Wright 2004). More recently, Pickup *et al.* (2007) have argued that primary PE has become marginalized, a situation that has been compounded by limited opportunities for prospective primary school teachers to

gain expertise during initial teacher education (ITE) courses or continuing professional development (CPD). This lack of focus on PE during ITE is common in many countries (lisahunter 2006).

Although PE curricula generally advocate for a broad variety of activities, international research suggests that PE content is dominated by team ball games (e.g. Donovan *et al.* 2006; Redelius and Larsson 2010; Smith *et al.* 2007). In that context, Waring and Warburton (2000, p. 162) warn that “appreciation of the importance of breadth in the physical education curriculum receives little recognition from those who at present support and drive government policy”. This point is echoed by Smith *et al.* (2007, p. 166) when they suggest that a “rhetorical commitment” to curricular breadth and balance is frequently contradicted by British government policy that promotes the centrality of team sports and traditional games. Within individual schools, the principal plays a key role in the decision-making process regarding content selection (Rainer *et al.* 2011) but must also have the support of the class teacher (Zhu *et al.* 2011).

The Irish perspective

Within European Union primary schools the average weekly PE time allocation is 109 minutes and games activities account for 41% of teaching time according to a pan European survey of PE provision (Hardman and Marshall 2009). In Irish primary schools 60 minutes per week is allocated to PE on the timetable. This allocation is comparatively low, representing approximately 5% of curriculum time (Government of Ireland 1999a) compared to a European average of 9% (OECD). A recent study suggests that only 35% of children in Fifth and Sixth Classes in Ireland (eleven and twelve year olds approximately) receive the mandated amount of weekly PE, with 46 minutes being the weekly average (Woods *et al.* 2010). In contrast, data from the “Growing Up in Ireland” study suggests that nine year olds are receiving slightly more than the recommended hour of PE each week, but suggests that

there is considerable variance among teachers (McCoy *et al.* 2012). Both studies report girls receive slightly less PE than boys, while girls in single-sex schools receive less than children in co-educational settings and in all-boys schools (McCoy *et al.* 2012). These figures represent a gradual improvement in recent decades as earlier research suggested the number of children “who encounter little or no PE has fallen from 20% in 1985 to 14% in 1996” (Irish National Teachers Organisation 1996, p. 31). In a manner that is similar to other countries, recent government policy advocates additional time should be allocated to the teaching of literacy and numeracy and recommended that all discretionary time should be devoted to these areas. As a result, time available for other subjects is reduced (Department of Education and Skills 2011c).

Research on the teaching of PE in Irish primary schools indicates that team invasion games dominate curriculum content, with Gaelic games, soccer and basketball being the most prevalent (Broderick and Shiel 2000; Fahey *et al.* 2005; McGuinness and Shelley 1996; Woods *et al.* 2010). Teachers appear to value social skill learning as a goal of PE and that can take place during these games, and there seems to be a shift away from a solely competitive ethos (Coulter and Ní Chróinín 2013). There has been limited focus on understanding how the games culture has become so dominant. The data generated in this study will assist in addressing this gap.

A lack of appropriate facilities for PE has been highlighted as a problem in a number of reports (e.g. Coolahan 1994; Fahey *et al.* 2005; Irish National Teachers Organisation 2008b; Joint Committee on Education and Science 2005) and it has been estimated that over half of all primary schools have no indoor facilities for PE (Deenihan 2005). This suggests that for a considerable number of schools, PE is highly weather dependent with opportunities to teach strands like gymnastics and dance curtailed by the lack of suitable indoor facilities (Irish National Teachers Organisation 2008b).

Questions have been raised about the confidence and competence of Irish primary teachers to deliver the PE curriculum (Coghlan 2011), and this has been attributed to a number of factors, including a lack of structured and systematic CPD and the limited and variable nature of preparation to teach PE in the ITE programmes at primary level (Irish National Teachers Organisation 2008b; Joint Committee on Education and Science 2005). In addition, PE has not featured prominently during school evaluations carried out by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) inspectorate. Between 2010 and 2012, PE was in second last position in terms of subject inclusion in Whole School Evaluation (WSE) reports. This represented 3% of all inspections. A similar situation pertained during incidental visitations with only drama registering fewer inspections than PE. Inspections in PE accounted for 2.1% of lessons seen on incidental visits (Chief Inspector 2013).

Who teaches primary PE?

The entire primary curriculum in many countries is delivered by one teacher, enabling that teacher to focus on each child's holistic development (e.g. Government of Ireland 1999b). It has been suggested that the employment of PE specialists may result in a loss of this focus (Wright 2002; 2004). While generally supporting the generalist teacher view, Sloan (2010) and Morgan and Bourke (2008) argue that the class teacher requires additional support to ensure that they have sufficient content knowledge to teach the subject effectively. An alternative viewpoint suggests that the demands on generalist teachers to teach a wide range of subjects is unrealistic, and some degree of specialism is required to address PE curriculum delivery appropriately (Carney and Howells 2008; Carney and Winkler 2008).

Research suggests a strong relationship exists between primary teachers' personal experiences of PE during their school days and their current teaching of the subject (Morgan and Hansen 2008). While conducting research with primary student teachers, Garrett and Wrench (2008, p. 46) outlined the contrast between teachers who "enjoyed unproblematic

relationships with the institutions of sport and physical education” and those who had been alienated by the strong sporting presence in PE. Furthermore, while some students had very positive dispositions towards competition, others noted very negative experiences.

Outsourcing has been described as the “process of procuring goods and services from external providers” (Benjamin J. Williams et al. 2011, p. 401). In that context, the increasing use of external providers to deliver PE in primary schools appears to be common internationally. Research into the outsourcing of PE to private providers has been carried out in Britain (e.g. Griggs 2008; Lavin *et al.* 2008), Australia (Benjamin J. Williams et al. 2011) and New Zealand (Petrie and Lisahunter 2011). Benjamin J. Williams *et al.* (2011), for example, suggest that this has been facilitated in Australia by a neoliberal economic rhetoric, while Petrie (2011) describes how teachers in New Zealand have welcomed the assistance of coaches to alleviate pressures caused by their overall teaching workload. Consequently, Smith (2013, p. 14) contends “that teachers are locked increasingly into complex relational networks comprised a diverse range of other professionals (e.g. coaches and other external providers) with a variety of vested interests that may coincide, partially coincide or diverge completely from the goals of teachers and teaching”.

It is increasingly common that external personnel often work alongside, or as a substitute for, the class teacher during the teaching of PE. Evidence from Britain, for example, suggests that the class teacher uses this time, among other things, to fulfil administrative duties, although some teachers view the presence of a coach as an opportunity for PE professional development (Blair and Capel 2008). It is estimated that 35% of primary schools there are employing external providers to cover classes where generalist teachers are engaged in formal planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time (Helen Ward 2005). Government policy on the management of PPA supported the idea of sports coaches being employed to cover teachers during this time (Lavin *et al.* 2008). As a result, it appears that primary

teachers willingly “give up the delivery of PE”, very often without giving the visiting coach any guidance around “planning and assessment” for the subject (Griggs 2010, pp. 42-43).

While the high workload associated with general curriculum administration was a contributory factor, teachers’ own confidence was noted as an issue (Blair and Capel 2011). This is particularly evident when the teachers compare their own perceived lack of ability with that of a sports coach who possesses an abundance of “sports-specific content knowledge...and bags of enthusiasm” (Griggs 2010, p. 44). Consequently, Petrie and Lisahunter (2011, p. 333) suggest that “having others ‘take the class’ is a pragmatic solution for teachers who lack confidence, motivation and/or time to negotiate and make sense of the policy, curriculum and content”.

This handing over of aspects of primary PE is viewed as a “worrying trend” by Griggs (2007, p. 61) because it is taking place “often without any regard of the subject knowledge required”. Coaches are perceived, however, to possess a level of sports-specific content knowledge that is deemed to be valuable in a primary school context where teachers’ confidence and competence to teach PE has been questioned (Doherty and Brennan 2014). As a result, school authorities frequently enlist coaches, paying little attention to the quality of the service being offered (Griggs 2010). It has been argued that a strong enough case has not been made for the status of PE in primary schools when curriculum time is handed over so readily to coaches (Keay 2006b). Furthermore, there is a risk that “current [government] policy...arguably does more harm than good by embracing the sporting community within a system that they do not understand” (Griggs 2007, p. 66).

Teaching and coaching: two sides of the same coin?

There is general agreement that a sound pedagogical foundation is essential for successful teaching and coaching (Cote *et al.* 2007; Fraser-Thomas and Cote 2006; Fraser-Thomas *et al.* 2005; Walsh *et al.* 2010). Cote *et al.* (2007, p. 6) advocate “that excellent coaches know how

to align their own competencies such that they are congruent with the needs of their athletes and the context in which they work”. A coach working in a primary school setting would need to have a clear understanding of the needs of the school and of the developmental needs of the children in the class grouping. Bergmann Drewe (2000, p. 82) argues that there is a close relationship between teaching and coaching and advocates a shift in “coaches’ mind-sets from training to education and “the child’s development can be addressed in a more holistic way, rather than focusing on a narrow range of sports-specific techniques.

Because coaches who work in primary schools come from different backgrounds, and represent a variety of agencies, there are no uniform guidelines to inform their role. The Australian Sports Commission (2007), for example, outlines twelve key points for coaches to consider while working in school. These guidelines advocate collaborative planning with the class teacher, designing activities that complement existing school plans and ensuring that sustainable partnerships are developed. In Britain, resource packs have been prepared for Adults Other Than Teachers (AOTTs) with suggestions on how to assist in the delivery of general PE programmes (Sport England *et al.* 2003). The English Football Association (FA) has published a document that outlines best practice for AOTTs, who are delivering parts of the PE curriculum as soccer coaches, and it suggests how soccer fits into the curriculum as well as outlining strategies for the development of after-school programmes (The Football Association 2003). Details on how elements of these guidelines were used in this thesis to create a template for analysing the work of coaches in Irish primary schools are provided in Chapter Four.

Increasingly, coaches and other external personnel are being regarded as primary PE specialists. Carney and Howells (2008) propose that a specialist should be:

A graduate professional who has expertise in three domains. Firstly, the specialist requires sound knowledge and understanding of education in the primary phase. Secondly, the

specialist must have a strong command of physical education, including knowledge of appropriate pedagogy as well as activity specific knowledge. Thirdly, the specialist must be an advocate for physical education within the school community, be willing to share good practice, and to act as agent for change (2008, pp. iii-iv).

Evaluated against these standards, it is likely that many coaches and other external providers cannot be regarded as specialists, despite being responsible for the delivery of aspects of PE curricula. Recent research suggests that the quality of external English coaches is inconsistent, with serious concerns “about the ability of coaches in terms of their understanding of classroom management and their control of children” (Lavin *et al.* 2008, p. xi). This suggests that sports coaching qualifications do not prepare coaches sufficiently well to deliver PE lessons of a high standard (Blair and Capel 2013). Instead, Carney and Winkler (2008, p. iv) warn that “the outsourcing of lessons to non-teachers serves only to reduce PE to bouts of activity specific exercise, jeopardising the developmental and holistic nature of the experience”. Nevertheless, the use of sports coaches appears to be a preferred option to the provision of teachers with sufficiently high levels of teaching expertise (Petrie 2011). In addition, De Martelaer and Theeboom (2006) suggest that untrained volunteer coaches are unlikely to continue in a coaching role for long, leading to high turnover rates and coaching inputs that lack quality. This assertion may have implications for the Irish coaching strategy that is based on the work of volunteers.

Who teaches primary physical education in Ireland?

PE in Irish primary schools is typically taught by generalist teachers, and Irish government policy since 1999 has asserted that the “class teacher is the most appropriate teacher to teach the physical education curriculum” (Government of Ireland 1999b, p. 24). A more recent parliamentary report has suggested that the employment of primary PE specialists should be

considered (Joint Committee on Education and Science 2005). There has been some debate on the specialist issue within union and teacher education circles (Coulter *et al.* 2009; Ni Chroinin and Murtagh 2009; Roche *et al.* 2009) but there has been no discernible impact on national policy. Scope is allowed for teachers to assist colleagues for particular elements of PE curriculum delivery and it is acknowledged that parents and sports coaches can support the teacher provided the teacher retains “overall responsibility for planning, organisation, control and monitoring (Government of Ireland 1999b, p. 28). This stance is supported by the Irish Primary Physical Education Association (2010).

To date, no Irish NGBs have provided their coaches with detailed guidance on how to interpret these curricular guidelines. There is no research on levels of co-operation between coach and class teacher in the planning and implementation of the programme. Apart from the curriculum statement above, there are no statutory guidelines for school authorities regarding the management of this external input. Consequently is it the responsibility of each school Board of Management, through the school principal, to manage how external expertise is utilised in Irish primary schools. These external tutors are typically coaches representing sports’ NGBs, employed to teach specific elements of the curriculum like dance or aquatics or they are volunteers from the local community. There is also the issue of who is accountable for the quality of this external provision (Benjamin J. Williams *et al.* 2011).

While planning and organisational issues in Irish primary schools are assumed to remain the responsibility of the class teacher (Government of Ireland 1999b), there is a lack of evidence on the procedures adopted when external personnel are deployed.

It is difficult to ascertain the proportion of the Irish PE programme that is currently delivered with the assistance of external personnel. External tutors in areas like music, drama and PE have been utilised in Irish primary schools to varying extents for many years (Department of Education and Science Inspectorate 2002; Irish National Teachers Organisation 2007). The

available research which is more than a decade old suggests that 82% of children were taught PE by their class teacher, with the remainder taught by “other teachers, coaches employed by their schools, or specialist PE teachers (Broderick and Shiel 2000, p. 19). More recently, McHugh (2008) reports that nearly 80% of Irish teachers receive some assistance from external personnel. Based on these figures, it would appear that there has been an increased use of NGBs and other providers in primary schools but the reasons underpinning this trend, and the impact they have made on the teaching of PE, have not been studied.

Fahey *et al.* (2005, p. 88) note that “the lack of research and understanding concerning the motivations, capacities, needs and resources of adult volunteers [in sport]...is an important gap in knowledge”. Although they were not referring specifically to coaches operating in primary schools, our understanding of issues pertaining to these coaches is similarly deficient. What is known, however, is that external personnel appear to have been accepted uncritically into the schools system (Irish National Teachers Organisation 2008b), and principals, in particular, value the contribution of sports coaches (Woods *et al.* 2010). While the motives of sporting organisations are clear with regard to the recruitment of players via school coaching schemes, there is an absence of research examining the duties carried out by coaches in Irish primary schools. In addition, there is an absence of clarity on “the quality and expertise of human resources [needed in]...supporting extracurricular sport” (Woods *et al.* 2010, p. 65). While the school inspectorate appears to offer legitimacy to these practices, they have noted in their reports that payment for this tuition by pupils “is contrary to the principle of free primary education” (Department of Education and Science Inspectorate 2002, p. 9). As Irish NGBs generally provide their services to schools free of charge, it would appear that they comply with that aspect of the Inspectorate’s guidelines. While there is some evidence to suggest that the GAA’s coaching programmes operate in over 92% of primary schools (Gaelic Athletic Association 2013), there is limited information on coaches’ biographies or

the role they play in these schools. Data are not available for the type of qualifications, if any, held by external coaches working in primary schools. The materials that have been produced by NGBs to support their school coaching programmes tend to focus on the development of effective school-club links (e.g. Ulster GAA Council and Cumann na mBunscol 2009) rather than on the provision of specific guidelines on how to deliver quality coaching programmes.

The relationship between the teacher and the coach

Ken Green (2005) suggests that the use of external personnel may undermine the role of teachers when coaches assume more powerful positions within schools. In this regard, it is worth noting that teachers are subject “to pressures of socialization” from a variety of groups, including coaches (Capel and Blair 2007, p. 28). Research from the English primary school system suggests that as many as 14% of teachers are not present when PE lessons are taught to their class by external coaches. Of the teachers who do remain, the most significant reason for staying is for their own professional development (Lavin *et al.* 2008). We do not have comparable data in an Irish context, although curricular guidelines recommend that the class teacher should be present at all times (Government of Ireland 1999b). While a case can be made for the importance of informal professional development opportunities (Armour and Yelling 2007), it is unclear whether the coaches delivering elements of the PE programme have the inclination or the skill-set to assist with this process, and there is a lack of research on the efficacy of such an approach. Nevertheless, opportunities do exist for a wide range of personnel “to support and inform teachers as required” (Armour 2010, p. 3). Furthermore, there is considerable potential for “unstructured or unfacilitated mentoring” to take place if there is a “degree of mutual respect, trust, and open communication present” (Robyn Jones *et al.* 2009, p. 270). Of critical importance here will be the coach’s appreciation for the potential benefits of a mentoring relationship, and the objectives that are set out for school coaching programmes. From the teacher’s point of view, the data suggest a willingness to engage in a

mentoring process and learning through “an apprenticeship of observation” (Robyn Jones *et al.* 2009, p. 275). Bearing this in mind, it would seem that a co-operative relationship would be beneficial for both teacher and coach. A model where the teacher and coach work together has potential benefits for the teacher, who may gain content knowledge, and for the coach, whose pedagogical skills can be enhanced (Blair and Capel 2011). One research study in England where the coach and teacher worked together and shared responsibilities highlighted the potential for a more supportive environment for children (Griggs and Wheeler 2007). In the longer term, a supportive programme of CPD can have a positive impact on the teaching of PE if “it attends to the needs of adult learners” (Faucette *et al.* 2002, p. 306).

In the broader context, it is also possible that the subject knowledge offered by the coach does not match that which is required in the integrated model of PE, where the generalist must have a deep understanding of the individual needs of the children across a wide range of curricular areas (Flintoff *et al.* 2011; Talbot 2008b). Furthermore, a drive towards “specialist” input may become focused on the demands of competitive sport rather than concentrating on a broader view of PE (Wright 2002, p. 38). Regardless of the model of delivery chosen, the primary generalist must have a clear involvement in the teaching of PE with their class (Carney and Winkler 2008). It has been argued by Sloan (2010) that teachers want to retain this involvement.

The privileged position of sport: the displacement of PE?

Issues concerning the teaching of primary PE by teachers and external providers have been examined in the previous sections of this chapter. Policy documents produced by these external groups may “exert a profound influence on the identity, content and direction of physical education” (Stothart 2002, p. 10). It appears that the involvement of individuals and organisations external to schools may promote initiatives that not only blur the boundaries between PE and sport but, on occasions, give school sport a centrality that displaces

important elements of curricular PE. This process of displacement can result in the inclusion of activities that are disconnected from children's learning and from the school ethos (Petrie 2010). This is particularly true if these programmes are "developed and delivered by people with limited knowledge of curriculum, pedagogy, context, or learners" (Petrie 2011, p. 15). This argument is supported by comments that outline how "the current relationship between sport, games and PE [in Britain] is fully cemented in current government strategy...without discussion of the appropriateness for all children or, indeed, alternative approaches (Marsden and Weston 2007, p. 395). In that context, Penney and Chandler (2000) warned that a PE curriculum that focuses on a narrow range of activities or sports may have its educational components diluted. Talbot (2008a, p. 8) argues against the separation of PE from the rest of the curriculum but concedes that "the power and strength of the sport culture" exerts a considerable influence on what is taught. Moreover, she advises that school managements should resist a privatisation of PE where activities are delivered as disconnected packages that are not in the children's best long-term interests. It is hardly surprising, however, that a sports culture that is so strong in society in general, also impacts on, and shapes PE provision. The manifestation of that sports culture in primary schools in the current literature will be explored in the next section.

School Sport

The previous section concluded with a summary of how sport has, in many situations, become synonymous with PE. This section focuses specifically on how sport policy is designed and implemented, with particular reference to the provision of extra-curricular activities and the organisation of competition.

School sport policy

Although the development of PE policy has been discussed earlier in this chapter, it is worth noting that PE and school sport policies are not formulated in isolation. Instead, there is

considerable overlap between the two. The development of government policies on PE and school sport is a complex process that occurs in a “crowded space” (Houlihan 2000), where education, sport and health policy-makers compete for position (Griggs and Ward 2012). While the development of PE curricula is chiefly the responsibility of education policy makers, there is a greater number of groups involved in the formulation of school sport policy, including a variety of government agencies and sports’ NGBs. In the past decade, UK government policy has promoted the links between sport and PE and sought to foster collaboration and partnership among a variety of sport and educational groups (Donovan *et al.* 2006; Kirk 2004; Stidder and Hayes 2013).

The competing agendas of these different bodies can be problematic (Kirk and Gorely 2000). In that context, Phillpots (2013, p. 208) cautions that “that PESS [Physical Education and School Sport] is a highly politicized policy area that has been particularly vulnerable to the ideologies of successive governments and the influence of powerful politicians over the past three decades”. Furthermore, government initiatives in sport and physical activity are sometimes implemented through education, with policy objectives that are not always compatible with curricular objectives (Mick Green 2006b). It is worth noting that “any new policy is introduced into a context in which there will be differing, and often competing, interests” (Flintoff 2003, p. 232).

Government agencies view sport in a wide variety of ways, and adopt different approaches to sport policy development (Houlihan *et al.* 2009). Furthermore, because of the positive qualities attributed to sport, it is often viewed by policymakers as a “panacea for an improved society” (Burrows and McCormack 2011, p. 302). Policy documents place “faith in the power of sport (and by implication PESS) to be a force for social good” (Bailey *et al.* 2009, p. 5) but policy decisions are not always informed by empirical research (Marsden and Weston 2007). Much has been written about the way in which the promotion of traditional team games was

achieved centrality in Britain in the 1990s. While the publication of “Sport: Playing the Game (1995) represented the culmination of that phase, the lobbying carried out by politicians, sports governing bodies and the media in the years before shaped its content. From some perspectives, research evidence was ignored or side-tracked as groups closer to the locus of decision-making advanced claims that could not be supported empirically (Bloyce and Smith 2010; Houlihan 2000). More recently, the PESSCL strategy included a ‘Club Links’ strand that encouraged NGBs to create pathways for children to extend their sport participation beyond the school (Griggs and Wheeler 2007). Houlihan (2005, p. 166) uses the term ‘street level bureaucrats’ to describe the role played by “teachers, coaches, or sports development officers, in ‘making’ policy in the everyday context within which they operated”. It could be argued that this interpretation of policy might result in outcomes that are very different from those envisaged by the originators of the policy document. This helps to explain how mismatches occur between policy design and implementation, as the relationships among a variety of groups may lead to outcomes that were unintended or unforeseen and my research sought to interrogate this issue within the Irish primary school context.

Although Kirk and Gorely (2000) argue that policy development should be informed by research, claims are made that participation in PE and school sport programmes has positive health benefits despite inconclusive findings (Bailey *et al.* 2009). Likewise, the empirical evidence to support claims that team games are effective in fostering social, personal and moral values is less clear (Theodoulides and Armour 2001). Nevertheless, the development of partnerships between schools and the local community has been promoted consistently by government agencies internationally (Flintoff 2013; Wright 2002). Formal links between school PE programmes and community sport activities vary globally. Within Europe, school-community links exist in 55% of countries (Hardman and Marshall 2009). Research in England suggests that competitive sport activities, underpinned by government policy, have

become “an even more distinctive feature of contemporary PE provision” (Smith 2013, p. 3). Griggs and Ward (2012, p. 212) argue that the “‘sportification’ of physical education serves to confirm its peripheral role in the curriculum”.

Sport in Irish primary schools: policy and practice

While PE is a defined curricular area in Irish primary schools, the status of school sport is not so clearly defined. Nevertheless, extra-curricular sport plays an important part in Irish school life (Broderick and Shiel 2000; Woods *et al.* 2010) and is firmly embedded within most primary schools as part of the “hidden curriculum” (Kathleen Lynch 1989). While a hidden curriculum might be described as “the communication of knowledge that is unplanned and unintentional” (Solmon and Lee 2008, p. 232), the position of sport in primary schools is deeply rooted in school practice. While on the one hand involvement in sport a very ‘visible’ part of school life, it is underrepresented or ‘hidden’ in terms of policy articulation. While the primary curriculum defines a role for school sport that is extra-curricular (Government of Ireland 1999a), practice in schools would suggest that sport is firmly embedded within curricular time. Bailey *et al.* (2010, p. 83) assert that “educational policy is a key driver” of initiatives to increase participation in sport internationally. In Ireland, NGB policies and government sport policies as articulated by the Irish Sports Council (ISC) and other groups impact on how school sport participation is developed. It is argued there are “three pillars” of Irish children’s sport, namely school PE curriculum, extra-curricular school sport and sport played outside of school (Fahey *et al.* 2005, p. 1). The first two of these are clearly located within the primary school system, while the third is tangentially linked through the efforts of various NGBs.

School sport objectives, based on the perceived health benefits of sport, are positioned centrally in Irish government policy documentation (e.g. Department of Health and Children and Health Service Executive 2009). It is recommended that “the emphasis in all schools

should be on increasing physical activity including participation in sport” and that schools should provide 30 minutes of physical activity each day, in addition to the time devoted to PE in the curriculum (Department of Health and Children 2005, p. 88). More recently Layte and McCrory (2011, p. 57), while reporting on a national longitudinal study, concluded that “education and health policy needs to recognise the importance of sport and exercise and make room for it in the school day”. The Minister for Education countered that the daily recommendation of 30 minutes of physical activity was “unrealistic” considering the length of the school day, and the time pressures to cover the remainder of the primary curriculum adequately. Instead, he suggested that the shortfall could be made up by participation in sports activities provided by NGBs outside of the formal PE curriculum and within the local community (Cullen 2011).

Despite a range of health, education and sports policies that advocate increasing participation levels in sport for a variety of reasons, Lunn (2009, p. 11) concludes “that the level of public funding directed to elite sport is very nearly twice that devoted to grassroots sport”. The Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) and the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) are the NGBs that govern Ireland’s most popular team sports. Between them, they received 21% of Irish Sports Council’s funding in 2008. This compares with the allocation of 25% received by all the other NGBs combined (approximately 60 in total) and the 21% given to participation programmes generally (Lunn 2009). While overall ISC funding has dropped on a yearly basis since then, the three main NGBs have managed to retain a comparable proportion of the grant allocation (Irish Sports Council 2012). This situation diminishes the prospect of the smaller sporting organisations being able to establish a strong base within the school system, and ensures that traditional team sports retain their dominant position.

In return for significant government investment, these three organisations have articulated comprehensive guidelines on the management of children's activities under their jurisdiction (Football Association of Ireland 2007; Gaelic Athletic Association 2011; Irish Rugby Football Union 2012) . Although the major team sports dominate sport provision for children, they become less important as providers of physical activity opportunities as these children proceed to adulthood when individual and recreational activities become more important (Lunn and Layte 2008).

The view that children's levels of participation in physical activity are declining over time can be countered by strong evidence that suggests the opposite is actually the case. Bloyce and Smith (2010) reviewed a wide range of data that back up the idea that children in Britain are partaking in more organised physical activity than ever before. This is supported by research in Ireland that suggests that the amount of sport being played in primary schools appears to be increasing over time, with insignificant differences between the participation rates of boys and girls (Lunn 2008; Woods *et al.* 2010). Commenting positively on current policy implementation for primary school-aged children, Lunn *et al.* (2013, p. 24) note that "there appears to be little problem first getting children to make the transition into active participation in sport and exercise". There are, however, significant levels of drop-out in the teenage years particularly among girls, and from traditional team sports in general (Lunn *et al.* 2013). Consequently it would appear that there is a disconnect between the recruitment of young players in the early years, and their retention as they get older.

Sport: why do schools take part?

There appears to be a 'taken for granted' view that participation in sport has positive impacts on children (Ken Green 2002a). Government policy in the United Kingdom promotes sport and PE as ways to solve many societal problems (Evans 2004). Sport England (2007), claims that collaboration between schools and external bodies in the local community will lead to

increases in educational attainment and improve attendance and pupils' attitudes. The report uses the words of a teacher who notes the development of a "whole community ethos to education...improves results. And that's the business we're in" (Sport England 2007, p. 7). It is argued that sport has a positive impact on the development of the child's social and cultural values, as well as a contribution to health, education and recreation (Commission of the European Communities 2007). Sport is seen as an important vehicle for schools to maintain longstanding traditions, particularly representative team games (Ken Green 2005). These traditions, and the cultural ethos that underpin them are, it is suggested, typically reinforced "through the 'hidden' curriculum of competitive team games, the content and mode of competitive sport and PE" (Evans *et al.* 1997a, p. 289). School communities value the role played by sport, including interscholastic competitions, in the development of their overall ethos and identity (Burrows and McCormack 2011). The development of social connections through activities that involve teamwork can also be beneficial. These benefits require an emphasis on fostering "quality relationships and care" (Allen and Petrie 2005, p. 91). Bailey (2006, p. 399) argues, however, that while PE and sport "have the potential to make significant contributions to the education and development of children and young people in many ways", the benefits do not accrue automatically but are dependent on "the actions and interactions of teachers and coaches".

Extra-curricular activities: Just team sports?

Blair and Capel (2013, p. 173) propose that extracurricular activities have the potential to provide an important link "between curricular experience and young people's involvement in physical activity and sport as a lifelong participant". A significant proportion of extra-curricular activity is provided by coaches representing sports clubs, and children's participation rates are highest in the latter primary years (Ken Green 2008). Concern has been expressed that a range of extra-curricular activities that are focused on competitive team

games is unlikely to support children's lifelong involvement in physical activity (Curtner-Smith *et al.* 2007; Penney and Harris 1997; Smith *et al.* 2007). Writing about high school extra-curricular activities in the United States, Curtner-Smith *et al.* (2007) described how the practice of school coaches is influenced by a desire to develop elite athletes, to promote the school's image and to foster strong links with the local community. While the American system of elite school sport would appear to have little in common with sport in Irish primary schools, there is, nevertheless, a considerable amount of time devoted to the preparation of school teams and to the development of community sports links (Woods *et al.* 2010). One study suggests that the majority of extra-curricular physical activity in Ireland is devoted to training school teams (Murray and Millar 2005). It is unclear whether this type of activity can have as positive an impact on children's engagement in physical activity as extra-curricular programmes that are "developmentally appropriate and appealing...and delivered by well-trained staff" (McKenzie and Kahan 2008, p. 176). Of considerable importance in this regard is the manner in which extra-curricular team sport competitions are organised. This issue will be examined in the next three sections.

Competition in children's sport

Competitive sport is defined by David (2005, p. 34) as "any physical activity whose main objective, for participants, is winning". Current policy in Britain aims to strengthen links between the school and the local community so that children will be motivated "to take part in more competitive sport than ever before" (Department for Culture Media and Sport 2012, p. 5). Accordingly, the most appropriate way to introduce children to competition in sport is a vexed question and has been the subject of intense debate. Introducing children to formal competition too early can affect their self-esteem adversely and hamper skill development (Fraser-Thomas and Cote 2006). Furthermore, Wall and Cote (2007) suggest that programmes where fun and enjoyment are promoted can develop children's intrinsic

motivation to participate, thereby prolonging involvement. In that context, international research into the teaching of invasion games suggests that small-sided games with modified rules are most appropriate for children in school and community sport settings (e.g. Gréhaigne *et al.* 2005; Rod Thorpe 1990; Wein 2007). Various NGBs have endorsed this principle in recent years, resulting in formats that encourage maximum participation while introducing children to new skills in ways that are developmentally appropriate (e.g. Australian Sports Commission 2011; Gaelic Athletic Association 2011; New Zealand Rugby Union 2007; The Football Association 2009). As a result of these initiatives, small-sided, modified games have been adopted as models of best practice for primary school-aged children.

Nevertheless, attempts internationally by NGBs to modify traditional competitive structures for children have encountered significant resistance from within the membership. Plans were introduced in 2011 by the New Zealand Rugby Union (NZRU), for example, to alter the rules of games for children aged 13 and under. The rule changes were designed to prevent one-sided games by introducing a maximum score differential of 35 points. At that stage, coaches were requested to adopt strategies such as changing the playing personnel, swapping players between teams or altering players' positions (Brent Anderson 2011). This initiative met with stiff opposition from, amongst others, former international players and club coaches who objected that it was attempting "to protect kids from reality: it is not all about winning, obviously, but at the same time winning makes you humble and so does losing" (Donnell and Harper 2011). A similar debate has taken place in Ireland in relation to the GAA's Go Games initiative. While official policy has been supported by research that outlines the potential benefits of modified, small-sided games (Whelan 2011), the model has been the subject of criticism from media and 'grassroots' sources. Objections centre on the loss of traditional

practices (Sweeney 2010) and that children's experience of sport is diminished by the removal of formal competition (Humphries 2010; Joseph Lynch 2011).

The pressure to engage in competition comes from a variety of sources, including government policy, coaches and parents (Way and Balyi 2007). Although research suggests that having fun is the primary motivation factor for children's participation in sport, David (2005, p. 230) contends that "adults frequently shape competitive sport around the concept of winning by duplicating adult sport models" thereby decreasing children's enjoyment.

Competition in school sport

The nature of school sport competition has also been the subject of considerable debate internationally and in Ireland. While many policymakers and academic researchers argue for the adoption of models that maximize participation, there are other groups who advocate for traditional models that focus winning as a core value. It is suggested, for example, that competition in the school sport context should focus on personal improvement and enjoyment, with an emphasis on participation rather than the score (School Sport Australia 2012). What is of crucial importance is the manner in which competitions are organised by teachers who have a central role in managing any negative outcomes of school competitions (Aleixo and Norris 2009). Furthermore, some researchers would argue that children prefer pedagogical approaches based on learning and enjoyment to those that focus on competition for elite groups (Flintoff 2008a). Such an approach can enable participants to grow and a sense of togetherness is fostered. However, if a goal of elite performance, with a focus on winning, is given a dominant status, this impacts negatively on children's experiences (Kirk 2002) and may be a barrier to participation (Allender *et al.* 2006).

De Martelaer and Theeboom (2006) contend that, in practice, success in inter-school sports competitions is viewed positively in school communities and, as a result, PE curricula have

been modified to prioritise sport. Schools that emphasise sport participation for public relations purposes may put a significant value on performance in formal competitions involving a small number of talented students (Kirk and Gorely 2000). In Britain, the changing nature of government policy relating to the promotion of competitive school sport is illustrated by plans aimed at the “revival of competitive sport in schools”, inspired by the hosting of the 2012 Olympics in London (Department of Culture Media and Sport 2011). Competitive school sport is described as having a positive effect on children’s health and on the development of their social skills and self-confidence. The chairperson of the Youth Sport Trust commented that “competitive sport teaches young people a range of skills – from confidence and self-esteem to respect and friendship – all of which will support them as they progress through school and on to future careers (Department of Culture Media and Sport 2011). This official statement was preceded in 2008 by calls from the Prime Minister “to encourage competitive sports in schools, not the 'medals for all' culture we have seen in previous years" (Summers 2008). Current policy directives place a renewed emphasis on “competitive sport...[as a] compulsory part of the curriculum” at all school levels (Loughton 2012, p. 46), suggesting that the government’s “vision for physical education [is] firmly embedded in competitive team sport” (Stidder and Hayes 2013, p. 4).

In contrast, Laura Ward *et al.* (2008) have argued that too much emphasis on competitive team sports can be a disincentive to some children’s participation in school sport. The production of “winning teams” is not a good indicator of the development of lifelong patterns of physical activity outside of school (Ken Green 2004, p. 74). Instead, Bailey *et al.* (2009, p. 13) propose that “experiences of personal success, and participation within a motivational climate oriented towards task mastery rather than competition, appear to be key elements in determining positive perceptions”. Moreover, they suggest that exposure to an overly competitive environment at a young age can lead to lowered levels of self-esteem and

withdrawal from activities. It would appear, therefore, that particular articulations of school sport policy can have significantly different results, as policy that promotes the image of the school through competitive sporting success will provide children with a very different experience when compared to one that advocates for maximum participation in a range of activities. If competitive models that privilege elite groups of children remain unchanged, then the physical experience of other children is likely to be impacted negatively.

Consequently, alternative models of competition that focus on children's developmental readiness have been proposed (e.g. Pickup and Price 2007). In these models children are motivated to participate in order to have fun, to meet with their friends and to learn new skills (Bengoechea *et al.* 2004; Thomas and Thomas 2008).

Garrett and Wrench (2008, p. 57) argue that “discourses around the importance of sport and sporting skills for children continue to provide some of the strongest filters against seeing the need for change”. Groups of teachers and policymakers who favour traditional structures in order to promote values like identity and competitiveness may at odds with groups who prioritize participation and the child's holistic development. These issues are central to this study in seeking greater understanding of how particular sporting priorities have gained prominence in the Irish primary school context.

Competition in Irish primary school sport

There is limited research on Irish primary teachers' views of school sport competition, but a recent small-scale study suggested traditional competition formats are valued highly by teachers and students (Joseph Lynch 2011). It has been noted that the practice of sport and physical activity appear to be embedded firmly in the experiences of Irish primary school children (Collier *et al.* 2007). There may be some merit in the argument that “it is important to appreciate the virtue of the traditional dominant sports as energisers of both young people and adults, and the difficulties likely to be faced by efforts to create similar virtues in other

arenas of physical activity” (Fahey *et al.* 2005, p. 91). However, the introduction of modified games in primary schools has had a positive impact on player recruitment (Woods *et al.* 2010). Nevertheless, the implementation of these models remains contentious as children approach their teenage years, particularly in relation to how competition is introduced and managed. As noted in the previous section, this is frequently articulated in newspaper articles where advocates of a traditional model of competition outline their opposition to modified games. Heated debate has taken place on this issue in relation to Gaelic games, and the organisation of inter-school competitions for senior primary school classes has become particularly contentious because of its interface between school and community sport (Daly 2012; Joseph Lynch 2011). While national policy, as articulated by the GAA, is consistent across schools and community settings, the resistance to change has been most evident in the school sector, where groups of teachers have maintained traditional interscholastic competitive formats. This issue will be examined in greater detail in the final section of this chapter. The achievement of a balance between the traditional games-based model and more inclusive models presents a considerable challenge to groups and individuals involved in PE and school sport. The generation of data relating to this issue, was an important focus of my study.

The role of a National Governing Body in primary schools

Having examined issues regarding PE, school sport, and the relationship between the two, the next part of this review considers the specific role that NGBs play in primary school PE and school sport.

Establishing links: the school and the wider community

The sometimes fraught relationship between PE and school sport has been outlined above. Various interest groups seek to carve out positions within PE and school sport programmes, frequently without any engagement with the core tenets of school curricula (Talbot 1998).

Reid (2003) pointed out sporting organisations may view schools as recruiting grounds for the growth of their activities. Benjamin J. Williams *et al.* (2011, p. 411) described how well funded traditional sports like Australian football, cricket and rugby have established a dominant position as external providers to primary schools in Queensland. Their well-established presence enables them “to trade on significant levels of not just economic but also social capital”. The circumstances that have contributed to the dominant position of Gaelic games in Irish primary schools are not dissimilar, and is a key issue for this thesis.

Given the difficulty in agreeing definitions for PE, and the strength of the sports lobby in establishing a foothold for sport in primary schools, it is understandable that some writers have turned their attention to examining ways in which PE and school sport can co-operate to enhance children’s learning. In this context, models like Sport Education attempt to bridge the gap between PE and sport in meaningful ways (e.g. Kinchin *et al.* 2009). Gilbert (1998) advocates for partnerships between schools and community groups in order to achieve outcomes that are most beneficial to children. Similarly, Pope (2011, pp. 274-75) argues that

if external commercial, exclusive or political forces draw sport away from its educative potential, physical education and sport professionals have two choices: They can ignore such undesirable forces and watch sport take on a life of its own with the risk of any educational properties being diminished or lost, or they can advocate for and position sport and physical education as mutually educational vehicles that promote access and opportunity

This latter approach may have benefits for both PE and sport with educational objectives maintained as school activities can be connected in a meaningful way to the local community. More starkly, Stothart (2005, p. 101) warns that “if physical education avoids sport it will rapidly become a curriculum curiosity and a relic of educational myopia”. This focus on the need for the PE and sport communities to work towards mutually beneficial goals has attracted some support. For example, an integrative model for PE and sport performance was

proposed by Kirk and Gorely (2000). The authors concluded that the “widespread use of modified games and sports...and meeting new challenges for teacher and coach education are vital to our ability to make the most of this model” (Kirk and Gorely 2000, p. 131). Pope (2010, p. 4) argued that the PE community can enhance sport and suggested that “the argument from yesteryear that *sport is about sport* and *physical education is about the student* is both polemic and outdated” [italics in original]. He advises that physical educators should engage with sport policy initiatives rather than shying away from them. In contrast Gareth Williams (2008, p. 20) urges teachers “to protect their domain” when working with external partners in order “to ensure clarity of vision”.

Primary schools and NGB policy

This literature review has established that the sport lobby has a prominent position in the selection of sport content in primary schools. This section focuses on how NGBs are involved in primary PE and sport. Redelius and Larsson (2010) argue that individual sporting organisations exert a significant influence on the way that PE programmes are implemented, often resulting in a shift in focus towards extrinsic motivations like the winning of competitions. NGBs have a vested interest in establishing close links with primary schools and, consequently, new initiatives may be instigated and driven by external partners rather than by educational objectives (Waring and Warburton 2000). This is not to suggest, however, that educational policy does not also influence the development of NGB policy in relation to schools. In this regard, Reid (2003) notes that the Rugby Football Union (RFU) in England modified its policy in line with government recommendations to an extent that they complement the goals of PE. This is a good example of the operation of power balances within the context of education and sport.

Government policy developments in Britain place a strong emphasis on links between schools and clubs (e.g. Department for Education and Skills 2003; Department for Education

and Skills 2005) and this has been supported by the NGBs (e.g. Rugby Football Union 2012). Furthermore, the willingness of NGBs in the UK to get involved in developing school-club links suggests an awareness of the need to build initiatives that are more sustainable in the long term (Reid 2003). This involvement was encouraged by initiatives like the UK government's PESSCL strategy (Lavin *et al.* 2008). While government and sporting bodies devoted a considerable amount of time and resources to the development of policy initiatives, the manner in which policy has been implemented was problematic. Burrows and McCormack (2011, p. 309), for example, describe how one particular school community wouldn't "necessarily change their practice to fit with government mandates". Likewise, it is suggested that "governing body influence over clubs can not always be taken as read" (Reid 2003, p. 316). The 'distance' that can be apparent in policy terms between government bodies and the classroom, and between NGBs and their club units (Ken Green 2008), can be theorized as an example of lengthening chains of interdependency giving rise to unplanned and unforeseen outcomes. This will be a key focus of the research to be conducted with the GAA and primary school provision of Gaelic games.

The three largest NGBs (GAA, IRFU and FAI) in Ireland have each devised policies relating to supporting the playing of their games in primary schools. These policies have much in common. Small-sided games with modified rules are favoured, and a recognition that establishing or maintaining a presence in the primary school system is important for the development of their sports (Football Association of Ireland 2007; Gaelic Athletic Association 2011; Irish Rugby Football Union 2012). Given that they each advocate small-sided modified games, there appears to be a willingness to address a central challenge in the development of child sport policy, namely "to further develop its understanding of what a holistic, developmental approach to children's sport would entail" (Fahey *et al.* 2005, p. 87). In this regard, they are also broadly aligned with the Irish curricular guidelines on the

teaching of games in primary schools (Government of Ireland 1999b). While two of the organizations have abandoned official competitive structures for primary school-aged children, the FAI still organizes a national tournament (Football Association of Ireland Schools 2011). The remainder of this section focuses on the activities of the GAA in primary schools as the organization of these activities is a central focus of this research project.

The Gaelic Athletic Association and primary schools

Houlihan (1997, p. 161) contends that “the extent to which the GAA is woven into the fabric of Irish society, religion and politics makes it difficult to talk of the organisation’s role in policy-making, as this conceptualisation implies a degree of distance between itself and the institutions of the state”. The attainment of this dominant position has been traced back to decisions made in the early years of the association whereby clubs were formed “around parish units and local community networks” (Cronin *et al.* 2009, p. 211). There are currently 2126 clubs in Ireland, with a further 392 overseas (Gaelic Athletic Association 2014a) . (Houlihan 1997) argues that the lack of direct state intervention in Irish sport until comparatively recently is partly due to this extensive network of GAA clubs established around the country since the end of the 19th century. In his view, the GAA played a key role in the provision of social and cultural stimuli after the foundation of the Irish Free State in 1921, enabling it to carve out a dominant position in Irish society during the years after independence when discourses around the promotion of distinctive Irish cultural traditions were popular. It was actively involved in the production of curriculum documents in the 1920s when the foundations for a new educational system were being established (Duffy 1997). It has been suggested that, prior to 1965, the Irish government displayed a lack of interest towards PE and the GAA filled the void, particularly in rural Ireland (Houlihan 1997). Furthermore, Liston (2005b, p. 187) argued that “the GAA’s increasingly comprehensive provision for local and regional Gaelic sports since the 1900s has meant that

successive Irish governments were not constrained to become more involved in sports policy until the late twentieth century”. This point is echoed by Duffy (1997, p. 33) when he noted that “given the strength of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) in rural areas the need for formalised physical education on the curriculum, for boys at any rate, was clearly not a [government] priority”. In that context, the establishment of a strong position for the GAA within the school system is not surprising.

Gaelic games feature strongly in the extra-curricular school sport programme of a considerable number of schools, and the prevalence of these activities is underscored by the aspiration of Cumann na mBunscol, a voluntary organisation of primary teachers, “to have Gaelic games the games of choice for Ireland’s primary school children” (Cumann na mBunscol 2007, p. 3). As a consequence, many Irish children appear to associate Gaelic games with national identity (Waldron and Pike 2006). Houlihan (1997, p. 241) has argued that advocates for PE must “contend with the deeply entrenched position of the GAA in Irish society”, and he suggested that the GAA itself was wary of “the implications of PE for the future of Gaelic sports”. More recently, however, GAA policy documents have begun to outline a specific role for Gaelic games within the PE curriculum suggesting that the GAA is becoming more attuned to the requirements of national PE policy in contemporary Ireland (e.g. Gaelic Athletic Association 2014a).

The Gaelic Athletic Association has sought to identify schools as key sites in the recruitment of young players: “The school has always been the foundation stone in the promotion of our games and Association (Gaelic Athletic Association 2003, p. 9). As a result, the development of school-club links has been a key policy strategy (e.g. Ulster GAA Council and Cumann na mBunscol 2009) and significant financial resources have been allocated to the establishment of a school coaching network throughout the country. This network comprises a large cohort of professional coaches and development officers, supplemented by volunteer coaches who

provide regular coaching in primary schools. There is no empirical research on how this coaching programme operates. As a consequence, very little is known about how it impacts on the delivery of PE and sport in Irish primary schools. This study will attempt to address this gap in the literature.

Gaelic games and a 'Crisis Discourse'

Stephen Thorpe (2003, p. 135) describes how the creation of crisis discourses, bound up in notions of decline and deterioration, facilitates “the way certain ‘truths’ of physical education can be constructed and how they ultimately find their way into our beliefs, choices and commitments”. In Britain, the belief that sport was in crisis became a strong driver of policy that impacted on PE (Penney and Harris 1997). Swabey and Penney (2011) contend that arguments in favour of the inclusion of Fundamental Movement Skills programmes in primary school curricula in Australia, for example, were underpinned by the creation of crisis discourses around elite sport performance. Within the GAA, ‘crisis’ is frequently expressed in terms of gender and the significant gender imbalance in the Irish primary school system. This has been increasing since the early 1970s when over 30% of primary teachers were male. That figure had dropped to 18% in 2005 (Department of Education and Science 2005), to 15% seven years later (Office of the Department of Education and Skills 2013). Among GAA members there is a widely held perception that this imbalance constitutes a significant challenge for the future of Gaelic games (Cumann na mBunscol 2007; Foley 2001) as primary schools are considered to be key recruitment centres or “channels of supply” (Gaelic Athletic Association 2002, p. 69). As a consequence, there is an expectation that coaches are needed in schools to address this “problem” for the GAA (e.g. O Dwyer 2010). This viewpoint has been contested by some teachers’ groups who have highlighted the contribution of female teachers to the promotion of Gaelic games in primary schools and have rejected the crisis discourse (Irish Independent 2002). There is no empirical data

examining the part played by female teachers in the promotion of Gaelic games in primary schools. Although a recent report suggests that female teachers are slightly less likely to teach PE than their male counterparts, female teachers with less than five years' experience devote more time to PE than other age-groups (McCoy *et al.* 2012).

Primary school Gaelic games: only for boys?

It has been suggested that the ethos around traditional models of PE and school sport may be de-motivating for many girls (Cockburn and Clarke 2002). This point is echoed by Kirk (2012, p. 3) when he suggested that sport-based programmes may “act as a barrier to girls' participation”. Some studies have examined how these barriers may impact on the participation of girls in team sports outside of school also (Velija 2011; Velija and Malcolm 2009). As noted earlier, primary PE provision for girls in Ireland is slightly less than for boys (McCoy *et al.* 2012) but Gaelic football is the most prevalent activity for girls during both PE classes and extra-curricular activities. Research in Britain has noted negligible differences between the extra-curricular participation rates of boys and girls in primary schools (Ken Green 2008). In Ireland, issues around girls' involvement in PE and school sport were first highlighted with the publication of “Fair Play for Girls and Boys” (Irish National Teachers Organisation 1993). This document suggested ways to make girls' involvement in PE and sport more equitable, while conceding that the language used in the 1971 curriculum, practice in schools and the position of women's sport in society in general needed to be challenged. More recent data point to similar numbers of boys and girls taking part in extra-curricular sport, although boys participate more frequently. Gaelic football is the activity with the highest level of participation for boys and girls (Fahey *et al.* 2005; Woods *et al.* 2010), but schools field more teams for boys than for girls in formal Gaelic games competitions (Cumann na mBunscol 2007). Furthermore, O'Sullivan (2002) cautioned that girls' physical activity levels start to decline at the end of the primary cycle.

While current policy documents advocate for equal opportunities for boys and girls (Department of Education and Skills 2012b; Government of Ireland 1999b), it is not clear how well these policies are implemented at local level. The GAA, for example, does not organise Gaelic games activities for females. The sports of camogie and ladies football are managed, respectively, by An Cumann Camógaíochta and by the Ladies Gaelic Football Association (LGFA), although close ties exist between the three organisations. Neither An Cumann Camógaíochta nor the LGFA have sufficient coaches or the financial resources to provide comprehensive coaching schemes for the primary school sector. Instead, there is an informal understanding among the organisations that GAA coaching inputs should be available to girls as well as boys. What is not known is whether these coaches adapt their sessions to accommodate rule differences between these games or if a “one size fits all” approach is followed. Likewise, the extent to which the GAA coaching personnel promote female participation is unclear.

Cumann na mBunscol: teachers’ promotion of Gaelic games

Successive GAA policy statements have highlighted the importance of the primary school sector for the recruitment and development of young (male) players (e.g. Gaelic Athletic Association 2003). The contribution of teachers is regularly praised by high-ranking GAA officials (Gaelic Athletic Association 2014b) and, indeed, many high-ranking GAA officials have, or had, a teaching background. Teachers are also considered to have an important role in introducing girls to Gaelic games (Camogie Association 2010; Ladies Gaelic Football Association 2011). The origins of Cumann na mBunscol were rooted in a desire to promote Irish sports in primary schools. A history of the organisation suggests that a ‘crisis’ discourse was very evident in the mid-1920s as some teachers bemoaned the fact that “during the school season the children discussed the leading cross- channel soccer teams, and in the summer they carried their bats and cricket stumps to the nearest piece of open ground”

(Cumann na mBunscól Atha Cliath 2003). The first schools' Gaelic games competitions were organised by a small group of teachers, assisted closely by religious organisations such as the Christian Brothers (Sciath na Scol Chorcaí 2003).

The position of Cumann na mBunscól within the primary school sport framework is, in many ways, unique. The organisation provides a bridge between the school system and the NGB because of its close connections with both. It is now the largest organisation of its type, with over 90% of primary schools participating in its competitions (Gaelic Athletic Association 2013). Significantly, the organisation portrays itself as being independent of the GAA, and this position is enshrined in its constitution (Cumann na mBunscól 2011). The organisation, however, negotiates access to GAA grounds for the playing of matches, receives annual grants and benefit in kind in terms of ticket allocations to major games. Furthermore, the right to nominate members to sit on various committees within the GAA at local and national level demonstrates the interdependent nature of the organisations. An important implication of independence is that official GAA policies like the Go Games initiative are not always accepted by Cumann na mBunscól, leading to disharmony and a considerable degree of policy slippage (Cumann na mBunscól 2009b). Traditionally, Cumann na mBunscól has been successful in providing schools with an inter-school competitive games structure. County final days attract comparatively large attendances and provide the organisation with considerable public relations opportunities, with coverage in regional newspapers and on local radio commonplace (Sciath na Scol 2003; Vaughan 2000). The Setanta TV channel has broadcast deferred coverage of the Dublin Cumann na mBunscól primary school finals over a number of years. The competitive nature of these games, however, can be viewed as being in direct contravention of the GAA's policy of abolishing competitive games structures for the under twelve age group (Gaelic Athletic Association 2008). What this illustrates, however, is that while Gaelic games have a very visible presence within primary schools, policy

implementation is dependent on the actions of groups of teachers striving to achieve objectives that are frequently contradictory. Furthermore, while the GAA is a very powerful organisation within this arena, its capacity to implement policy is constrained or enabled by its relationships with these groups. This study seeks to deepen our understanding of the complex processes underpinning these relationships.

Summary

The objective of this chapter has been to provide a review of the existing literature on how PE and school sport policies are enacted in a primary school context. As Gaelic games occupy a dominant cultural position in Irish primary schools, this review focused specifically on what is known about how the GAA, in conjunction with Cumann na mBunscol, has established a presence there. However, we know relatively little about why the use of external coaches has become so prevalent, and about how their work impacts on the teaching of PE. Furthermore, there is an absence of research on how Gaelic games have come to dominate school sport activities and how they impact on the provision of PE in Irish primary schools. Finally, the extent to which official written policy is implemented at school level is unclear, and the factors that impact on implementation require attention. These gaps in our understanding will be addressed in this study.

Chapter 3: Exploring a Theoretical Framework

Introduction

Ken Green (2006a, p. 652) has argued that research in PE and school sport should be underpinned by strategies that stress “the interconnected aspects of broader social phenomena”. An appropriate theoretical framework is important for any research project (Mary O Sullivan 2007) as it helps to achieve a better understanding of the research topic, and can assist in the interpretation of the findings (Bryman 2008). The importance of a sound theoretical base is underlined by Silverman (2007, p. 9) when he contends that “research is worthless unless it recognises its theoretical assumptions”. Bloyce (2004b, p. 153) suggests that theory should be viewed as a “sensitizing agent, one that is open to modification” as the research project progresses. Figural sociology has been chosen as a theoretical framework for this study. The first section of this chapter will provide a general overview of the main tenets of figural sociology and a rationale for its use as a theoretical framework for this research. The second section examines my own position within the research process in the context of this theoretical framework.

Using Figural Sociology as a Theoretical Framework

Background

The origins of figural sociology are located in the work of Norbert Elias. The approach gained popularity among some of his colleagues at the University of Leicester, where an influential department of sociology developed at a consequence of his collaboration with Ilya Neustadt during the second half of the twentieth century (John Goodwin and Hughes 2011; Goudsblom and Mennell 1998). Although Elias appears to have been reluctant to discuss the work of other sociologists, his own influences have been traced to Max Weber and Karl Mannheim (Morrow 2009, p. 216). It has been suggested that the figural perspective

“provides a compelling framework for a ‘central theory’ in sociology” (Quilley and Loyal 2005, p. 808) by “synthesizing the best and most productive traditions” and incorporating the work of Marx, Weber, Mead, Goffman and “the tradition that eventuated in the work of Pierre Bourdieu” (Quilley and Loyal 2005, p. 812). Consequently, some similarities have been identified between the work of Elias and Bourdieu (e.g. Gabriel and Mennell 2011; Paulle *et al.* 2012) and Foucault (Dolan 2010; Newton 2001), and potential links have been suggested with other theories such as complexity theory (Quilley 2004; Stacey *et al.* 2000). In that context, Szakolczai (2000, p. 45) notes that the central concepts proposed by Elias “have a markedly interactive, dialogical character”. Towards the end of his academic career, Elias came to favour the term “process sociology” as a more adequate title for the approach (Morrow 2009, p. 216). Nevertheless, the former term is still used more commonly in the literature.

Elias argued for a move away from a “tendency to equate the ‘historical’ with past-centred, [and] the ‘sociological’ with present-centred” (Elias *et al.* 1997, p. 365). In this regard, Liston (2012, p. 2) contends that modern sociology “has become predominantly ‘hodiecentric’ or present-centred”. In contrast, a central trait of the figurational perspective has involved the adoption of a long-term, processual view of social change (Elias 1978). This attention to both present and historical influences is well suited to this research project because the adoption of a long-term perspective can increase our understanding of the position of Gaelic games in primary schools.

A central aspect of Elias’ work was to overcome what he saw as flawed “dualisms and dichotomies, such as that between the individual and society” (Patrick Murphy *et al.* 2000, p. 92). He emphasised the importance of an understanding of ‘process’ in the examination of relationships in society and endeavoured to develop his theoretical perspective so that “the processes of theory formation and empirical enquiry are seen as interwoven and indivisible”

(Joe Maguire 1988, p. 188). Elias (1978, p. 58) argued that “the separation of theory and method proves to be based on a misconception” and “thought in terms of continua and balances, not polarities and absolutes” (Mennell 2009, p. 98). Consequently, Hughes (2008, p. 170) contends that “his work always involved a symbiosis of, or ‘two-way traffic’ between, ‘theory’ and ‘research’”.

While figurational sociology has struggled somewhat for acceptance within sociology in general, Elias built up a strong and pioneering reputation in the sociology of sport (Coakley 2001; Dunning 1992b). The initial use of a figurational framework to study sport is generally associated with the work of Eric Dunning and, subsequently, a group of researchers often referred to as ‘the Leicester school’. Initially, a sizeable body of research focused on the use of the figurational concept of ‘civilizing processes’ to examine issues such as spectator hooliganism and the development of modern sport (e.g. Dunning *et al.* 1988; Patrick Murphy and Sheard 2006). Since then, the work of Elias and other figurational sociologists has been increasingly used to study policy issues in sport (Houlihan *et al.* 2009). Although PE did not feature specifically in Dunning’s research, his influence on other researchers who study PE from a figurational perspective is clear. In this context, a growing body of research in PE has developed in recent years (e.g. Ken Green 2000b; Ken Green *et al.* 2005; Haycock and Smith 2010; Keay 2009; Smith and Parr 2007; Velija *et al.* 2008).

A figurational framework has also been used to study change within organisations (Dopson 2001; Dopson and Waddington 1996; Hanstad *et al.* 2008), with some recent studies focusing specifically on organisational change within the GAA (Connolly and Dolan 2011b; 2012). Finally, it is worth remembering, however, that Elias himself argued that “studies of sport which are not studies of society are studies out of context” (Dolan and Connolly 2009, p. 205). Accordingly, a consistent trait of figurational research into sport and PE is an attempt to study how the issues raised are linked to broader societal issues (e.g. Joe Maguire and

Mansfield 1998). Furthermore, the potential of a figurational framework to bridge the gap between microsociological and macrosociological approaches has been highlighted by Mennell (2009). Macionis and Plummer (2012, p. 208) define macro-sociology as “the study of large-scale society” whereas micro-sociology is “the study of everyday life in social interactions”. Consequently, Elias favoured approaches that focused on “*synthesis* – making connections” (Gabriel and Mennell 2011, p. 16) [italics in the original]. Consequently, examining the relationships that exist at school level is an important part of this study, along with exploring how these relationships are connected to actions at regional and national level.

Key elements of Figurational sociology

A number of writers have provided summaries of the main components of figurational sociology. van Krieken (2001, pp. 353-54), for example, highlights the following key elements:

1. Societies are made up of human beings who engage in intentional actions; the results of a combination of actions are often *unplanned* and *unintended*
2. Humans can best be understood in terms of the interdependent relationships or *figurations* that are formed with other individuals or groups
3. Power is expressed relationally rather than in terms of a static state. *Power* ratios or balances between individuals and groups are in flux
4. Societies can only be understood through the study of long-term *processes*
5. “Sociological thought moves constantly between a position of social and emotional *involvement* in the topics of study, and one of *detachment* from them”

Liston (2011, p. 167) has outlined how aspects of these concepts have been used as “sensitizing tools” in a broad range of research areas. In the forthcoming sections I provide more detail on some of these concepts, along with their relevance for my research. Although

they will be dealt with separately, it worth noting that these figurational concepts are inter-related and it is necessary to examine the issues raised during this study in that context of interdependent relationships and actions.

Figurations

Central to the figurational approach is an attempt to overcome “the false dichotomy of structure-agency dualism” (Ken Green 2000b, p. 181). It is proposed that the most effective way to achieve this is by exploring the complex web of social relationships that form in society. Elias uses the term ‘figuration’ as a means to describe these interactions. A figuration is defined as “a structure of mutually oriented and dependent people” (Bloyce and Smith 2010, p. 4). The concept of figurations helps the sociologist to focus on “dynamic networks of differentially interdependent human beings” (Patrick Murphy and Sheard 2006, p. 555) because humans “are social beings – they do not exist in a vacuum but are part of networks of social relationships” (Dopson 2001, p. 516). In that context, Mennell (2006, p. 522) outlines that “figurational sociology is concerned with *people in the round*; they are not separate political, economic and social beings” [italics in the original]. The social bonds that form within figurations can exert a strong influence on people’s interactions in ways that “may be both enabling and constraining” (Patrick Murphy *et al.* 2000). Consequently, Elias sought to study the interdependencies that bind humans together in various ways (Mansfield 2007).

Elias proposed that social knowledge could be developed more adequately by focusing on “*homines aperti* or pluralities of ‘open people’” instead of on “what he called the *Homo clausus* or ‘closed person’ view of humans” (Quilley and Loyal 2005, p. 813) [Italics in the original]. By definition, *homo clausus* is an individual who acts and makes decisions independently from the rest of society, while *homines aperti* are involved in interdependent relationships with other individuals and groups (Elias 1978). For Elias, the latter is a more useful conceptualization through which to gain a greater understanding of figurations that are

“shifting networks of people with fluctuating, asymmetrical power balances” (Dunning and Hughes 2013, p. 52). It also enables researchers to understand human actions in terms of the interactions of individuals and groups, and the adoption of figurations as units of study seeks to avoid individual-society dualisms (Patrick Murphy *et al.* 2000). The concept of figuration is used in study how policy formulation and implementation are the subject of negotiation among many groups. Consequently, this leads to complex processes within figurations resulting in unforeseen and unplanned outcomes (Bloyce *et al.* 2008).

Figurations are a product of complex social processes and there is an understanding that these processes are complex and historically rooted (Patrick Murphy 1997). Moreover, a more adequate understanding of people’s actions can be attained when consideration is given to “their social and historical context” (Dopson 2001, p. 517). Elias (2007, p. 418) suggested that “single plans and actions...can give rise to changes and patterns that no individual has planned or created”. This observation underpins the idea that social processes are ‘blind’ (Bloyce 2004a; Ken Green 2000a), and this concept is particularly important in the understanding of policy planning and implementation as the relative power of individuals and groups can have a significant influence on how policy is mediated. Because of the complex interweaving of players within in the policy process, the results may be different to what had been intended originally (Bloyce and Lovett 2012; Bloyce and Smith 2010). As Liston (2011, p. 167) noted, it is important to have an awareness “of the ways in which the outcomes of social action ...always and inevitably generate consequences which are both predictable and unplanned”. Central to this awareness is that the researcher is prepared to take a long-term, relational view of issues. Dopson and Waddington (1996, pp. 535-36) argue that, very often, people involved in policy planning take a short-term view of the issues involved, and fail to adopt a position that enables them to “retreat from the present”. The promotion of Gaelic games features prominently in Irish primary schools. By conducting a figurational analysis of

the processes that underpin this phenomenon, a more adequate understanding can be achieved by looking at the development of these relationships over time. The interdependent relationship between the GAA and Cumann na mBunscol, for example, consists of a complex network of bonds involving individuals and sub-groups possessing both complementary and opposing objectives that are likely to lead to unforeseen outcomes. As these ties are historically rooted, they can be understood more adequately by adopting a long-term perspective.

Power

A central component of figurations is power. This is conceptualized as a product of all human relationships, but it is not a static concept. Instead, it is relational and the ensuing relationships are usually unequal and based on coercive, economic or persuasive interactions (Patrick Murphy 1997). Elias asserted that power was “both repressive and enabling” (Rojek 1986, pp. 590-91). It is also argued that power-relations are multi-polar and unequal, and as interdependency chains are lengthened, power differentials are reduced (Ken Green 2000b). As Elias (1978, p. 74) himself expressed it, “power balances, like human relationships in general, are bi-polar at least, and usually multi-polar”. Furthermore, as Dopson (2001, pp. 521-22) notes, “a figurational approach reminds us that even the most powerful groups who attempt to achieve their goals are always mediated by other groups, whether or not the participants are aware of this”. In this context, “the superiority of the stronger group is never absolute; rather it always stands in relation to the weaker group” (Treibel 2001, p. 182). Consequently, Elias (1978, p. 93) suggested that “a more adequate solution to problems of power depends on power being understood unequivocally as a structural characteristic, all-pervading and, as a structural characteristic, neither good nor bad”. In the context of my research, power differentials are evident at a local level in the relationship between teachers and coaches, for example. Additionally, external groups like the DES may be able to mandate

for policy change in an overt way by means of its statutory powers. An organisation like the GAA, on the other hand, may have to negotiate for change in schools in a more persuasive way through its constituents groups. These examples illustrate some of the complex power balances that are evident in the primary schools in relation to school sport and PE.

In an attempt to gain an understanding of the differential power balances that exist among units within figurations, Elias (1978) proposed the use of 'Game Models'. These models provide a mechanism so that "the inherently complex processes of interweaving are...made more easily understandable (Elias 1978, p. 73). The next section will outline how Elias used these 'Game Models' to examine the interaction between groups at various levels.

Game models

Elias developed the concept of 'Game Models' to explain how power relationships work within complex figurations (Dopson and Waddington 1996). His use of game models is underpinned "by the view that it is not possible to comprehend the outcomes of human figurations solely on the basis of determining the intentions of individuals and groups. One has to focus on the composite unit, the patterns of their dynamic interdependency" (Bloyce and Murphy 2008, p. 23). Specifically, Elias (1978, p. 72) proposed that "it becomes more necessary not just to explore a composite unit in terms of its component parts, but also to explore the ways in which these individual components are bonded to each other so as to form a composite unit". In team games, individual players "move and respond to each other", forming fluid configurations that are "interdependent and inseparable" (Elias and Dunning 2003, p. 241). By extension, the proposition of a 'game' involving a great number of people enabled him to theorise about the relationships that exist in complex organisations, where the 'game' is multi-layered and has examples of extended interdependency chains. As a result, game models can be conceptualized as simplified analogies of more complex social processes" (Dopson 2001, p. 518).

The concept of game models is “prefaced by the Primal Contest, a model that shows a relationship between two groups totally unregulated by norms” (Elias 1978, p. 75). To explain the Primal Contest, Elias recounted a story about two small tribes who were searching for food in a large expanse of forest. Although at first glance these tribes appeared to be largely independent of each other, they found themselves competing for the same set of scarce resources. Their struggle for survival prompted a series of violent attacks on each other, showing that each tribe’s actions were heavily dependent on the other. As a result, their “enduring antagonism reveals itself as a form of functional interdependence” (Elias 1978, p. 76). It is worth noting at this juncture that Elias used the term ‘function’ in the context of interdependent relationships that are processual and involve power ratios. Consequently, an examination of social functions ought to take into account “the reciprocity, the bi-polarity or multi-polarity” of these functions or relationships (Elias 1978, p. 78). During their engagement in a violent struggle, the tribes in the Primal Contest were not constrained by any rules or norms but their actions were nevertheless based on an interdependent relationship.

From this introductory example, Elias (1978, p. 80) proceeded to describe games models as “interweaving processes with norms”. These models involved two-person games, multi-person games at one level and multi-person games on two or more levels. After a brief description of the two-person game model, I intend to outline how the concept of multi-person games on several levels has relevance for my research.

Elias used the two-person game model to provide a simplified example of the interdependent relationship between two participants. When one player is considerably superior to the other, the former “has a very high measure of control” over the latter (Elias 1978, p. 81). However, this level of control is not unlimited because even a vastly inferior opponent has some influence on their opponent. Rather than one participant having absolute power over the other, there is a power balance or ratio in operation. It is this difference that “determines to

what extent player A's moves can shape player B's moves, or *vice versa* [italics in the original]" (Elias 1978, p. 81). Perhaps more significantly, the stronger player also has a greater degree of control over the game. In games where there is a lesser power differential between the opponents, there is a greater degree of uncertainty in the game's outcomes as each opponent is able to exert greater influence over their opponent. The subsequent power ratio is more equal and "there will result from the interweaving of moves a game process *which neither of them has planned* [italics in the original]" (Elias 1978, p. 82).

Multi-person games played on several levels are more complex than the simple two-person model. As the number of players increase, it becomes more difficult for individual players to influence the course of the game. Moreover, as individual players become part of groups within the game, it becomes more difficult for each individual to understand how the game is progressing, or what direction it is taking. Some players may perceive that their ability to control the game has diminished. The arrival of more players will cause the game to become "increasingly disorganised" (Elias 1978, p. 85). As a result, groups may splinter and reform within the same level of the figuration, or form a more complex figuration with additional tiers. Furthermore, players at lower levels of the model may become stronger and this, in turn, will decrease the influence of stronger players on the game (Treibel 2001).

Nevertheless, this should not be seen as an inevitable or irreversible process, as "chances to control the game may increase again as people become more and more distanced from their own intertwining network, and gain more structure into the structure and dynamics of the game" (Elias 1978, p. 96). In the context of this study, the implementation of national GAA policy depends directly on how a GAA school coach interprets his/her remit to work in the school, but also depends on how the coach is received there by other groups such as school principals, Cumann na mBunscol teachers and class teachers who may have no allegiance to the GAA. In that way, the initial policymaker's control of the 'game' diminishes as more

players come to have a direct, and indirect, involvement. Accordingly, a policy initiative may be implemented in a variety of ways, depending on the actions of various groups involved directly or indirectly in the implementation process.

Bloyce and Murphy (2008) used game models to examine the introduction of the rule change to 'three points for a win' policy within English soccer because of the complex nature of the situation. Underpinning their approach was the view that "it is not possible to comprehend the outcomes of human figurations solely on the basis of determining the intentions and actions of individuals and groups". Instead, the patterns of their dynamic interdependency must be taken into account (2008, p. 23). Ken Green (2002b, p. 68) used this approach to explore "the personal, the local, and the national" dimensions of physical education teachers' networks of interdependent relationships in order to attain a fuller understanding of teachers' philosophies. Velija *et al.* (2008) found game models to be useful when examining the relationships that shape how student teachers engage with PE content. The use of multi-person games as played out on several levels can help to understand the organisation of Gaelic games in Irish primary schools. As Dopson (2001) has pointed out, the increasing complexity of games is a reflection of the interweaving of a greater number of players to such an extent that even strong players find it more difficult to control the direction of the play, or to predict future directions. Because of this increasing complexity, individual players may perceive that the network "functions increasingly as though it had a life of its own" (Hanstad *et al.* 2008, p. 234). In a similar way, the situation pertaining to Gaelic games promotion in primary school can be characterized as increasing in complexity as more groups become directly and indirectly involved. Accordingly, 'Game Models' can provide an appropriate framework to assist in the analysis of these processes.

Habitus

Elias' concept of 'habitus' is used to explain the behaviour of humans within figurations. Smith and Green (2004, p. 595) suggest that, while commonalities can be drawn between Elias and Bourdieu in the way they used the term, the former "sought to move away from an (over)emphasis placed on bodily habitus...in favour of a more generalized conception". Elias described habitus as "this 'second nature', or 'automatic, blindly functioning apparatus of self-control'" (Ken Green 2003, p. 18). Furthermore, he argued that people develop an individual habitus, along with a series of social habituses that are evident in their interaction with different groups of people (Ken Green 2006a).

Dolan (2010, p. 10) explained that, for Elias, "the formation of habitus takes considerable time and occurs across multiple spaces". It is worth noting that habitus change happens slowly, and may not keep pace with other social changes (Ken Green 2000b). Significantly, however, Dolan (2010, pp. 10-11) goes on to argue that "the spaces themselves are less significant than the constellation...of many interdependent people through which each person's habitus, from early infancy, takes shape". Although habitus is formed primarily during the early years, development continues as a person becomes part of increasingly complex figurations (Ken Green 2003).

Liston and Moreland (2009, p. 130) propose that the social construction of identity lies within habitus formation, and is "embodied in social learning and in our conceptions of ourselves as individual people ("I" images), groups of people with some shared conception of identity ("we" images), and groups of people who are different to other groups ("they" images)". It has been suggested that, "over time, people develop different layers of we-identity depending on the structure of interdependencies in which they are embedded (Connolly and Dolan 2011b, p. 39). It is worth remembering that "identity is constructed in, and through, the actions of people" (Liston and Moreland 2009, p. 129). Accordingly, an awareness of the

complex interweaving of individual and group actions remains central to any consideration of how conceptualizations of identity impact on PE and school sport. For example, organisations like Cumann na mBunscol may portray powerful We-images around aspects of the promotion of Gaelic games that separate them from other groups of teachers and even the GAA. Velija and Malcolm (2009) have employed habitus, involving We-, I- and They- images, to examine gender and sport. In a similar way, an exploration of the use of We- and They- by, for example, members of Cumann na mBunscol and the GAA, or school coaches and female teachers, has the potential to assist in the development of a more adequate understanding of these relationships and their impact on the sport and PE ethos within primary schools.

Keay (2009, p. 231) highlights the differentiation by Elias between individual and social habituses, where “social habitus refers to the characteristics shared by a group”. This process is made more complicated when individuals may be members of different groups within the same organisation simultaneously (Connolly and Dolan 2011b). Within the context of Gaelic games in Irish primary schools, “overlapping membership” (Connolly and Dolan 2011b, p. 39) would appear to be a significant factor in how individuals are involved in the organisation of these games, as teachers frequently have multiple affiliations (as teachers, coaches, GAA members etc.) in different groups within the figuration. The close historical connections between teachers and the GAA as highlighted by Cronin *et al.* (2009), for example, suggest that there are complex networks of interdependent relationships based on deep-seated nationalist motivations. Elias (2001) (cited in Liston and Moreland 2009, p. 128) suggested that “traits of national group identity....are a layer of social habitus built very deeply and firmly into the personality structure of the individual”. In that context, it will be interesting to examine how this aspect of identity is played out in school communities today.

While studying PE teachers, Keay (2009, p. 240) concluded that “members of the figurations influence the habitus of PE teachers and ultimately the power relationships in the

figurations”. For this study I sought to develop an understanding of the impact of others on the habitus of the teachers involved, while at the same time examining how teacher habitus can impact on policy change around sport and PE in primary schools.

Established and Outsiders

Elias outlined his theory of ‘established’ and ‘outsiders’ in a publication about groups of people in a 1950s English midlands town. The town was fictionalised as Winston Parva, and their study examined the relationship between groups in the town characterised as ‘established’ townspeople and ‘outsiders’ (Elias and Scotson 1994). Instead of adhering to the prevailing view of ‘community’ as an integrative phenomenon, the authors provided an analysis that “took more account of social conflict” (Bloyce and Murphy 2007, p. 5). Treibel (2001, p. 180) outlined how Elias used the mechanism of ‘established’ and ‘outsiders’ to describe how “the best characteristics of the best and most prominent members are ascribed to the whole of the dominant group, whereas the worst and most shameful qualities of the most notorious individuals are carried over to identify all in the outsiders’ group”. In that context, the ‘established’ or more powerful groups in Winston Parva characterized all ‘outsider’ groups “according to the ‘minority of the worst’...leading outsiders to be internally divided and constrained to aspire to the ‘minority of the best’ (Liston 2005a, p. 68). Although Bloyce and Murphy (2007, p. 18) have questioned some aspects of Elias and Scotson’s work, including problems concerning involvement and detachment, they propose that the concept of “established-outsider relations” can be a useful theoretical lens if care is taken “to locate the particular example...within its broader figuration”. Velija (2011) argued that Elias and Scotson presented an oversimplification of the power ratios involving the residents of Winston Parva and suggested that attention should be focused on complex and fluid situations where a group may be both established and outsiders within particular figurations. Of particular interest to me is what Velija (2011, p. 93) describes as “the concept of blame

gossip and stigma” used by some outsider groups in order “to distance themselves from other outsiders to maintain closer contact with the ‘established’”. In the context of the GAA, Connolly and Dolan (2011b, p. 48) have examined how, in the early years of the association, notions of “true Irishness” were used to bolster the identity of we-groups within the organisation while simultaneously stigmatising “they-groups – those playing and associating with competing sports”. While these identifications represent groups within and outside the GAA, it is also worth noting that strong ‘we-‘ and ‘they-‘ identities exist within the organisation itself (Connolly and Dolan 2013). In addition, there has been a trend towards centralization as smaller units have become more integrated into the formal structures of the organisation (Connolly and Dolan 2012). Liston (2005a) adapted the concept to explore changing power relations between males and females in Irish sports organisations, and examined how female athletes interpreted their ‘outsider’ position in relation to the large, male-dominated NGBs.

There are a number of possible examples of ‘established’ and ‘outsider’ groups within my research focus. From one point of view, the GAA coach in primary schools can be viewed as a representative of a dominant NGB that holds a powerful position within the school. The class teacher, on the other hand, may find that he or she is replaced, or sometimes even excluded, at particular junctures during the school day. GAA personnel who are critical of particular teachers’ promotion of Gaelic games may use ‘blame gossip’ to justify the presence of coaches, while at the same time denigrating the position of the teacher. I concede that this example as presented here, in line with Velija’s concerns mentioned above, is an oversimplification of the power balances that are evident in schools. Nevertheless, it may provide a useful starting point for an examination of the figurational relationships within this study.

Involvement and Detachment

I outlined earlier how Elias sought to circumvent dualisms such as those involving the individual and society, or structure and agency. By focusing on the dynamic processes involved in figurations, he sought to overcome what he saw as “flawed” dualisms (Connolly and Dolan 2011b, p. 38). In order to resolve problems around objectivity and subjectivity, Elias (1956, p. 227) proposed the use of ‘involvement and detachment’ as “tools of thinking” in order to overcome this dichotomy. While outlining the ways in which humans adopt a detached or involved outlook, Elias (1956, p. 226) suggested that “normally adult behaviour lies on a scale somewhere between the two extremes”. He viewed involvement and detachment as essential tools in the development of knowledge. He did not, however, consider them to be separate phenomena. Instead, he conceptualised them as being at opposite ends of a continuum; the task of the researcher was to strive continuously for a position of relative detachment by embarking on what he called a “detour via detachment” (1956, p. 229). This ‘detour’ would prompt “researchers to ‘step back’ and recognise their own involvement (or detachment) and thus, their vested interests and values” (Alfrey *et al.* 2012, pp. 366-67). This is important because, as Elias *et al.* (1997, p. 360) argued, “it is difficult to achieve a more object-adequate orientation precisely because we are accustomed to seeing all tensions and conflicts exclusively from the perspective of an involved person or group”. Elias (1987) used the Edgar Allan Poe short story entitled “The fishermen in the maelstrom” to illustrate this point. In that story, two brothers in a fishing boat were caught in a deadly maelstrom. One brother quickly entered a state of panic and was unable to do anything to save himself: he became completely involved in the dilemma. The second, after some initial panic, began to observe what was happening around him more clearly and identified that small cylindrical objects were being dragged more slowly towards the centre. By achieving a level of detachment greater than that of his brother, he survived by clinging to

a cask long enough for the maelstrom to subside. As van Krieken (2001, p. 387) points out, the relevance of this story is that the researcher will need to strive for “particular *balances* of involvement and detachment” [Italics in the original] at different stages of the research. Joe Maguire (1988, p. 189) argues that “for Figuralists, the hallmark of scientific enquiry is an attitude of detachment”. He stresses that because the experience of the researcher is inextricably linked to the patterns under investigation, this enhances the researcher’s efforts to understand what is being studied. The inference is that sociologists must strive to achieve a balance between involvement and detachment, with the notion of balance suggesting that there is a continual interplay between the two. Mansfield (2008, p. 95) suggests this balance is “ever-changing”. Bloyce (2004b, p. 148) argues that the researcher “is inescapably a part of the phenomena that they are researching: human relationships”. It is worth noting, however, that “*complete* detachment on the part of the researcher is neither achievable nor, for that matter, desirable” [italics in the original] (Ken Green 2006a, p. 659). Furthermore, because of researchers’ active involvement in the research process, the extent to which they are involved or detached is likely to vary at different stages of that process (Alfrey *et al.* 2012).

Figural theorists seem to accept that the core value of the concept of ‘involvement and detachment’ is based on its sensitizing role in guiding the researcher through the process of producing more adequate understanding (Bloyce 2004b; Mansfield 2008). Despite the fact that the concept is central to the figural approach, guidelines on how to develop methodologically sound practice are scarce. Rojek (1986, p. 591) reminds us that Elias himself left no guidelines on how to conduct research that is adequately ‘detached’. While Bloyce and Murphy (2007, p. 17) maintain that Elias’ work “brought immense clarity to an area riddled in ideology and awash with unhelpful dichotomies”, they concede that Rojek’s criticism is significant. This lack of defined procedures presents potential difficulties for

researchers who wish to adopt a figural perspective. Some guidelines, however, can be gleaned from the existing literature. Patrick Murphy (1997), for example, emphasises that it is important for the researcher to engage in self-reflection. Joe Maguire (1988, p. 190) advocates for the adoption of a “long-term, developmental perspective”, and the creation of positions where the researcher is moving from a role of “sociologist-as-participant” to one of “sociologist-as-observer-and-interpreter”. Liston (2007, p. 632) introduces the notion of “secondary re-involvement” to assist “in the generation of more adequate and reality-congruent knowledge about the social world.” This objective of producing more ‘reality-congruent’ knowledge is associated closely with a position that is “informed, primarily, by ‘what is’ rather than by ‘what ought to be’” (Liston 2007, p. 632). Mansfield (2007, p. 125) identifies similarities between the concept of involvement-detachment and ethnographic approaches, and proposes that it “provides a sensitizing framework for blending the roles of inquirer and participant”. Similarly Baur and Ernst (2011a, p. 120) highlighted three aspects of subjectivity that require consideration, namely *verstehen* (the “insider-perspective”), partiality, and perspectivity (the “outsider-perspective”). The relevance of these terms for my research will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter.

My position in the research process

Armour and Jones (1998, p. 6) suggest that “the interplay of self, biography and social structure lie at the heart of the sociological enterprise”. When researchers explore topics “for which they are uniquely qualified to participate through their own past experience” there is considerable potential for interesting research (Denscombe 2010, p. 211). Moreover, Ken Green (2006a, p. 659) suggests that “one of the benefits of possessing ‘insider’ knowledge and experience can be a deepened appreciation of relevant issues as well as a heightened sensitivity towards the perceptions of those under scrutiny”. While acknowledging that researchers should be encouraged “to conduct research in areas of their own interest and

involvement”, Mansfield (2008, p. 108) recommends they “reflect upon and challenge their personal ideals” in order to formulate robust findings and conclusions. In the specific context of PE, this is particularly important considering “the deep attachments to sport and physical activity” that may be evident in a researcher’s biography (Ken Green 2006a, p. 658). It is the researcher’s responsibility to outline details of his or her background in a research project as clearly as possible (Baur and Ernst 2011b).

My own personal biography contains a strong involvement in PE and sport at a variety of levels. I can identify with Jones’ view that his participation in sport had a “significant input to the construction of my identity”(Armour and Jones 1998, pp. 12-13). While this in itself is hardly unique as sport is a significant social and cultural activity (Bloyce and Smith 2010), it is relevant in the context of outlining how my experience of sport has impacted on my perspectives while conducting this research. As Holliday (2005, p. 308) argues, “embedded in my own autobiography are discourses, behaviours, and relationships”. These factors are likely to play a part in the development of a researcher’s perspective. Accordingly, Chesney (2001, p. 128) presents a case for outlining this perspective by arguing that “for the readers to accept the research as valid, they must be able to scrutinize the integrity and philosophy of the researcher so that the findings are trusted”.

While it is worthwhile to consider Nelson’s (2005, p. 315) warning that “texts in which the researcher’s subjectivity is foregrounded can be perceived as irrelevant, self-indulgent, or insufficiently critical”, it is also important that researchers outline how their own background, assumptions and motivations impact on what they are studying (Ramanathan 2005).

Furthermore, consideration should be given to the researcher’s acknowledgement of their “shaping presence” in the research (Nelson 2005, p. 315). Getting the balance right may be a considerable challenge. Chesney (2001, p. 129), while noting that an over-identification with the research topic “can lead to tunnel vision and flawed and limited findings”, argues that by

“acknowledging, documenting, learning from the transition from objective to involved, and then applying this information to the research findings may enhance, enrich, and increase the validity of the research”. The steps I took to address these issues will be outlined in Chapter 4.

Richardson and Adams St. Pierre (2005, p. 964) asked if “there is adequate self-awareness and self-exposure for the reader to make judgements” about the research that has been conducted. Furthermore, Etherington (2004, p. 25) expressed the opinion that “without sight of the person at the heart of the work, I feel no relationship with the writer”. Chesney (2001, p. 128) suggested the need to “focus on the dilemmas experienced as a researcher”. Writing from a figurational perspective, Mansfield (2007, p. 126) advised that “striving for an appropriate involvement-detachment balance includes a capacity for reflexivity, an ability to critically examine one’s own passions and personal interests through the research process”. In attempting to do this, Alfrey *et al.* (2012, p. 366) described how “the lead researcher documented her own biography in order to bring to the fore how her experiences, understanding and knowledge...have developed across her professional life”. In a similar way, Perry *et al.* (2004) outlined how they used detailed field notes, reflections and discussions in a study where the lead researcher had a particular involvement in the subject matter. Using these strategies, they “sought to minimize the ‘costs’ and maximize the ‘benefits’ of involvement” (2004, p. 140).

In the upcoming sections I describe how my experiences have shaped my perspectives on PE and school sport in order to heighten my awareness of my positioning on the involvement-detachment continuum, and to provide the reader with a sense of how my “insider-perspective” (Baur and Ernst 2011b, p. 120) has contributed to the research. Moreover, the process of “addressing the me in the research” has the potential to enhance the overall quality and integrity of the process (Chesney 2001, p. 128). Four perspectives have been chosen to

describe how my specific experiences may have shaped my thinking on issues concerning the delivery of Gaelic games programmes in primary schools. It is worth noting, however, that while these perspectives are presented separately, my teaching and coaching experiences have been interwoven, with considerable overlap at particular times.

Perspectives as a player

My involvement in organised sport stretches back to my primary school days. Although the school did not participate in formal competitions at that time, and PE classes consisted of infrequent games of rounders, the principal teacher did encourage the male pupils to get involved with the local club GAA club. No other organised sports options were available in the area. My earliest memories centre on being a very enthusiastic participant who never quite made the grade in under-age sport. It is impossible to quantify to what extent this experience has impacted on my current view that models of school sport should facilitate maximum participation opportunities for all children. During the course of this research, one particular interviewee touched on this topic when he suggested, while speaking about a colleague who was against very competitive structures in primary school games, that “maybe he’s a man who struggled to get on underage teams himself”. My own experience was that I struggled to get a starting position on club teams during my teenage years, and was never considered good enough to make team panels in secondary school. My collegiate sport experience was also characterized by great enthusiasm and dedication tinged with a sense of failure: I was never quite good enough to make the team. From a playing point of view, I could be characterized as a ‘late developer’. Despite not managing to get selected for any underage county representative teams, I subsequently played inter-county Gaelic football at senior level for almost ten years. During this time, in particular, my commitment deepened considerably, and Gaelic football dominated all aspects of my life throughout my twenties.

Perspectives as a teacher

As a newly qualified teacher (NQT) in the late 1980's, my first teaching experiences were as a substitute teacher in three large urban schools in Dublin. Two of these schools, managed by the Christian Brothers, had a long tradition in the promotion of Gaelic games. Internal school leagues took place during PE time, and at lunch-time. Both schools placed a considerable emphasis on the 'school team', with squad training sessions taking place after school.

Representing the school as a player was seen as an honour. A large cohort of very committed teachers was involved in the coaching of these representative teams, and there was a sense of 'apprenticeship' or 'serving time' before a new teacher could get involved in a coaching capacity. There appeared to be a clear hierarchal system in place and, while I was welcome to help out, there was a clear sense of being external to the 'inner circle'. Admittance to that established group was not automatic, and was based on proving one's worth through the performance of tasks such as filling water bottles and co-ordinating internal leagues for junior classes. One of these schools had a strong link with a local club, and some teachers were also very involved in coaching there also. This link is described in detail in the autobiography of a prominent inter-county player who had attended that school: "It was one big community, from school to club...Players were fed to the clubs by the school, where idealistic teachers cultivated and developed an interest in Gaelic games" (Farrell 2005, p. 198). The third school, situated in a socially disadvantaged suburban area, was relatively new and consequently had no traditional allegiance to any sport. The principal, however, was very anxious to get the children involved in a range of extra-curricular activities to provide an alternative to the high levels of anti-social behaviour evident in the local community. I was given the responsibility, as an enthusiastic substitute teacher, of coaching the boys' Gaelic football team. This involved the organisation of training sessions two evenings each week after school. In each of these situations I was very willing to take on coaching roles, partly

because this fitted well with my own perception of what a teacher 'should' do, but also because these volunteer involvements were useful in building an employment curriculum vitae at a time when employment opportunities were scarce. In a similar way to how Ken Green (2003, p. 119) describes PE teachers as being "inclined towards replicating (because they feel more comfortable with them) 'traditional' approaches to 'traditional curricula', I was willing to commit to these forms of extra-curricular activity. In hindsight, being young, male and enthusiastic appear to have been qualities deemed desirable by school principals.

My first permanent teaching position was in a newly-established school in Galway city. My previous volunteering in school sport was a considerable advantage in securing the position as the principal was intent on providing a wide range of extra-curricular activities. His motivation seemed to centre on the establishment of a 'good' reputation for the school, rather than on the promotion of any specific sport. Employing male teachers was also a priority. As a result, a large number of young teachers possessing a wide range of interests were appointed in a short space of time. Each new teacher was encouraged, and expected, to get involved in the provision of extra-curricular activities in sport or music. Given my own personal interests, I got involved in the coaching of Gaelic football after school. As the children were too young initially to take part in inter-school competitions, the emphasis was placed on coaching and internal school leagues and boys and girls were encouraged to participate. In the following years, teams were entered in the Cumann na mBunscol boys' competitions but there were no formal competitions organised for the girls at that time. My clearest memories from that period relate to attempts to develop links with the local club, and feeling pressure to win a competition. In the first instance, the majority of the boys played with the local club, which was also trying to develop an identity in a sprawling suburban area. There were no opportunities for girls to play in the local community. A scarcity of club personnel ensured that these links were never very strong, and my own playing commitments

ensured that I wasn't in a position to emulate the teachers I had seen in Dublin by getting involved myself. The second issue stemmed from the expectations of the principal. While participation in sport was valued to a certain extent, a higher premium was placed on the public relations potential associated with winning a county title. There was a strong tension between promoting participation, and striving to win at all costs. I have vivid memories of arguing with referees during and after games, as I brought my own playing behaviours to bear on my coaching duties. I believed my worth to the school, and my self-perception as a teacher, were measured in terms of the team's winning or losing of games. During this time, extra-curricular sport played an important part in school life; in parallel to this, PE classes were carried out independently, very much in line with the curriculum as it pertained at the time. However, I valued my own involvement as a coach of extra-curricular sport more highly than my role as a teacher of PE. This emphasis on sport rather than on PE has some parallels to research conducted by Curtner-Smith (2001, p. 83) who pointed to significant numbers of PE teachers in the United States who possessed a "coaching orientation".

After spending six years teaching in that school, I was appointed as principal in a small rural school. Being a new principal in a school that had well established traditions and practices carried potential for disharmony. Hurling was the only sport on offer, and it was played during school time and at lunchtime. Any PE lessons that were taught were based on team games. The previous principal had discouraged girls from participating in playground activities with the boys and this was a policy that appeared to have been tacitly supported by other members of the staff. One teacher advised, using an Irish saying, "Ná dean nós agus ná bris nós", that I shouldn't start or break a tradition. Having discounted that advice, I began coaching Gaelic games after school, leading to some resentment from that member of staff who probably felt undermined by my efforts to change established practices. All boys and girls were encouraged to participate equally, and they responded enthusiastically. On one

level, I had made radical changes in existing practice by adopting a more inclusive approach to extra-curricular activities, but at another level my chosen activities displayed a preference for a narrow range of activities that were firmly established within my own habitus.

The local club was very supportive of my efforts to promote Gaelic games in the school and provided financial support in the form of contributions to general school fundraisers.

Equipment was also provided, along with free use of the local playing pitch. This support was welcomed by the school community and the club officials seemed to be very appreciative of the games activities that were being organised. There was also a sense, however, that this situation fulfilled their expectations about what *should* be going on in the school. In many ways, my actions were very much in line with what they believed the role of the principal should be. For my part, while I facilitated the increased participation of children in extra-curricular sports activities, these activities were centred entirely on Gaelic games and some athletics as these activities fitted best with my own values and preferences. My teaching of PE, in contrast, focused on providing the children with a broader experience. Although the absence of indoor facilities curtailed the teaching of gymnastics and dance, the other strands were covered during the school year. A range of activities were included in the teaching of the games strand, and Gaelic games activities were covered in accordance with the curricular guidelines (Government of Ireland 1999a). While the school sport ethos I tried to promote would also have been in line with curricular guidelines, I valued the extra-curricular activities more highly due to the positive response from parents and pupils: school sport was a more ‘visible’ activity, with a capacity to build links with the local community, raise the school profile and, consequently, forge a distinctive school identity.

During this time, two other events were influential in my changing attitudes towards PE and school sport. Firstly, the completion of an M. Sc. in the sociology of sport at the University of Leicester enabled me to adopt a broader and more long-term view of social processes as I

began to understand better the role of the school within a wider social setting. Secondly, I was selected as a tutor to deliver national in-service workshops on the PE curriculum to teachers. Although I never actually began delivering these in-service courses, I participated in an intensive training programme involving a network of other teachers and teacher educators from around the country. This involvement, in particular, prompted me to change my approaches to teaching PE in significant ways, as the training involved observing other teachers, and being observed myself.

A career change in 2004 enabled me to take up a position as a lecturer in PE on an initial teacher education (ITE) programme. This role differs greatly with my previous teaching roles: my current teaching, with a sole focus on PE, contrasts greatly with the holistic nature of primary teaching where connections can be made more easily across curricular and extra-curricular activities. In practical terms, I have made a conscious effort to separate my teaching of PE to ITE students from my interest in Gaelic games. My engagement with institutional and national policy has resulted in a closer alignment with the “broad and balanced” (Government of Ireland 1999a, p. 8) ethos of the national PE curriculum. My involvement in Gaelic games is now confined to a voluntary contribution to coach education programmes and the coaching of teams for inter-collegiate competitions. This involvement, however, represents a continuing commitment to extra-curricular activities that has been present throughout my teaching career.

Perspectives as a coach

My identity as a teacher, particularly a teacher who was involved in school sport, led to opportunities to coach outside of the educational context. The GAA’s summer camp programme was in its infancy in the early 1990’s with each county operating independent programmes, often on a very *ad hoc* basis. While providing enjoyable activities for children was a key objective, the camps also offered part-time employment opportunities to young

players who might otherwise have travelled abroad for the summer months. In my case, the camps provided me with some additional earnings during the summer months and I didn't think in much detail about my involvement at the time. Coaching at Gaelic games summer camps seemed to be the natural progression for a young male teacher and inter-county footballer. In sociological terms, it represented an intertwining of teaching, coaching and playing roles, and reinforced the connection between my role as a primary teacher and the GAA. Ken Green (2003, p. 5) has highlighted the "taken-for-granted" views of PE teachers. In a similar way, I did not question my motivation for being involved. Instead, from a more detached perspective now, earlier descriptions of habitus as being 'second nature' are apt in this context. Platts (2012, p. 73) points out that "our social learning" is an important factor in habitus formation. In that context, my early teaching experiences in situations where teaching and coaching were inter-related pursuits, were very influential in the development of what might be termed a vocational approach to teaching (Schwarz 1999), and the subsequent promotion of Gaelic games in a school environment.

For me, two distinct pathways opened up: firstly, my various roles as teacher, player and children's coach seemed to 'fit' with the requirements of the GAA's coach education programmes that had begun to be developed in the mid-nineties. As a result, I was invited to train as a tutor so that I could deliver coaching courses in a voluntary capacity. While these links seem coincidental at first glance, they also are examples of the "inter-connectedness of interdependent people" that make up figurations (Ken Green 2000b, p. 182). Secondly, opportunities became available to coach adult teams at an elite level. Of greatest significance in this particular path was getting the chance to coach a female inter-county Gaelic football team for four years. The female player occupies an outsider position within Gaelic games (Liston 2005b). Prior to my own involvement with this team, I had tried to provide equal playing opportunities for girls and boys during my coaching of Gaelic games in schools.

These efforts did not, however, cause me to reflect on gender inequalities in sport to any significant degree. My experiences of coaching at inter-county level, on the other hand, prompted me to reflect more deeply on female participation in sport. Perhaps the inequities were more clearly evident at adult level, where teams were striving for recognition in the context of subtle and overt discriminatory practices. In any case, these experiences were important for me as I reflected on the formation of we- and they- identities within the Gaelic games figuration.

Perspectives as an administrator

As a young teacher in Galway, with an interest in Gaelic games, I was encouraged by the school principal to represent the school at Cumann na mBunscol meetings. At the time, I was the only male teacher on the staff, apart from the principal, so there was an unstated assumption that this was part of my role within the school. It is an example of how my own biography, along with factors involving occupational socialization (Curtner-Smith 1997) were important in the principal's identification of me as the person to represent the school at these meetings. While I had been aware of the organisation while teaching in Dublin, the 'privilege' of being the school representative in the large well-established schools where I taught appeared to be the preserve of experienced teachers. Before long, I was heavily involved in the Cumann na mBunscol network in Galway at a time when the organisation of school competitions was transferring from juvenile GAA boards to Cumann na mBunscol. This particular experience was significant in the context of developing an understanding of how Cumann na mBunscol became a more powerful organisation within the Gaelic games figuration.

My involvement in Cumann na mBunscol led to my election to various volunteer positions, including county secretary. While the term 'election' would suggest that these positions were contested vigorously, the reality was somewhat different. Because of sparsely attended

AGMs, formal elections were rare, and positions were assumed either through volunteering, or with the encouragement and support of incumbent officers. This group of volunteers displayed a definite we-identity that was characterized by a strong ethos of volunteering, a belief in the positive impact of Gaelic games in primary schools. This correlated well with my own identity as a teacher with a strong commitment to Gaelic games. Despite the gender imbalance in the primary teaching profession as a whole, very few female teachers were actively involved at committee level during the 1990s.

My position as county secretary consisted mainly of organising Gaelic games competitions for over 200 primary schools in the county. While increasing the number of participating schools was always an implicit objective, particularly after the initial takeover from the county juvenile boards, the magnitude of the administrative task left little time for formal policy development. My role in administration at county level led to opportunities to get involved on provincial and national committees, ultimately leading to the position of assistant secretary and, subsequently, development officer at national level. During this time, I would also have been playing and coaching at a high level myself. Despite these other commitments, I was very interested in contributing to the development of policy within Cumann na mBunscol. Again, my I-identity aligned closely with the we-identity of various Cumann na mBunscol committees, particularly as these committees became more closely integrated with games development committees within the GAA. Ken Green (2000b, p. 181) seeks to explain the practices of teachers “in terms of the networks of relationships...in which they are and have been involved”. In my case, the connections made at local and national levels of Cumann na mBunscol and the wider GAA community facilitated my involvement in policy development at a national level. During my time as development officer, the national committee of Cumann na mBunscol developed a strategic plan with the central aim of having “Gaelic games the games of choice for Ireland’s primary school children” (Cumann na

mBunscol 2007, p. 3), while I was also invited to be a member of the GAA's national Coaching and Games Development Committee (GDC). As national development officer, I was heavily involved in both the strategic plan consultation process and the compilation of the final document. On reflection, I believe that my professional role as a PE teacher educator at that time was significant because I sought to align the objectives of the strategic plan with those of the school PE curriculum. While explicit references to the curriculum were included in the strategic plan, it is unclear whether or not this impacted on policy implementation. A key objective of the strategic plan and the GDC has been to implement the GAA's Go Games policy nationally. This experience is of particular relevance considering the emphasis on policy development and implementation in this research. By this time my other roles, in ITE and within the field of research, served to distance me from Cumann na mBunscol while at the same time brought me closer to the GAA's national policy-making process. These experiences represented a "double-bind" (Dunning and Hughes 2013, p. 3) situation because of policy implementation tensions between the GAA and Cumann na mBunscol. These tensions will be examined in detail in Chapter 8. Holliday (2005, p. 305) argues that "it would...be a mistake to deny who I am and what my own ideological preoccupations are". Accordingly, I believe that my experiences can have a positive impact on the research as I have had a close involvement in the policy development and implementation processes, leading to insights that would not have been possible without this insider perspective. My awareness of these experiences has informed the decisions I have taken during the course of this research. While acknowledging that my interest in sport is deep-seated and has had a significant influence on my life, I'm also conscious of Green's (2000a) concern that by remaining too involved in a study, researchers may fail to attain a level of detachment that can provide a sufficiently rigorous sociological analysis. In the next chapter I will outline the

importance of adopting a reflexive position during the course of this research, and describe how I sought to achieve an appropriate balance between involvement and detachment.

Concluding reflections

At this stage I will add some concluding remarks to reflect my own engagement with the research process. Regular discussions with my supervisor, and the maintenance of a reflexive diary served to question and challenge my assumptions in order for me to adopt more detached positions at particular stages of the process. Two aspects of my life away from the formal parameters of this study informed my reflections and, I believe, enhanced the overall quality of the research. Firstly, as a teacher educator I engage in frequent conversations with students about their attitudes towards PE and sport. Their observations sensitized me to the issues that concern them as future teachers; their desire to ‘make a difference’ prompted me to reflect on the processes that underpin, and sustain, current practice in schools. Secondly, my volunteer involvement with GAA policymaking committees has deepened my understanding of how policy outcomes “are inevitably ‘blind’ ...[with] unintended as well as intended outcomes or consequences” (Ken Green 2008, p. 29).

Summary

This chapter has outlined a rationale for the use of figurational sociology as an appropriate theoretical framework for this study. A number of key figurational concepts, including *figurations*, *game models*, *established-outsider relations* and *habitus* have been identified as having particular relevance. The concept of *involvement and detachment* has been introduced, and more detail on how this informed methodological decisions in this study will be provided in the next chapter. The second purpose of this chapter has been to outline my own position in the research process in order to facilitate a balanced approach to issues concerning involvement and detachment throughout the research process. This has brought my “insider

status” (Perry *et al.* 2004, p. 140) to the fore, and has challenged me to reflect also on how an “outsider perspective” (Baur and Ernst 2011b, p. 120) can enhance my work.

The next chapter outlines the methodological approaches adopted in this study, and explains how the adoption of a figurational perspective influenced these approaches.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter seeks to explain how aspects of figurational sociology served as useful “sensitizing concepts” (Joe Maguire 1988, pp. 187-88) to inform the selection of methods during the planning, data generation and analysis phases of this research. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first gives a brief overview of prevalent research traditions and examines them from a figurational perspective. The second section describes the data collection procedures for the study together with a rationale for the selection of the research methods, namely semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation and documentary data. The final section outlines the data analysis strategies that were adopted.

Developing a research strategy

Figurational sociology and methodology

Textbooks that provide guidance on approaches to research in the social sciences frequently commence with a discussion addressing epistemological and ontological decisions that are made by the researcher (e.g. Bryman 2008; Snape and Spenser 2003). Figurational researchers are encouraged to adopt a wide variety of methodological approaches, as long as consideration is given to achieving as detached a perspective as possible, in order to guide research that adds to existing knowledge (Bloyce 2004b). Baur and Ernst (2011a, p. 120) contend that Elias “took an interpretative stance” in the course of his work as a figurational sociologist. Interpretivist approaches “seek to construct descriptive analyses that emphasize deep interpretive understandings of social phenomena” (Pope 2006, p. 22). An interpretivist approach is characterised by the use of research designs that enable participants to express their opinions. By doing this, the researcher seeks to make sense of issues in the context of their own historical and social perspectives (Creswell 2003). The relationship between theory

and data is inductive, whereby research questions are open-ended and “the data is used to generate explanations” (Draper and Swift 2011, p. 7).

Elias (1978) sought to overcome the dichotomy between theory and research that is frequently evident when research philosophies are discussed. Other researchers writing from a figurational standpoint have further argued that “the notions of epistemology and ontology represent something of a false dichotomy” and, because of their interdependence, “there seems little sense in discussing them separately” (Bloyce 2004b, p. 146). In addition, he suggests that the study of human relationships frames a research project more adequately (Bloyce 2004a). In research conducted using a figurational framework, “the processes of theory formation and empirical enquiry are seen as interwoven and indivisible” (Joe Maguire 1988, p. 188). This approach is echoed by May (2001, p. 29) when he calls for a “combination of reflection, experience and practice” to build a “constant relationship between social theory and social research”. In the context of my research, a reflexive journal was kept from the beginning of the study in order to address these considerations, and specific details on how this informed my understanding of the data will be outlined later in this chapter.

Elias encouraged his students to carry out research “in areas in which they were directly interested in or involved” (Dunning 1992a, p. 252). Such an approach has the benefit of what Dupuis (1999, p. 46) describes as her “deep familiarity” with the subject matter in a particular research project. While this strategy certainly appears to mark a useful starting point, it also challenges researchers to reflect on how this prior knowledge and experience impacts on the approaches they take as they proceed through a research project. Ken Green (2006a, p. 653) argues that many physical educationalists display a “strong emotional attachment” to their subject that may result in unintentional biases. Accordingly, he suggests that research should incorporate “the interconnected aspects of broader social phenomena” (Ken Green 2006a, p. 652). In a similar vein, Holliday (2007, p. 20) advises researchers to develop a “sociological

imagination by locating themselves and their actions critically within a wider community”.

The description of my own background that was provided in the previous chapter has been an attempt to locate myself within the Gaelic games community. This process has helped me to challenge my own biases and assumptions and give the reader information “on which to base a judgement about how reasonable the writer’s claims are with regard to the detachment or involvement of self-identity, values and beliefs” (Denscombe 2010, p. 303).

Involvement and Detachment: methodological considerations

The notion of Involvement and Detachment was introduced in the previous chapter in the context of overall figurational theoretical framework. This section outlines how the concept informed methodological decisions of this research project. As Mansfield (2008, p. 94) points out, it is concerned with finding a “way of balancing an involved researcher position with an appropriate balance of detachment”. It is not possible, or desirable, for researchers to adopt a completely detached position as this would negate the benefits of insider knowledge and experience (Ken Green 2006a). While their experiences are essential in the identification and examination of social problems, researchers should seek to achieve a balance between involvement and detachment (Joe Maguire 1995). Holliday (2007, p. 13) proposes that the researcher is challenged to make “the familiar strange” during the course of qualitative research. As a result, reflexivity is an important strategy to achieve an appropriate balance between involvement and detachment (Bloyce 2004b). Likewise, Dunning (1992a, p. 244), suggests that the process could be conceptualized “in terms of fluid and complex balances”. Researchers who adopt a figurational perspective are advised to take a “detour via detachment” (Joe Maguire and Mansfield 1998, p. 118). Engaging in reflexivity, for example, is a form of “detour behaviour” (Mansfield 2008, p. 107). This is followed by “secondary involvement” (Dunning and Hughes 2013, p. 180), thereby enabling the researcher to engage

in a process that includes the adoption of insider and outsider perspectives as the research progresses.

Constructing a research framework

Giving detailed attention to research design is important as it “provides a framework for the collection and analysis of data” (Bryman 2008, p. 31). Using a sporting metaphor, Robson (2002, p. 77) distinguishes between the “strategy” and “tactics” that are adopted in a research project, where the strategy outlines the broad orientation of the methodology and tactics describe the specific methods used. Regardless of the research position adopted, the researcher should ensure the chosen approaches are carried out consistently and rigorously (Seale *et al.* 2007, p. 3). Creswell (2003, p. 4) argues that “research practices lie somewhere on a continuum between” qualitative and quantitative approaches. In that context, my research strategy lies at the qualitative end of that continuum. Swift and Tischler (2010, p. 560) characterize qualitative research as an approach that “investigates *how* and *why* people behave in certain ways” (italics in the original). Additionally, qualitative research “is about the process” (Hastie and Glotova 2012, p. 311). Robson (2002, p. 166) argues that qualitative research involves the construction of a flexible design where the researcher is an “instrument of data collection”. This notion of flexibility has the potential to enhance social research (Babbie 2013), and is supported by Holliday (2007, p. 8) when he suggests that “decisions about research design are made in gradual response to the nature of the social setting being investigated”. This suggests that research questions and data generation methods are likely to be modified as the project progresses. However, to ensure that there is robust analysis and discussion, there is a responsibility on the researcher to detail carefully how and why these decisions were made (Holliday 2007). Holloway and Todres (2003) also argue for an approach to methodology that acknowledges the need for coherence and consistency while at the same time allowing for an appropriate degree of flexibility. Consequently, as Denzin and

Lincoln (2005a, p. 5) point out, “The combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives, and observations in a single study is best understood, then, as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness and depth to any enquiry”. As my research objectives involve gaining a deeper understanding of the relationships that exist among different groups within the Gaelic games figuration, I chose qualitative approaches in order to examine the networks of interdependency that have formed. There is already a considerable amount of quantitative data relating to PE and school sport in Irish primary schools (Economic and Social Research Institute 2013; Fahey *et al.* 2005; Woods *et al.* 2010). There is an absence, however, of studies that focus on how and why particular practices have come about. As a result, I selected research tools that were qualitative in nature in order to achieve a deeper understanding of the interdependent relationships involved.

Choosing research tactics

Research tactics are the specific methods that are used in the generation of data (Robson 2002). A combination of interviews, documentary analysis and observations is used commonly in research projects examining policy and practice in PE and school sport (e.g. Curtner-Smith 1999). This ‘tactical’ framework was also adopted in this study.

The research sample

Table 4.1 provides an overview of the research sample. Each of the methods outlined here will be discussed in greater detail in the sections that follow.

Table 4.1 Overview of the research sample

Semi-Structured Interviews	Observations	Documentary Analysis
47 participants Interviews were conducted between May 2010 and August 2012	15 hours with coaches in schools, in a non-participant capacity 25 hours at school events such as blitzes and competitive fixtures	Government and NGB policy documents Whole School Evaluation reports Search of references to Cumann na mBunscol in newspapers and websites

Purpose sampling is defined as a strategy where “people are deliberately selected with an explicit purpose in mind, namely to address the research aim and because they are rich sources of data in relation to this” (Draper and Swift 2011, p. 5). The “hand-picked” nature of a purposive sample has advantages in terms of enabling the researcher to “concentrate on instances that will best illuminate the research question at hand” (Denscombe 2010, p. 35). Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 27) suggest that purposive samples are “usually not wholly prespecified, but can evolve once fieldwork begins. This enables the researcher to include rare or negative cases so that a more complete analysis can be carried out (Denscombe 2010). I decided that a purposive sample would be most appropriate to answer the questions identified in the research proposal. At the beginning of my research, the purposive sample was designed based on the research questions. Consequently, I devised a preliminary list of teachers, coaches and administrators whom I believed had sufficient experience to shed light on the key questions regarding how Gaelic games policies were enacted in primary schools, and why these practices had attained a dominant position. Most of the teachers selected were very committed to the promotion of Gaelic games through their involvement in Cumann na mBunscol. Although national policies on PE and school were examined, the practical application of Gaelic games policy was studied in three counties located in three different

provinces. This approach was taken in order to obtain a diverse range of views. While it is difficult to prescribe an optimum sample size when using purposive sampling techniques (Bryman 2008), Hastie and Hay (2012, p. 83) suggest an endpoint is reached when “our ability to interpret any new possible meanings on the topic has been mostly exhausted”.

Liston (2005a, p. 71) used a “combination of purposive sampling and snowballing methods” to generate data in a study involving elite female athletes. ‘Snowballing’ occurs when discussions with initial participants leads to contact with others who are relevant to the research project (Bryman 2008). While snowballing was not considered in the development of my initial purposive sample, the technique became relevant as a result of conversations that occurred during interviews that took place early in the data generation phase. This technique was most useful in one county where I was unfamiliar with the GAA coaching personnel and with the teaching community. As a result, interviews were eventually carried out with a principal in a large suburban school and a part-time coach based on the recommendation of another participant who believed that these individuals could provide useful insights.

Glesne (2006, p. 31) uses the term “backyard settings” to describe situations where the researcher has in-depth knowledge of, and connections with, the research participants. Backyard research can be both rewarding and problematic. Because of the relationships that already exist, the researcher must engage in the research “with heightened consciousness of potential difficulties” and should develop a rationale to justify the selection of particular research sites (Glesne 2006, p. 33). The main advantages and disadvantages of these settings are set out in Table 4.2:

Table 4.2: Advantages and disadvantages of backyard settings

Advantages	Disadvantages
Convenient Access	Ethical dilemmas: over-familiarity with participants; potential conflict of interest
Ease in establishing rapport	Political dilemmas: representation of the data
Uses time efficiently	Role confusion
Prior knowledge provides a useful context	Concluding the research may be difficult

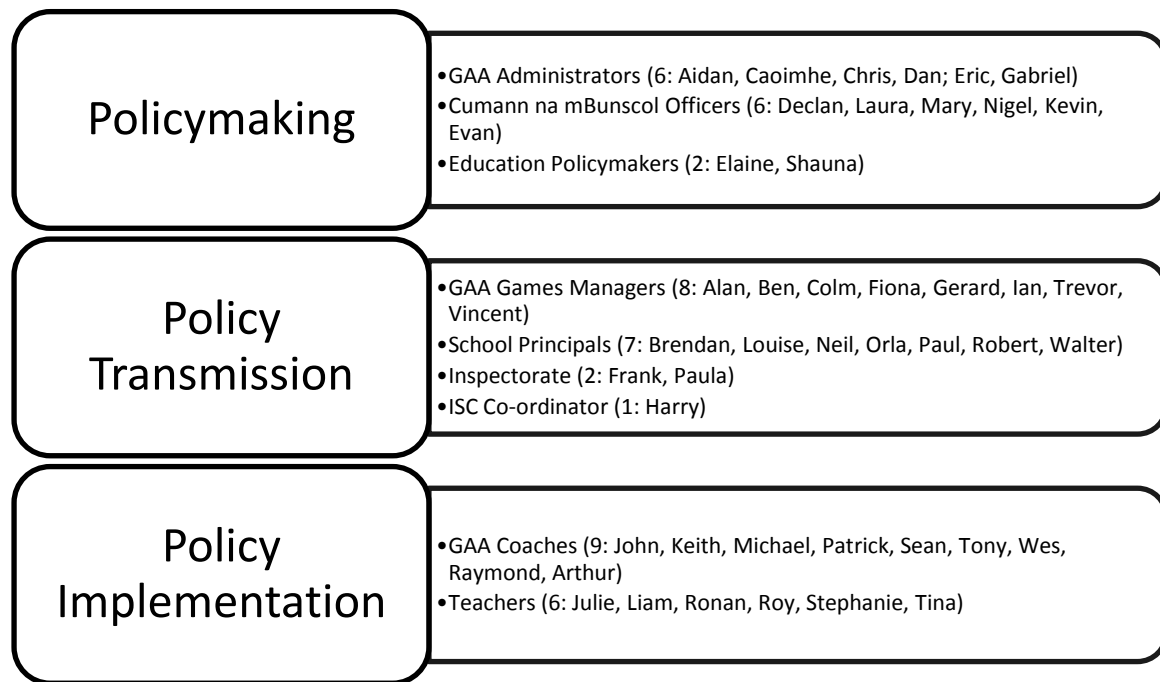
(adapted from Glesne (2006))

The participants in this research included policy-makers in the GAA; other NGB administrators and coaches; members of Cumann na mBunscol and other teachers; and individuals involved in PE and school sport policy-making and individuals, including trade union officers, Irish Sports Council employees and members of the DES inspectorate. A total of 47 people participated in this study, and interviews were carried out over a two year period between May 2010, and August 2012.

Figure 4.1 is a representation of the primary role of each participant, and the number of participants at each level of the study design. Building on the concept of multi-level game models as outlined in the previous chapter, three levels were identified in the early stages of the research design. Firstly, individuals and groups involved in policy development at a national level were characterised as policymakers. The middle level was populated by people like GAA games development managers and school principals who were identified as policy transmitters. Finally, teachers and coaches working at school level were viewed as policy implementers. While this structure was useful in providing an overview of the participants' roles, I acknowledge that it presents the policy development and implementation as a simple, 'top down' hierarchical process. Instead, it would be more accurate to describe it as a

complex and multi-directional process. This simplified structure is a useful starting point nevertheless.

Figure 4.1: Participants and their primary roles



It should be noted that some individuals fulfilled multiple roles simultaneously. As a result, their interviews provided insights that related to a number of different levels. Evan, for example, is a principal teacher in a small school and therefore carries out full teaching duties also. His role as principal involves administrative decisions concerning how PE and sport policies are enacted by all the teachers in this school. As class teacher, he implements these decisions on a daily basis. He is heavily involved with Cumann na mBunscol and is in a position to shape national policy. In addition, he is involved in an administrative capacity with the local GAA club, and oversees the development of its youth structures. While the main reason for involving him in the study was to gain an insight into policymaking at a national level, his experience in other areas was also explored. Table 4.3 lists each of the participants in this study, and indicates where multiple roles were held. The key focus for each interview is included in the final column.

Table 4.3: Participants and their affiliations

Name	Role 1	Role 2	Role 3	Interview Focus
Aidan	National Gaelic Games Development	Club coach		Polycymaking
Alan	Gaelic games administrator	Coach		Transmission
Arthur	Coach (Full-time)			Implementation
Ben	Gaelic games administrator			Transmission
Brendan	Class teacher	Cumann na mBunscol officer		Transmission
Caoimhe	National Gaelic Games Development			Polycymaking
Chris	Gaelic Games administrator	Teacher		Polycymaking
Colm	Gaelic games administrator			Transmission
Dan	National Gaelic Games Development	Coach		Polycymaking
Declan	Cumann na mBunscol officer	Principal Teacher	GAA administrator	Polycymaking
Elaine	Education Policymaker	Former Teacher		Polycymaking
Eric	Gaelic games administrator			Polycymaking
Evan	Cumann na mBunscol officer	Principal teacher	Class teacher	Transmission
Fiona	Gaelic games administrator			Transmission
Frank	DES Inspectorate	Former Teacher		Transmission

Gabriel	National Gaelic Games Development	Former Teacher	Coach	Policymaking
Gerard	Gaelic games administrator			Transmission
Harry	LSP Co-ordinator	GAA coach		Transmission
Ian	Gaelic games administrator	Coach		Transmission
John	Coach (Part-time)	Student	Club officer	Implementation
Julie	Class Teacher			Implementation
Keith	Coach (Part-time)	Student	Elite Player	Implementation
Kevin	Principal Teacher	GAA administrator	Coach	Policymaking
Laura	Cumann na mBunscol officer	Principal Teacher	Class teacher	Policymaking
Liam	Class Teacher	Cumann na mBunscol officer		Implementation
Louise	Principal Teacher			Transmission
Mary	Cumann na mBunscol officer	Principal Teacher	Class teacher	Policymaking
Michael	Coach (Full-time)			Implementation
Neil	Principal Teacher	Cumann na mBunscol officer		Transmission
Nigel	Cumann na mBunscol officer	Principal Teacher	Class teacher	Policymaking

Orla	Principal Teacher	County Ladies Football Administrator	Class teacher	Transmission
Patrick	Coach (Full-time)			Implementation
Paul	Principal Teacher	Cumann na mBunscol officer	Class teacher	Transmission
Paula	DES Inspectorate	Former Teacher		Transmission
Raymond	Coach (Full-time)			Implementation
Robert	Principal Teacher	Cumann na mBunscol officer	Club officer	Transmission
Ronan	Class Teacher			Implementation
Roy	Class Teacher	Coach		Implementation
Sean	Coach (Full-time)			Implementation
Shauna	Education Policymaker	Former Teacher		Policymaking
Stephanie	Class Teacher			Implementation
Tina	Class Teacher	Elite Player		Implementation
Tony	Coach (Part-time)			Implementation
Trevor	Gaelic games administrator			Transmission
Vincent	Gaelic games administrator			Transmission
Walter	Principal Teacher			Transmission
Wes	Coach (Part-time)			Implementation

General ethical issues

Denscombe (2010, p. 331) proposes four key principles to ensure that research is conducted in an ethically appropriate manner. These can be summarized as follows:

- Protecting the interests of the participants
- Ensuring that participation is voluntary and based on informed consent
- Operating with scientific integrity and avoiding deception
- Complying with “the laws of the land”

In line with these considerations, this research project received ethical approval from the University of Limerick Ethics Committee. Research participants were provided with a general information document outlining what was required of them. This can be found in Appendix A. An informed consent forms was signed by each participant. This document is contained in Appendix B.

The issue of participant confidentiality is important in the social sciences (de Vaus 2001). Because many of the participants in this study knew each other well, on a personal or professional basis, taking measures to ensure their anonymity was particularly important. This was done by replacing real names with pseudonyms and by omitting contextual details that would have facilitated the identification of participants. The names of schools or other locations were omitted or given a pseudonym also. These procedures were outlined to each participant before the commencement of the interview. Care was taken to ensure that the anonymity of participants is protected not only in all future published materials, but also during storage of all data (Gratton and Jones 2004). This was done in this study by keeping all personal details separate from transcripts and other materials (Fade and Swift 2011). These details were saved separately in password protected documents and in journals that were stored securely.

Interviews

Interviews as a research method

Using interviews is a popular means of generating data in social research. Batteson and Ball (1995) propose that interviews are an effective means of gaining insights into policy-making decisions. In the context of this study, interviews were conducted in conjunction with field-based observations and documentary analysis. At its most fundamental level an interview is “a story that describes how two people, often relative strangers, sit down and talk about a specific topic” (Rapley 2007, p. 15). In a research context, interviews become a complex exchange between the interviewer and interviewee, where both contribute to the resulting text (Sirna *et al.* 2008). The nature of the interaction that takes place has been the subject of considerable debate, with writers arguing for and against the idea of interviewer neutrality, although the latter “is dominant in contemporary methodology texts” (Rapley 2007, p. 19). Denzin and Lincoln (2005b, p. 643), for example, argue that the interview method “is not a neutral tool, for at least two people create the reality of the interview situation”. The interview itself can be used as a means to stimulate researcher reflexivity (Garton and Copland 2010). Perry *et al.* (2004, p. 138) advise that “movement along the involvement-detachment continuum is a desirable feature of all research...that incorporates interviewing as a research tool”. This heightens the importance of post-interview review and the subsequent documentation of my reactions in the journal. The example below from my journal outlines how the comment of Alan, a GAA administrator, sparked off a range of reactions from me where links are made to other data and to the literature on primary PE:

Teachers probably wouldn't be doing PE at all because of a lack of confidence. That's why the coaching schemes are so important" This comment links to a point made by Hadyn-Davies (2012, p. 33) that the teacher as specialist debate had been made redundant in England because of the prevalence of sports coaches: "this debate has

been somewhat side-tracked by the use of sports coaches to answer workforce reform agendas. Sports coaches in primary physical education bring 'expertise' in sports activities". We must question if these coaches are, actually, PE specialists. Mary's post interview emails also mention the coach as an 'expert'. In fact, the coaches are really business students with no depth in primary pedagogy; nevertheless, they are regarded as 'experts'. The comments of the Castlelands class teachers illustrated a similar view of the coach, as did the principal. The situation in Greenfields was similar.

Using semi-structured interviews

Cohen *et al.* (2000, pp. 268-69) categorize interviews as ranging from formal interviews with a defined set of questions, through less formal interviews where the interviewer is free to alter the planned format, to informal interviews where the interviewer raises issues "in a conversational style". Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer a degree of freedom to probe for responses using a mixture of open and closed questions, and enable a deep exploration of the research topic (Drever 2003). This strategy was selected as the preferred format in this study because the approach allows for the interviewer to probe beyond the initial answers by asking questions that enabled the interviewee to clarify and elaborate on particular answers (May 2001). Additionally, it offered the potential to explore the chains of interdependency among individuals and groups.

A general topic guide was prepared at the beginning of the data generation process. Arthur and Nazroo (2003, p. 115) advise that "a topic guide should be seen as a mechanism for steering the discussion in an interview or focus group but *not* as an exact prescription of coverage" (*italics in the original*). While the wording of the core questions asked was similar throughout the data generation process, there were also opportunities to ask supplementary

questions based on the initial responses (Bryman 2008). An interview schedule focusing on a defined group of central themes enables comparisons to be made across interviews while at the same time allowing for emergent themes to be explored (Griggs 2010). In this context, the development of my topic guide was an important part of the data generation process. Initially, one general topic guide was prepared and discussed with my supervisor, and was informed by the research questions that had been identified at that time. Questions in the early portion of the guide focused on the interviewees' biographical information and background, before moving to more specific questions on PE and school sport policy and practice. Some aspects of the general guide were changed depending on the positions held by interviewees. This involved the development of slightly different guides for teachers, coaches and GAA administrators so that specific issues could be dealt with in more detail. There was considerable scope to discuss practical issues about the implementation of the school coaching programme with teachers, for example, while the processes involved in policy formulation were given more attention during interviews with GAA officials. The flexibility of this approach allowed for a reframing of the topic questions in line with the ongoing analysis that accompanied the data collection. The topic guides were reviewed after each interview, and adapted to account for issues that may have arisen. Once it became apparent, for example, that coaches were covering PE curriculum time in schools, more questions were added about their understanding of its structure and content. Samples of the interview schedule used with coaches, teachers and administrators are contained in Appendix C.

From my point of view, it was important to explain clearly my research objectives at the beginning of each interview as many of the interviewees knew me well on a personal and professional level. Field notes were written after each interview so that I could track my own perceptions about what had transpired, and these notes were valuable in the formal analysis of the data when the interview transcripts were examined in the context of other data. I

adopted an approach whereby the coding of each transcript was done in conjunction with my field notes and reflections.

The interview process

Glesne (2006, p. 95) suggests that interviewers should “listen analytically” in order to gain insights that may steer the course of the interview itself, and this strategy can be useful during data analysis. In practical terms, this was a skill that developed as the study progressed. Two main strategies were used. Firstly, a set of generic questions was formulated in order to probe specific responses more deeply. With practice, these questions were used productively to elicit a richer response from the interviewees. These questions are outlined in Table 4.4:

Table 4.4: Examples of generic (probing) questions

Can you give me an example of...?

Why do you think it is important to...?

How did your approach change when...?

Could you explain what you mean by...?

How did you react when...?

(adapted from Legard *et al.* 2003)

Secondly, additional written notes were made as soon as possible after each interview concluded. These notes captured my initial thoughts about salient points that were made during the interview. In one early interview Brendan, a teacher, spoke negatively about the relationship between Cumann na mBunscol and the GAA. This alerted me to examples of ‘we’ and ‘they’ images at an early stage (Connolly and Dolan 2011a). This helped to reinforce the idea that the process of analysis commences from the start of a research project (Miles and Huberman 1994).

In addition to the ethical issues discussed earlier, some specific issues related to the interview process. Each interviewee signed an informed consent form, and the introduction of each interview detailed the steps that would be taken to preserve the anonymity of participants, in line with the guidelines presented by Fontana and Frey (2005). Draper and Swift (2011, p. 4) point out that “all interviews are interwoven with issues relating to ethics and the balance of power between the researcher and the researched”. Interviews were generally conducted in quiet places like university or school offices where the participants were afforded a degree of privacy. The interviews were audiotaped and, subsequently, transcribed. The interviews varied in duration from thirty five to seventy minutes. Electronic copies of the transcripts were stored in locations with password protection. All interview notes and transcripts were written up using pseudonyms only and contextual details were omitted or altered.

Power balances within the interview process

Aspects of power relationships can affect the rapport that is developed during an interview. Garton and Copland (2010, p. 535) argue that very little has been written about “rapport talk” that is based on relationships that existed prior to the commencement of the research. Considering that I had known many of the interviewees on a professional basis prior to the study, establishing a rapport was relatively easy. As Denscombe (2010, p. 178) notes, “people respond differently depending on how they perceive the person asking the questions”. Because of my own ‘insider’ status, it was relatively easy to gain access to individuals who were influential in the policy-making process. Interviewees were generally willing to speak candidly about the topics being discussed. In one instance, however, access to a national policymaker was denied due to apparent scheduling issues. Attempts to find alternative dates proved unsuccessful, and I formed the impression that this was an indirect way of saying no. Fortunately, I was able to speak to other people in similar positions in order to generate data that was sufficiently comprehensive.

According to Draper and Swift (2011, p. 4), “all interviews are interwoven with issues relating to ethics and the balance of power between the researcher and the researched”. I experienced this most frequently during interviews with coaches and administrators. In the case of the former, some inexperienced coaches viewed my role with some suspicion. I needed to assure them that I wasn’t ‘checking up’ on them, and was most interested in hearing their opinions. During an interview with an administrator, the power balance was definitely in his favour. Because he held a position of high status within his organisation, my post interview reflections suggest that I was reluctant to ask very probing questions about the rationale for some policy decisions. Acknowledging the issue was important in the context of my own interviewing skills, and the experience helped me to adopt more effective strategies in subsequent interviews with participants who held similar positions.

Perceptions around the respective status of interview and interviewee can impact on what is said during the course of the interview (Glesne 2006). Data generated during the interview process can be weak if participants give responses that they think the researcher wants to hear. This is described by Robson (2002, p. 172) as the “good bunny syndrome”. In contrast, researchers must also be aware of situations where the participants are deliberately obstructive or withhold information (Robson 2002). This assertion is particularly relevant where the researcher and the participants are known to each other outside of the research situation. The term “acquaintance interview” is used to describe situations where the interviewer could be termed an “insider” (Garton and Copland 2010, p. 536). In the context of this research, my position was clearly that of an insider. While it may be sometimes difficult for researchers to manage their new identity as interviewer in these situations, acquaintance interviews can be useful in gaining access to information that might not be generally available (Garton and Copland 2010). Because of my own insider knowledge, I became aware during the course of one interview that parts of the interviewee’s dialogue

were inconsistent with conversations we had outside the research context previously. Despite some probing questions, it became apparent that the interviewee was looking for affirmation that what he was saying corresponded to what he thought I wanted to hear. In particular, he appeared to favour national GAA policy on Go Games, despite being critical of this policy in conversations prior to the interview. From a methodological perspective this was somewhat problematic as it was difficult to reconcile the differing perspectives. In this case, the field notes generated after the interview helped to provide important background information when the whole interview was analysed later. From an analytical perspective, however, this interview was indicative of a tendency on the part of some individuals to hold apparently contradictory positions. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter eight in the context of Cumann na mBunscol's stance on competition.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p. 147) use the term "elites" to describe interviewees "who are leaders or experts in a community, who are usually in powerful positions". Because of their status, it can be difficult for researchers to gain access to them. In my case, however, gaining access was relatively straightforward. Sometimes, because of their familiarity with, and expertise of, their own field, responses may contain many "talk tracks" that deliver a particular, rehearsed viewpoint, and it may be difficult to probe beyond that. My use of the bank of probing questions that was outlined earlier helped to minimize this effect.

Observations as a research tool

As May (2001, p. 173) points out, "observation is about engaging in a social scene, experiencing it and seeking to understand and explain it". Observations are useful in research because they can capture a sense of "what participants do, rather than what they say they do" (Draper and Swift 2011, p. 5). The data generated during observations "contrasts with, and can often ...complement" what has been obtained using other research methods (Robson 2002, p. 310).

Unstructured non-participant observation, where “the aim is to record in as much detail as possible the behaviour of the participants” (Bryman 2008, p. 257), was the chosen format for this study. This type of observation is useful when the researcher is aiming to develop “an understanding of a complex set of interactions” (Simpson and Tuson 2003, p. 12). This typically results in the development of a “narrative account” of that behaviour (Bryman 2008, p. 257). Simpson and Tuson (2003, p. 55) suggest that researchers involved in non-participant observation should seek to adopt a “fly-on-the-wall” perspective, particularly in educational settings. Such behaviour distances the researcher from the activity being observed, and reduces the chances of the researcher’s presence provoking untypical types of behaviour. During reflections on the data, it is important for researchers to consider how their presence affected the situations that were observed (Robson 2002). A key advantage of observation as a research method is the flexibility inherent in the ways that it can be conducted (May 2001)

Observations in this study

The observations carried out in this study occurred in two contexts. Firstly, observations were conducted with three primary school coaches in different counties. One was a full-time coach with over 10 years’ experience while the others coached in schools on a part-time basis. One of these had covered a wide range of schools for about three years, while the other was a third-level student working solely with the schools in his own club’s catchment area during his spare time. Although he did receive payment for his work from the GAA, his involvement was not connected with his college course. In total, approximately fifteen hours of observation was carried out in these school settings. The purpose of observing in this context was to generate data on how coaching was conducted in schools. These data provided ‘first-hand’ evidence that supplemented the data gathered during interviews with these coaches. The second form of observation took place during inter-school competitions. These observations occurred at Cumann na mBunscol county final events in three different counties,

and at a non-competitive inter-school blitz. These sites were selected in order to gather evidence of how policy on the organisation of inter-school games was enacted in practical situations. In particular, observing the differences between competitive and participatory approaches was a key focus. Consent was obtained from the organising committees in each case, and my role was akin to that of a spectator. At one venue, the activities were co-ordinated by a teacher who had participated in a semi-structured interview and I was asked to act as an umpire during some of the games. In total, twenty five hours were spent observing in these settings.

I developed a checklist to guide my observations based on guidelines for school coaches published by the Australian Sports Commission (2007) and by the Association for Physical Education (2007), because Irish guidelines were not available. A copy of this checklist can be found in Appendix D. This format helped to maintain a focus on my research questions while in the field, and did not detract from the process of recording “as much detail as possible...with the aim of developing a narrative account” (Bryman 2008, p. 257).

Field notes

A field journal can be used to assist the development of understanding throughout the research process, and can track “insights that result from the interaction of reading, reflecting, and doing research (Glesne 2006, p. ix). Furthermore, Glesne (2006, p. 56) advocates the use of “mental, jotted, and full field notes”, depending on the observation context. In some situations it may not be possible to write detailed notes while in the field. The researcher needs to rely on the first two strategies in these cases. Accordingly, full notes should be written up as soon as possible after the period of observation has ended. These notes will provide a “thick description” of the observed phenomena (Delamont 2007, p. 213). Notes “should be both descriptive and analytic” (Glesne 2006, p. 56), so that as much information as possible is gathered for subsequent analysis. The maintenance of autobiographical notes

(Glesne 2006) is an important strategy that supplements the data gathered during observations, and contributes to the overall process of researcher reflexivity (Gratton and Jones 2004). My field notes were handwritten originally during or immediately following observations. They were subsequently typed and coded with other data using N-Vivo

Ethical issues relating to observations

My status within the teaching and Gaelic games communities facilitated my access to schools, and information pages and consent forms were provided for teachers and parents. A separate negotiation was conducted with the coaches and this also involved obtaining informed consent. As the coaches that I observed also participated in semi-structured interviews, they were aware of the general objectives of my research, and were willing to have their sessions observed. I explained that I would be taking some notes on what I had seen, and they expressed no reservations about this.

The non-participant nature of the observations helped to ensure that what was observed seemed as normal as possible. Informal conversations sometimes took place with the class teachers during the lesson, and details of these conversations were recorded in the field notes later.

Documents and electronic media

Documents as a source of data:

Documents might be viewed as “the sedimentations of social practice” (May 2001, p. 176). Accordingly, they provide a rich source of data that can help in the understandings of social processes over a period of time. They are particularly useful in establishing a macro-level view of social figurations (Baur and Ernst 2011a). In general, documents are written with specific purposes in mind: they may be “written *in order to* change or sustain the behaviour” [italics in the original] of individuals or groups (Dolan 2009, p. 186).

Official documents produced by national governmental agencies can be a useful source of data. Denscombe (2010, p. 217) suggests that, at least on the surface, “they would appear to provide a documentary source of information that is authoritative, objective and factual”.

Documents developed by non-governmental organisations can also contain useful research data. Policy documents developed by such agencies, for example, typically describe current practice and set targets for future development. The attainment of these targets will depend on individuals and subgroups within the organisation, but may also require the co-operation of people external to the organisation. So while a policy document may have been prepared by a core group within the organisation, its implementation will involve engagement with an extensive range of other individuals and groups.

Websites and other internet-based fora are being used increasingly to provide textual information that is relevant to social researchers (Stebbins 2010). While the consistency and reliability can be of variable quality, researchers may find data that illustrates a reaction to official documents that are published elsewhere, thereby contributing to the triangulation process. In a similar way, newspapers can be used as a data source. It is worth remembering that the biases of journalists and editors may be reflected in the content, particularly in the context of opinion pieces or descriptive articles (Bloyce 2004b). Furthermore, part of the researcher’s role is to evaluate what may have been omitted, in addition to examining the content that has actually been included (May 2001).

Irrespective of the source, it is worth remembering that “documents can owe more to the interpretations of those who produce them than to an objective picture of reality” (Denscombe 2010, p. 233). As May (2001, p. 183) argues, documents can be “viewed as media through which social power is expressed”. It is important to bear in mind the contexts in which they have been prepared, and any potential biases of the people or organisations responsible for their preparation.

Use of documents in this study

Policy documents

A variety of documents were gathered during the course of this study. They included curriculum and general policy documents published by the DES and policy documents relating to physical activity and sport published by other state and semi-state bodies such as the Department of Health and Children and the Irish Sports Council (ISC). A review of DES and ISC policy statements published since 1971 was carried out. That timeframe was chosen because it represented the length of time that PE has been included as a mandatory subject on the primary school curriculum. Policy documents published by Irish NGBs, primarily those involved in the promotion of Gaelic games, were examined in order to gain an understanding of how their official policy statements address primary PE and school sport.

Whole School Evaluation (WSE) reports

WSE documents were first published by the DES inspectorate in 2006. This was a significant departure as, prior to this, school inspection reports were not available publicly.

Consequently new information on curricular and administrative practice in primary school is now freely available on the DES website. This data source was chosen because it had the potential to provide a government perspective on PE and school sport policy implementation. Reports published from 2006 until June 2012 were examined with a view to gathering data on the implementation of PE in Irish primary schools. In particular, attention was given to the status of Gaelic games within curriculum content and the role played by external personnel in the delivery of aspects of the curriculum. In the course of examining a data source like the WSE reports, it is useful to bear in mind that “administrative records...are not...merely neutral reports of events. They are shaped by the political context in which they are produced and by the cultural and ideological assumptions that lie behind it” (Scott 1990, p. 60).

Denscombe (2010, p. 223) highlights the socially constructed nature of official documents

and suggests that they “can owe more to the interpretations of those who produce them than to an objective picture of reality”. A series of documents like the WSE reports are bound to reflect the priorities of the sponsoring agency, in this case the DES. They will also reflect, to some degree, the personal biases of individual inspectors and the responses of individual school communities. The strength of the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO), and the right of school communities to respond to the content of the report, must be taken into account when assessing the credibility of these WSE reports. Reports published from 2006 until 2009 proved to be the most useful for this study. During that time, 729 reports were published with 372 of these having some reference to PE.

The use of newspapers and electronic media in this study

Cumann na mBunscol is an influential organisation in the delivery of Gaelic games in primary schools. A range of documentation was gathered, including national and provincial strategic plan policy documents, and information booklets outlining games schedules from individual counties. Many county units of Cumann na mBunscol have websites detailing local activities. The information contained on these webpages gives an insight into how national policy was being interpreted at local level. Newspaper coverage of initiatives like Go Games was examined to get a sense of the popular debate that occurred during the early implementation stages of these programmes. A search using the words ‘Cumann na mBunscol’ and ‘Go Games’ was conducted in the three national daily broadsheet newspapers (Irish Independent, Irish Times, Irish Examiner). The data generated was used to provide a contextual background to issues that may have arisen during the timeframe of the research.

Reflexivity

The figurational sociological perspective on involvement and detachment highlights the need for the adoption of a reflexive approach to research. Reflexivity, as described by Roulston (2010, p. 116), “refers to the researcher’s ability to be able to self-consciously refer to him or

herself in relation to the production of knowledge about research topics”. Ahern (1999, pp. 408-10) has presented a set of guidelines to assist in the development of reflexive thinking throughout the research process. From the outset of the study, I kept a handwritten journal that tracked my own thoughts and recorded key aspects of discussions that took place with my supervisor. These journals were created using hardback notebooks initially. Each journal entry was recorded in a double-page format where events (data) were described on the left hand side and my comments and observations were recorded on the opposite side. The material contained in the journals was subsequently transferred into journal memos in N-Vivo. The journals were very useful for compiling data from informal sources such as conversations, media reports and meetings. Along with being a useful source of data, the content of the journals reflect my own thought processes over the course of the overall research. It helped shape the ways that the semi-structured interview schedule evolved over time. At that stage of the research, the journals were reviewed to identify recurring themes. N-Vivo coding of the journal content was linked to coding of other data subsequently.

Table 4.5 outlines how these guidelines informed the development of my reflexive stance during the research process, and I have included specific examples:

Table 4.5: A framework for reflexive bracketing

A Framework for Reflexive Bracketing	
Ahern's Tips for Reflexive Bracketing	How the framework informed this study
Identify the researcher's 'taken-for-granted' background and interests	I started out with a belief that the promotion of Gaelic games was 'good' for a school community. It is something that I had never really questioned
<i>Examine the power balances</i>	My own national profile in policy development was well known among many interviewees; I had to keep this in mind when reading the transcripts; were people telling me what they thought I wanted to hear?
Clarify the researcher's personal value systems	Acknowledgement that I needed to adopt a more detached position.
<i>Develop a critical perspective through continuous self-evaluation</i>	Tracking my thoughts and perceptions in the journal helped here.
Describe potential areas of role conflict	My roles as researcher/GAA policymaker/teacher; did participants trust me? Were they 'open' in their responses?
<i>Does the study have implications for the participants?</i>	Awareness that some participants might be easily identified: strategies to preserve anonymity.
Identify gatekeeper's interests and disposition towards the research	Some gatekeepers wanted feedback on how their systems were operating.
<i>Consider ways to prevent conflict</i>	I needed to examine if I was choosing participants who agreed with my own views; was I able to probe/challenge without becoming confrontational?
Recognise feelings that might indicate a lack of neutrality	Regular debriefings with my supervisor were important in order to interrogate my own values.
<i>Refer to research notes and engage in peer debriefing</i>	This prompted me to review how I approached data generation strategies.
Is anything new or surprising in the data collection or analysis?	A review after each episode of data generation helped to refine my strategies and to redirect questioning during interviews
<i>Has saturation been reached or has the researcher 'gone native'?</i>	Was I hearing the "same" perspective? Did I need to seek different one? Was I adopting a sufficiently detached position to balance my own involvement in the GAA?
When blocks occur in the research process, reframe them	It was important to maintain a degree of flexibility as the research proceeded as some sites became unavailable. The purposive nature of the

	design assisted to overcome these problems
<i>Can different participants or methods shed light on the process?</i>	Was my sample sufficiently varied?
After analysis, reflect on how writing up is proceeding	Frequent returning to the data; re-examining the codes
<i>Check for bias in data selection and interpretation</i>	Recheck my in-vivo and analytic codes (Roulston 2010)
Review the analysis in relation to the literature	Identify connections to the literature
<i>Is the literature supporting the analysis, or just reflecting the researcher's background?</i>	Has the analysis deepened my understanding, raised questions or forced me to reconsider my perceptions?
Resolve bias by acknowledging its outcomes	Seek to identify my position on the involvement-detachment continuum: have I 'stepped back'?
<i>Has the researcher overlooked particular data due to unresolved bias?</i>	Final review of findings; return to journal; seek clarification from participants (e.g. the role of the principal in leading Gaelic games activities)

(adapted from Ahern 1999)

My reflective journal tracked my thoughts from the beginning of the research project, and short memos were written in order to address my connectedness to the data as particular issues arose. One of the earliest memos written, for example, detailed an informal conversation I had with a GAA development officer where he complained that the majority of his coaching staff were employed on short-term contracts, leading to a high turnover of staff. This prompted me to write at the time that these coaching inputs may be “only a stopgap measure with no long-term effect”. As a result, I was alerted to issues relating to the overall quality and sustainability of school coaching programmes. The memo writing became more detailed as the data analysis progressed because these memos helped to develop my ideas as codes merged during the formation of themes.

Dependability and Credibility

The concepts of reliability and validity are of central importance in “the natural sciences”, but are not considered appropriate terminology for the determination of “quality” in qualitative

research (Lewis and Ritchie 2003, p. 270). Denscombe (2010) suggests replacing them with the terms ‘dependability’ and ‘credibility’ respectively. He argues that dependability can be enhanced by providing an audit trail that contains an “explicit account of the methods, analysis and decision-making” involved in a research project (2010, p. 300). In order to develop a process that meets credibility criteria, researchers should outline a rationale for the following: choice of social setting; choice of research activities; choice of themes and foci; and dedication to, and thoroughness of, fieldwork (Holliday 2007). The provision of such detail can add significantly to the research quality. Chesney (2001, p. 128) points out, “for the readers to accept the research as valid, they must be able to scrutinize the integrity and philosophy of the researcher so that the findings are trusted”.

Triangulation is frequently cited as a strategy to enhance credibility (e.g. Denscombe 2010; Lewis and Ritchie 2003). Fontana and Frey (2005, p. 722) describe triangulation as “a multimethod approach to achieve broader and often better results”. Methodological triangulation can be achieved by using a number of different methods. It is beneficial to use methods that are “markedly different” and by “comparing data from different informants” (Denscombe 2010, p. 347). By adopting a multi-method approach, Curtner-Smith (1999), for example, used three data generation strategies (passive participant observation, formal and informal interviews, and document analysis) in order to enhance trustworthiness through triangulation. Holliday (2005, p. 308) favours the use of the term ‘thick description’ instead of ‘triangulation’ as the former is concerned with “getting at increased richness and showing interconnectedness”. Consequently, “it is the strategic rigour with which the interconnecting voices of thick description are presented that gives qualitative research and the use of narrative its validity”

As I have outlined earlier, Glesne (2006) proposes that researchers should devise a scheme of reflexive questions to strengthen the research process. She suggests that these questions

should focus on the different perspectives of the “Inquirer”, “Participants” and the “Audience” and can provide a framework for use in the reflexive journal (2006, p. 126). Creswell (2003, pp. 195-96) presented a range of strategies to establish credibility, trustworthiness and authenticity. A summary of these strategies, with associated examples from my research, are outlined in Table 4.6:

Table 4.6: Strategies to enhance research credibility

<u>Strategy</u>	<u>Examples of how I applied this strategy</u>
Triangulating by using different data sources	Using Cumann na mBunscol websites, fixture booklets, semi-structured interviews and observations to gain an understanding of competitive game organisation
Member-checking	Having read through one transcribed interview, I followed up on the role of the principal via email, in order to clarify some perspectives
Using rich, thick description	Inclusion of participant quotes that help to provide a sense of context
Clarifying biases	Balancing my own bias in favour of maximum participation games models, with an understanding of why traditional competitive structures have retained popularity
Debriefing	A recurring theme of supervisor debriefing meetings was how my ‘insider’ position influenced the research. These discussions helped me to balance my insider-outsider perspectives so that my interrogation of the data was more rigorous
Spending prolonged time in the field	Interviews and observations covered a period from May 2010 until October 2012. This covered a time of sustained policy change within the GAA

(adapted from Creswell 2003, pp. 195-96)

Limitations of the Research Design

During the course of this study it was not possible to engage with all groups impacted by Gaelic games activities in primary schools. It is important to note here the perspectives that may be absent in the data. The purposive nature of the sample meant that the majority of teachers who participated were either very involved in Gaelic games promotion or were broadly uncritical of the presence of coaches in their schools. While some teachers expressed

criticisms of current practice, the voices of teachers who oppose Gaelic games activities are absent. Children were not recruited as interview participants. As a result, an understanding of their experiences is limited to the data generated during observations. Similarly, the views of parents were not elicited during this study. It was decided not to include these two groups in order to maintain a sample size that was manageable and focused on the research questions.

Data Analysis

Perry *et al.* (2004, p. 139) argue “that it is crucial to recognize the centrality of the researcher in the process of data generation and analysis” or, as Fade and Swift (2011, p. 107) note, the researcher is “the principle tool of data analysis”. Thus a “reflexive account” should be provided “by the researcher concerning the researcher’s self and its impact on the research” (Denscombe 2010, p. 303). My decision to describe aspects of my personal biography in Chapter three was based on the recognition that these experiences have given me a particular insight into the research topic. It aligns with the way Nelson (2005, p. 317) locates herself in the research in order to portray events as “a complex web of particular interrelationships and affiliations”.

It has been suggested that analysis commences from the beginning of data collection (Rapley 2007). Consequently, this leads to a “non-linear and non-sequential” process where “data collection and analysis tend to proceed simultaneously” (Hastie and Glotova 2012, p. 310). Remaining aware of my own perspectives was also important throughout the research process. In the words of Perry *et al.* (2004, p. 145), “the concept of involvement-detachment sensitizes the researcher to the role of the self in the process of analysis in a manner that has the potential to minimize the costs and maximize the benefits of researcher involvement”. Striving for an “appropriate blend between involvement and detachment” is, according to Bloyce (2004a, p. 85), a prerequisite for analysis procedures that lead to a greater understanding of the research topic. In some senses this presents the researcher with a

conundrum on how to manage the tensions presented by an “insider-perspective” and an “outsider-perspective” (Baur and Ernst 2011a, p. 120). Consequently, data need to be explained through the adoption of “a relatively detached examination of the complex figurations in which they work” (Dopson 2001, p. 523). A thorough engagement in reflexive practice during data analysis is a reliable means of achieving that blend. By tracking decisions that I made, and by adapting the questioning strategy of Glesne (2006, p. 166) to strengthen the trustworthiness of the analysis, I sought to attain an appropriate interplay between involvement and detachment. This strategy is presented in Table 4.7:

Table 4.7: Four key questions that can strengthen the trustworthiness of the analysis

Questions that can strengthen the trustworthiness of the analysis
What did you notice?
Why do you notice what you notice?
How can you interpret what you notice?
How can you know that your interpretation is an accurate one?

The use of these questions during the data analysis aligned with a desire to “remain vigilant and cross-questioning of our ‘researching’ practices” (Ramanathan 2005, p. 292).

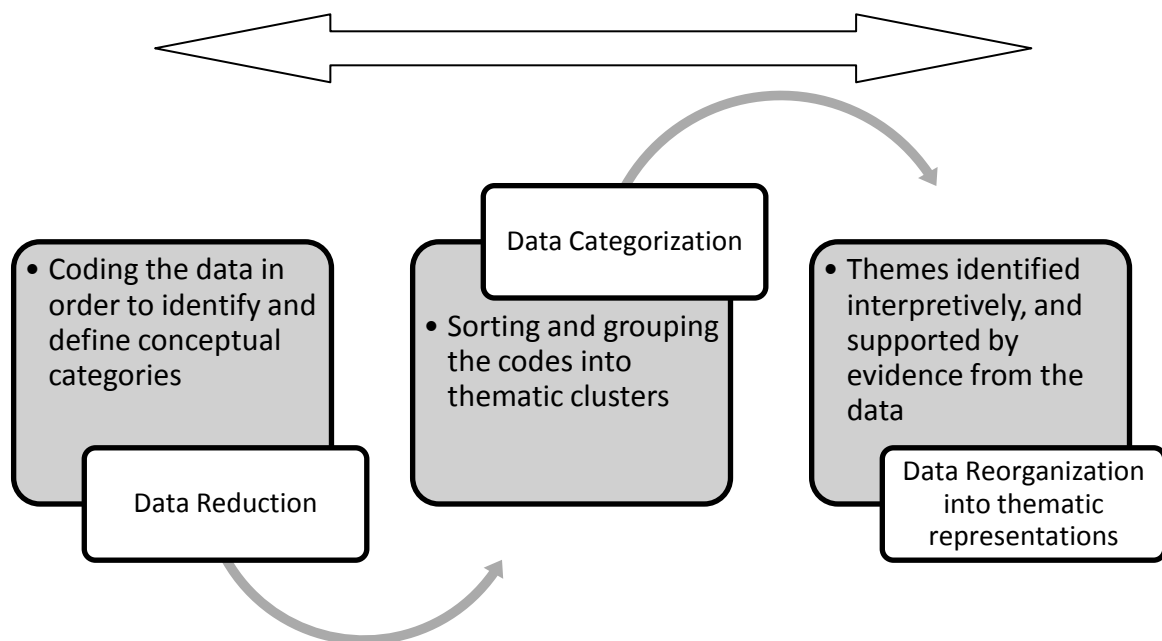
Additionally, these questions helped me develop a position that acknowledged “the inevitability of involvement and the potentially significant part it can play in developing a more reality-congruent picture of complex aspects of the social world” (Perry *et al.* 2004, p. 139).

Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis has been defined by Hastie and Glotova (2012, p. 319) as “the process of identifying, coding and categorizing patterns found in the data”. Various authors have outlined complex procedures for conducting data analysis that are both comprehensive and

robust (Attride-Stirling 2001; Bazeley 2013; Braun and Clarke 2006; 2013). Regardless of the thematic approach adopted, Spencer *et al.* (2003, p. 213) argue that the process of analysis is “not linear” and used the analogy of a ladder, where there is “movement both up and down the structure”. This movement would facilitate a continuous questioning of the data in order to produce robust codes and themes. Figure 4.2 illustrates how I adapted a framework proposed by Roulston (2010) to provide guidance during my research.

Figure 4.2: A framework for thematic analysis



(adapted from Roulston 2010, pp. 150-51)

Qualitative data analysis is frequently criticised because insufficient detail is given about the process undertaken (Denscombe 2010). The provision of a clear “decision trail” (Appleton 1995, p. 996) is one way to deal with such criticism. As Dolan (2009, p. 196) recommends, the process of analysis should involve a “constant two-way traffic between data and developing themes”. The iterative nature of this process, whereby “the analysis moves back and forth, with a frequent return to the data”, is a central part of data analysis, facilitating the

integration of new perspectives (Ian Jones *et al.* 2013, p. 156). Ritchie *et al.* (2003, p. 219) suggest that this “iterative and continuous” process should be divided into two stages, namely “managing the data and...[and] making sense of the evidence through descriptive or explanatory accounts”. In practical terms, this process can be represented by what Bazeley (2007, p. 9) outlines as a “describe – compare – relate” cycle. In conjunction with this, researchers should adopt procedures to ensure dependability, including a systematic checking of transcripts for errors and ensuring that there is not a drift in code description (Creswell 2009). As Braun and Clarke (2013, p. 230) point out, the researcher’s task in “analysing the data is a *selective* one . It’s about telling a *particular* story about the data, a story that answers your research questions” [italics in the original]. In light of the researcher’s central role in this decision-making process, it is important to outline clearly the steps taken during the course of the research.

Managing the data

Spencer *et al.* (2003, p. 213) use the metaphor of being in “a muddy field” to describe how researchers can sometimes have the sensation of being “bogged down” in an unstructured mass of data. In order to address this challenge, a range of computer software packages has been developed to assist in the management and subsequent analysis of data (Darmody and Byrne 2006). These packages are commonly referred to as computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) (Bryman 2008). While many strengths and limitations of CAQDAS have been identified (e.g. Braun and Clarke 2013, p. 219), Ian Jones *et al.* (2013, p. 161) advise researchers “to be sensitive to the data” and to “always look for meaning rather than just frequency of themes or categories”. This is an important consideration, as CAQDAS offers the potential to generate reports that may inadvertently conceal some of the subtle nuances of qualitative data. Improvements in the technologies, however, have led Bazeley (2007, p. 8) to argue that contemporary software design can help the researcher attain

closeness to, and distance from, the data thereby “exploiting both insider and outsider perspectives” and contributing “to a sophisticated analysis”. The N-Vivo 8 software package was used during the course of this research. In the initial stages it was used to store electronic documents relating to the project and it provided a means to track reflections using a reflective journal memo. From the outset, interview transcriptions, transcribed observations and other notes were entered into the software enabling initial coding to take place from an early stage. By using the tree node facility, initial codes were grouped together to begin the formation of emergent themes (Sparkes and Smith 2014). Bryman (2008, p. 553) cautions that problems can arise during coding if “chunks of text [are taken] out of context”, thereby losing nuances of the social setting. This was overcome by developing a deep familiarity with the interview transcripts during Phase 1 of the analysis so that context was foregrounded. During the latter stages of the analysis, I returned to paper-based procedures as I found they enabled me to stay more connected to the data. Consequently, that process that led to the identification of the themes that are outlined in Chapter nine, and was managed using hand-written diagrams and typed memos rather than N-Vivo.

Coding

Braun and Clarke (2013) describe complete coding as a process where the researcher aims to identify everything across the whole dataset that may be relevant to answer the research questions. A typical approach to coding is to decide whether coding is approached from a deductive (theory driven) position or from an inductive (data-driven or open) standpoint (Fade and Swift 2011). An alternative approach is to implement a coding framework that involves a constant interplay between deductive and inductive strategies (Keay 2006a; 2009). This resonates with what Baur and Ernst (2011a, p. 122) describe as Norbert Elias’ support for “the alteration of inductive, deductive and abductive procedures”, where an abductive approach is described as an attempt “to describe and understand social life in terms of social

actors' motives and understandings" (Blaikie 2007, p. 8). The digital recording of each interview was listened to as soon as possible after it had taken place. This helped to develop familiarity with the content. As soon as interview notes and transcriptions were inputted to NVivo, the process of coding began. Each interview was read at least twice and preliminary codes were identified and noted as free nodes. Examples of early codes that were identified include: 'Teacher Indifference', 'Initial Teacher Education (ITE)', 'Values', 'Time Constraints', 'Volunteering', 'Elite Player Development', 'Winning', 'Coaching Qualifications'. It became apparent early in the coding process that some codes were too broad, so part of my initial work involved recoding some data under more specific codes. 'Competition', for example, was used as an early code but as I encountered different aspects of the data the code needed to be broken down into more precise codes such as 'winning at all costs', 'expectations', 'turning players off', 'experiencing success', 'elitism'.

Writing memos

While it may seem appealing to separate the coding of data from the process of identifying themes, a degree of overlap is desirable in practice (Fade and Swift 2011). It is considered good practice to write up observations throughout the coding process so that coding and theme formation become a more fluid process. These observations become part of the "analytic journey" so that data can "be challenged, extended, supported, and linked in order to reveal their full value" (Bazeley 2009, p. 8). The writing of memos and other notes are useful tools to track the researcher's thought processes during the analysis and provide a record of "why and how their thinking is important" (Ian Jones *et al.* 2013, p. 155). An extract from one memo entitled "Things left unsaid" is included here:

Sometimes what's left unsaid is as interesting as what's said. This is very evident in the way that issues of gender are addressed. Because of the lack of formal links at many levels, there are a lot of assumptions made on all sides.

Gerard's interview highlighted the view that to fully upskill teachers to replace the part played by coaches would be akin to "turkeys voting for Christmas": it would not be in the interest of a cohort of professional coaches for this to happen. This got me thinking about official GAA policy. While I've always assumed that the GAA actually wants to increase the involvement of teachers, there isn't actually a lot of evidence to support this assumption. In fact, it could be argued that an 'unwritten' aspect of policy is to cement the position of the coach in the school.

In particular, this extract highlights a methodological requirement to probe deeper in some interviews in order to deconstruct the 'assumptions' that were sometimes made by the participants and the researcher. Secondly, it prompted me to interrogate what was said in policy statements more fully in the context of prevailing practices. Braun and Clarke (2013, p. 225) point out that the development of "themes from code data is an *active* process: the researcher examines the codes and coded data, and starts to create potential patterns" (italics in the original). Given the interpretative nature of qualitative data analysis, it is not surprising that there is no consensus regarding what exactly constitutes a theme. Drawing on Curtner-Smith (1999, p. 182), I used "discrepant and negative cases" in order to "refine and modify emerging themes". Appendix E contains an illustration of the process involved in development of the 'Justifying Gaelic Games – Ethos and Identity' theme.

Summary

This chapter has described some of the key issues relating to the development of a methodological framework for a research study. It has outlined a rationale for the selection of semi-structured interviews, observations and document analysis in this study in order to arrive at an in-depth understanding of the complex relationships that underpin the implementation of Gaelic games activities in Irish primary schools. It also provided details on

the specifics of all the data collection strategies and how the data were analysed. The next three chapters will provide an analysis of the data generated through the use of these research tools.

Chapter 5: PE and Sport Policy Development in Ireland

Introduction

The central objective of this chapter is to share findings on how long-term policy processes shape current PE and school sport practices. In the context of the overall structure of this thesis, it examines macro level policy development. This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section examines the role played by government agencies in the development of policies that relate directly and indirectly to PE and school sport, while the second section focuses specifically on the formulation of Gaelic games policies that impact on primary schools. As Houlihan (2000, p. 181) has noted, “new policies are introduced into a policy space which may not only be crowded but which already possesses a pattern of power relations established as a result of the implementation of earlier policy”. Accordingly, the degree to which a new policy is implemented is affected by existing patterns of interdependencies that are in constant flux. Liston (2005b, p. 184) argues that, from a figurational perspective, “it is only possible to *understand more adequately...the policy process*” [italics in the original]. In that context, a long-term view of policy processes that are evident in the Irish PE and school sport context is presented so that a more adequate understanding can be attained.

The role of government agencies in the policy process

The education policy landscape and PE curriculum development

It has been suggested that educational policy development in Ireland prior to the 1970s was characterized by governmental inaction. Coolahan (1989, p. 28) quotes Garret Fitzgerald, a member of the parliamentary opposition in 1970, who claimed many problems in the education system were caused by an “accumulation of neglect, lack of action, lack of policy by the government over a long period of time...all Governments have tended to let education

drift”. Denis O Sullivan (2005, p. 103) suggests that a process of “cultural nationalism” was the dominant influence on educational policy development from the foundation of the Irish state until the 1980s. The Catholic church also played a central role in decision-making during this period, particularly with regard to education policy in general and curriculum content selection (Duffy 1997).

PE in Irish primary schools in the late 19th and early 20th centuries consisted of physical drill (Duffy 1997). The declaration of national independence in 1919 served as a stimulus for educational change. A National Programme Conference was convened in 1921 to design a primary school curriculum for the new state. The GAA and the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) participated in this forum, along with other invitees who had “major interests in primary education” (Farren 1995, p. 54). The weekly time allocation for physical drill was reduced from one hour to 30 minutes. It was removed completely as a compulsory subject in 1926 due to a series of changes designed to increase the time devoted to the Irish language. Teacher resistance and the lack of appropriate facilities were cited as other reasons for the demotion of the subject (Duffy 1997). The GAA’s involvement in curriculum design is noteworthy, however. In 1932, revised guidelines for physical training were published and schools were advised to include Gaelic games and Irish dance. This adjustment “reflected the nationalistic mood of the time” and addressed concerns about young people’s moral and physical development (Duffy 1997, p. 22). A report from the Council of Education in 1954 recommended that PE should be included in the primary curriculum as a mandatory subject, but this was not acted upon (Coolahan 1989). As a result, government policy remained unchanged until 1971.

The 1971 Curriculum

The publication of the primary school curriculum in 1971 represented a significant change in government policy as this was the first occasion that a broad curriculum for PE was outlined

for primary school children (Duffy 1997). The philosophy of that document, enshrined a commitment to child-centred primary education, where children were to be given opportunities “to live first and foremost as children and not as future adults” (Government of Ireland 1971, p. 289). Guidelines for the teaching of Games suggested that “separate arrangements will often need to be made for boys and girls” in senior classes, and teachers were advised that “limited inter-school competitions are now possible” (Government of Ireland 1971, p. 312). Elsewhere, teachers were warned to “guard against an over-emphasis on rules and competitiveness” and, while there was a mention of “national and traditional games”, Gaelic games were not mentioned specifically except in the listing of some sample skills, while in general it was advised that children should be guided to “discover the fundamental principles underlying a variety of games” rather than on the development of games “with the full adult competitive situation in mind” (Government of Ireland 1971, p. 292).

The 1971 curriculum was accompanied by a short-lived CPD programme for teachers and research in the following years indicated that the innovative strategies advocated in the curriculum document had not influenced practice to any significant degree (McGuinness and Shelley 1996). In essence, a “physical education vacuum” continued to exist after the publication of the curriculum (Duffy 1997, p. 193). Although the Irish primary school system would be regarded as ‘centralised’ by international standards, at local level school managements can be viewed as having significant decision-making capabilities and have considerable scope to “exercise discretionary powers” (Coolahan 1994, p. 23). Consequently, it appears that decision-making at a local school level had a significant impact on how the curriculum document was implemented. According to McGuinness and Shelley (1996, p. 56), 51% of teachers paid little attention to the new programme, while a further 10% claimed that

they had never even read it. Additionally, PE was perceived to have “low status in the colleges of education and among the priorities of the Department of education” (1996, p. 60).

The process of curriculum review recommenced in the early 1990s, initiated by the Report of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum (the Quinlan Report) in 1990. This document reported on the apparent poor quality of PE teaching in primary schools and the narrow content, with most activity centred on athletics and games. It also highlighted contrasting opinions where the school inspectorate regarded the syllabus as suitable while teachers considered it to be “unrealistic and demanding excessive expertise” (Department of Education and National Council on Curriculum and Assessment 1990, p. 64). It was suggested that more practical guidelines were required for teachers and it was recommended that each school should have access to at least one teacher with additional expertise in the subject. A subsequent government green paper sought to raise the profile of PE by ensuring that it was taught on a daily basis. It recommended that an emphasis should be put on “motor skills and health-related aerobic fitness”, while specialists should be employed “to provide guidance to primary teachers” (Government of Ireland 1992, p. 90). A government white paper published in 1995, *Charting our Education Future*, made an explicit connection between education and sport, advocating for the establishment of local education boards that would “have a major role in the development and implementation of sport and physical recreation programmes, in support of local community interests and sports organisations (Department of Education 1995, p. 112). The white paper did not make specific reference to PE, except in the context of developing “students’ physical ability...within the framework of the health-promoting school” (1995, p. 23) and it appears that a defined place for PE was not envisaged in the forthcoming revised primary curriculum.

The 1999 Curriculum

While official policy was being formulated through the green and white paper processes, a curriculum committee for PE was established by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment in 1993. This committee was responsible for the development of a PE syllabus and worked under the Primary Co-ordinating Committee that was tasked with the authorship of the entire primary curriculum. Interview data suggest committee members at that time were concerned about the possible dissolution of PE as a distinct subject, in light of its absence from the government's white paper (Shauna). When the revised primary curriculum was published in 1999, however, the PE component bore little resemblance to what had been outlined in the 1995 white paper. Rather than catering for pupils' physical development through health-related activities, the curriculum document maintained a place for PE as a distinct subject area, albeit with the inclusion of links to other subjects, and particularly with Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). The 1999 PE curriculum authors sought to provide "opportunities for the physical, social, emotional and intellectual development of the child" and divided curriculum content into six strands: Athletics, Aquatics, Dance, Gymnastics, Games, and Outdoor and Adventure Activities (Government of Ireland 1999a, p. 2). The child-centred philosophy of the 1971 curriculum was maintained, and the provision of a "broad and balanced" programme was emphasised (Government of Ireland 1999b, p. 16).

While a wide variety of game types was advocated with the Games strand, the document also mandated that "Gaelic games should be given particular consideration as part of the games programme" (Government of Ireland 1999a, p. 4). Additionally, 'small-sided' game formats were advocated to "encourage maximum participation". Guidance on the relationship between PE and sport, and on the role of competition in primary schools, was also provided. It was argued that "physical education and sport, although closely linked, are not synonymous" (Government of Ireland 1999a, p. 6), while a "balanced approach to

competition” where the child’s developmental needs were catered for appropriately was outlined (Government of Ireland 1999a, p. 7). With regard to extra-curricular activities, the curriculum document advised that these “should always reflect the aims and objectives of the physical education curriculum” (Government of Ireland 1999a, p. 7). Aidan, a GAA administrator, acknowledged that some lobbying of the curriculum design committee had taken place. This was done at that time in order to “articulate the need and the importance of ensuring that there was specific reference of Gaelic games in the curriculum as they are our indigenous games, our native games”. He conceded that this had been a difficult process but “at the time it was the best we could get. We were prepared to settle for it because some people would argue that it shouldn’t be in there at all”.

The 1999 document reaffirmed the position of the class teacher as “the most appropriate teacher to teach the physical education curriculum”, but acknowledged the potential role that teaching colleagues, parents or external coaches could play in supporting curriculum implementation (Government of Ireland 1999a, p. 24). However, it was emphasised that the teacher should be present at all times and “must retain overall responsibility for planning, organisation, control and monitoring to ensure that the child’s physical activity is coherent, consistent, progressive and controlled” (Government of Ireland 1999b, p. 28). The use of specialist teachers, as suggested in the white paper, was not proposed. The practical application of curricular policy on coaches will be addressed in detail in Chapter seven.

School sport policy

Contemporaneously with the changes in curriculum policy during the 1990’s, national sport policy was also being developed. Some of these developments referred specifically to school sport. If, as Duffy (1997, p. 74) proposed, “the state had assumed a distant role in the promotion of both school physical education and sport” for most of the 20th century, examination of state policy in the 1990’s suggests the adoption of a more prominent role.

During 1996, the Irish Department of Education established a workgroup, chaired by former athlete John Treacy, to develop a strategy for sport in Ireland. The resulting strategy “Targeting Sporting Change in Ireland” was published in 1997 (Department of Education 1997). It was acknowledged that the government white paper, ‘Charting our Education Future’ had “important implications for the implementation of key aspects of the Sports Strategy” (Department of Education 1997, p. 7). The recommendations included the establishment of links between the school and the local community, and raising the status of “physical development and education” in primary schools (1997, p. 17). The strategy designers sought to “identify initiatives in sport policy that are complementary” to education policy in general, and to school sport and PE in particular (1997, p. 49). In practical terms, this would focus on, among other things, the development of training opportunities for teachers, parents and coaches and support the implementation of the revised primary PE curriculum. The potential role for NGBs in providing these CPD opportunities for teachers was also highlighted. It appears that the Department of Education inspectorate had been involved in the discussions relating to PE and school sport, and was fully committed to the identified strategic goals (Department of Education 1997).

The Irish Sports Council (ISC) was formally instituted in 1999, with a brief “to plan, lead and coordinate the sustainable development of competitive and recreational sport in Ireland” (Irish Sports Council 2002, p. 1). It was positioned within the DES initially. A strategic plan “A New Era for Sport” was published in 1999 outlining the council’s priorities for the period from 2000 to 2002 (The Irish Sports Council 1999). This document stressed the importance of developing access to sport in schools, and recommended that the ISC should work in conjunction with the DES “to increase the level of physical education in schools” (Irish Sports Council 2002, p. 19). It was also acknowledged that there should be a greater co-ordination of policy between health, education and sport. This articulation of a close

relationship between sport and education was largely neglected until the publication of the ‘Get Ireland Active’ document in 2012 (Department of Education and Skills 2012b).

Subsequent governments have moved the ISC from its original position within the DES, and it currently resides within the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. In a similar way, it seems that sports policy as articulated by the ISC has also abandoned its connections with education. This happened incrementally, as references to education decreased in successive strategic plans. The issue of establishing a position for sport within the congested public policy space (Houlihan 2000) also occupied by “education, health and social policy” is identified as a challenge (The Irish Sports Council 2006, p. 16). The plan sets a target of increasing by 3% the number of children participating in “some level of extra curricular sport and extra school sport combined” (The Irish Sports Council 2006, p. 22). The proposed establishment of local school partnerships during the term of the plan had the potential to impact on this target. Links with the DES, and specifically with the Inspectorate, were markedly absent.

The 3% participation increase target identified for the 2006-2008 period was repeated in the 2009-2011 plan (The Irish Sports Council 2008) but other references to schools are absent, except in the context of elite performance programmes by “developing junior talent through a structured competition pathway from schools to world level” (The Irish Sports Council 2008, p. 28). In the latest plan, the ISC appears to have abandoned any role in school sport and PE. In acknowledging the recommendations of the CSPPA study (Woods *et al.* 2010), the ISC noted “the most relevant measure for the Council is the extra-school (effectively club sport) targets” (The Irish Sports Council 2011, p. 7). In more general terms, the plan expresses support for “the concept of sport & physical activity becoming a formal school subject. It will support the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport as it advances proposals to give greater status to sport within the education system (The Irish Sports Council

2011, p. 9). This is mentioned without any reference to PE. Consequently it appears that ISC policy, as it is presented in strategic plans, has become disconnected from PE, and its role in schools is concerned solely with sport. Alternatively, it could be argued that it considers PE and sport to be synonymous.

Unintended consequence: the impact of education policy on PE and school sport

While government PE and sport policies are focused directly on their specific target areas, other government policy initiatives may have unforeseen and unintended consequences for PE and school sport. Three such policy initiatives have been identified in my data. While the practical implications of these policies will be examined greater detail in Chapters six and seven, an outline of the policy is provided here. LLoyd *et al.* (2010, p. 176) suggest “assessment and evaluation are the cornerstones of the education and health fields”. This is reflected in international trends towards increased accountability in education (Ball 2010). In Ireland, this heightened emphasis on accountability is reflected in the Whole School Evaluation (WSE) process, established in 2006 and administered by the inspectorate of the DES, and by the School Self-Evaluation (SSE) initiative launched in 2012. SSE was introduced to “increase both the autonomy and accountability of our principals, teachers and boards of management” (Quinn 2013b). In practical terms school decision-making on the use of coaches and the planning of sports fixtures is being influenced in ways that are not specified in WSE and SSE documentation. The implications of these policies will be discussed in Chapter 7.

Secondly, there has been an intense debate on the standard of literacy and numeracy in Irish primary and secondary schools since the publication by the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) test results in 2010. This has centred on a perceived crisis in educational standards (e.g. Education Matters 2010). As a result, there has been an increased emphasis on literacy and numeracy in primary schools, and the time heretofore

allocated as discretionary curriculum time must now be devoted to literacy and numeracy entirely (Department of Education and Skills 2011a). Consequently, time available for other subjects is reduced (Department of Education and Skills 2011c). Interview data suggest that this decreases the amount of time that can be devoted to PE, and causes tension within schools regarding the scheduling of sports activities.

The third policy initiative centres on an industrial relations settlement known as the Croke Park agreement. The objective of this agreement was “to ensure that the Irish public service continues its contribution to the return of economic growth and prosperity to Ireland, while delivering excellence in service to the Irish people” (Department of Education and Skills 2011b). Teachers were expected to provide 36 hours per year in after-school activities relating to school planning and preparation. Co-ordinating extra-curricular activities were not included in allowable tasks, despite lobbying by Cumann na mBunscol for such a derogation. A motion from Waterford to the 2013 national AGM of Cumann na mBunscol proposed that representations should be made by the national committee and the GAA to the DES to have Cumann na mBunscol games and activities included in future agreements on additional time in school in order to “acknowledge the voluntary effort of so many teachers, the importance of Cumann na mBunscol games and activities in enriching the lives of pupils and therefore enshrining the importance of our National Games in the Curriculum”. Indeed, the debate included criticism of the GAA for a perceived lack of support of teachers on the issue. The Cumann na mBunscol national development officer argued that “any extension of our working day must include sport as an essential aspect of planning and curriculum design”. Furthermore, he warned that it “is not acceptable for the GAA to stand back and not exercise its considerable lobbying powers to influence decisions that could have a detrimental effect on the bedrock of its organisation”. In contrast, the INTO had not sought to include sports volunteering as these activities did not fall within the original scope of the discussions to

legislate for the “professional development and collaborative work” (Elaine). Teachers reported that the practical implication of the agreement had generated a lot of “anger that the hour was not counted towards your coaching of the school team” (Liam). Nigel believed that the extra Croke Park hour each week meant that there was one less day available for after school activities, while Orla say it as a “huge threat” to extra-curricular activities. Ronan commented that it was harder to “find time for after-school training and games”, and noted that there had been an increase in the numbers of schools seeking to fulfil inter-school fixtures during the normal school day. In effect, it would appear that an unplanned consequence of this policy was that less time was being devoted to after-school activities and more games were being played during school time. Other aspects of this latter point will be addressed in Chapter seven.

Gaelic games policy and the primary school

This part of the chapter focuses on how Gaelic games policy is expressed with regard to primary schools. It is divided into two sections. The first examines policy development within the GAA, while the second addresses the negotiation of policy between the GAA and other organisations.

GAA internal policy articulation

The data generated during the course of this study point to a series of changes to GAA national policy objectives over time. From the foundation of the organisation in 1884, it played an important part “in the shaping of Irish Nationalism” (Farren 1995, p. 15). This resulted in policy that sought to promote Gaelic games, music and the Irish language, and was exemplified in the rule that banned members of the GAA from participating in what were termed ‘foreign’ games until 1971. In 1939, the president of Ireland, Douglas Hyde, was removed as patron of the association for attending an international soccer match as part of his presidential duties (Moore 2012). The impact of this nationalist rhetoric is still evident among

teachers, and will be examined in detail in Chapter seven. The assertion that the concept of nationalism “is not static” (Cronin 1999, p. 31) is relevant with regard to how GAA policy objectives have shifted. While expressions of national pride are still evident, more recent national GAA policy documents have, in turn, placed a greater emphasis on community development and physical activity promotion.

Duffy (1997, p. v) has distinguished between “stated” and “actual” policy where the former is typically written while the latter is characterised by the measures taken to implement it.

Strategic plans published by the GAA offer an insight into their stated policy pertaining to PE and school sport. The publication of strategic plans has become commonplace in the past decade as the GAA and related bodies have articulated official policy through a range of plans at national and regional levels. This is due in part to requirements set by the ISC to identify specific targets in order to qualify for funding. The two most recent GAA strategic plans identify objectives that relate to schools. ‘Enhancing Community Identity’ was published in 2002 (Gaelic Athletic Association 2002) and this was subsequently replaced by “The GAA Strategic Vision and Action Plan 2009-2015” (Gaelic Athletic Association 2008). In the first document, the GAA’s vision outlined a commitment to community development. Building relationships with the local school were identified as key strategies in the recruitment of future players; it was acknowledged that “links with schools...need to be improved and supplemented by promotion and coaching” (2002, p. 65). This need for improvement was deemed to be particularly important as schools “the GAA’s traditional ‘channels of supply’ ...are now being targeted by competitors” (Gaelic Athletic Association 2002, p. 69). This fear of recruitment challenges posed by other sports has been an enduring feature of GAA rhetoric for many decades. Clubs were encouraged to “adopt schools...as ‘feeding grounds’ for future club teams” and the development of school activities was identified as providing “a key opportunity for drawing together boys’ and girls’ Gaelic

games” (2002, p. 113). This latter theme, the integration of camogie and ladies’ football within the GAA, was a recurring feature of the document. The national strategic plan that followed in 2008 sought to “cement our position as the leading community based organisation in the country” (Gaelic Athletic Association 2008, p. 7). Key targets were outlined for the development of Gaelic games in schools and clubs and the Go Games⁴ strategy was proposed so that “all children under 12 will get meaningful playing time to develop the skills of our games in a challenging and fun environment” (2008, p. 26). Significantly, the plan contained no reference to Cumann na mBunscol, and only one reference to teachers, suggesting that developing links between schools and clubs was more important than supporting the work of Cumann na mBunscol.

Aidan, a GAA policymaker, explained “our GNP [Grassroots to National Programme⁵] policy didn't just happen in a linear way. A lot of it was unplanned and happened almost by accident. There were a lot of changes of direction along the way”. This programme, arising from these national strategic plans, seeks to encourage “lifelong participation in sport and physical activity” through Gaelic games (Gaelic Athletic Association 2014c). His use of the word ‘unplanned’ reflects the processual nature of policy development.

The 2008 strategic plan advised all provincial and county units to develop additional strategic plans in order to strengthen the link between national, regional and local policy. This directive led to the publication of an extensive array of additional policy documentation, but also facilitated the development of policies that did not always reflect national priorities. This challenge in achieving coherence between national and regional policies is compounded by organisational structures that grant significant levels of autonomy to provincial and county

⁴ Go Games is a GAA initiative that prioritizes maximum participation in a non-competitive environment through modified rules and a small-sided format

⁵ The GNP is the GAA’s national coaching and games development plan designed to encourage “lifelong participation in sport and physical activity”

committees. Comments attributed to the GAA's director-general in a newspaper article are indicative of this:

I might be chief executive but this organisation is absolutely not like a business. You have 32 counties all of whom feel they have a level of autonomy and when it suits them they can be as distant from the centre as they want to be. So you do not have the level of control over counties and provinces that your position might seem to indicate and that can be very frustrating (Shannon 2013)

The ways provincial and county committees address their role in schools point to varied interpretations of national policy. While Go Games policy is supported in each of the four provinces, only Ulster mentions working in partnership with Cumann na mBunscol. In the other provinces school policy implementation is delegated to full-time GAA development officers. Ulster is also the only province to advise on the content of school coaching sessions, where it highlights the importance of a “fundamentals and physical literacy” programme delivered by its development officers (Ulster GAA Council and Cumann na mBunscol 2009). This programme is supported by Northern Ireland government funding and is underpinned by a commitment to fundamental movement skill development that is not matched by the DES in the Republic of Ireland. As a result, Ulster GAA policy has evolved in a manner that is very different from the other provinces.

County strategic plans are generally more specific in outlining their role in schools. The core objective of the Limerick plan, for example, is to establish club-school links in all schools, and it acknowledges the county “has been fortunate to have so many talented and dedicated teachers coaching our games to children in our primary schools” (Limerick GAA 2011, p. 20). While commending the work of teachers, the phrase ‘our...schools’, reflects a belief that schools are an integral part of the GAA structure. Monaghan GAA's strategic plan seeks to

ensure that each primary school class in the county gets a minimum of 10 coaching sessions per annum, with a “fundamental movement programme” made available to all children from 1st to 3rd class. Displaying what could be seen as a lack of understanding of the primary PE curriculum, the plan also seeks to “introduce handball to the sport curriculum”.

The Dublin GAA strategic plan highlights the GAA’s potential to address issues like physical inactivity in the general community through its activities in primary schools. It seeks to establish a central role for the GAA within the county because it

Has the structures, format, network, tradition and size to effectively deliver Government policy at community level in a sustainable and value for money way. This is not to say that the GAA can address all of Ireland’s social problems but it is in the best position of any sporting organisation to deliver on areas of common interest to the State (Dublin Gaelic Athletic Association 2011, p. 22).

This plan seeks to establish a niche for the GAA at the forefront of initiatives to promote government physical activity policy. It makes an interesting play for position in light of international trends towards privatization and outsourcing of government education and health provision (Ball 2008; Ball and Youdell 2007; Benjamin J. Williams *et al.* 2011).

Furthermore, the plan suggests:

The educational sector’s capacity to provide games and physical activity has been negatively affected by factors such as:

- The lower number of males entering primary school teaching.
- The reduced involvement of the Religious Orders in the management of schools.
- Greater emphasis on academic results in schools.

- Greater obligations on schools in terms of health, safety and child protection”
(Dublin Gaelic Athletic Association 2011, p. 22).

It is noteworthy that, despite Cumann na mBunscol’s presence in the county since the 1920’s there is no mention of the organisation in the county’s strategic plan. It would appear that the developers of the plan envisage perceived problems in the educational system will be addressed more effectively by club development officers rather than by teachers working through Cumann na mBunscol.

A final example of GAA national policy is outlined in the ‘Heads of Agreement’⁶ document that explains how school coaching programmes should be managed. This document was formulated at national level by games development personnel in collaboration with Cumann na mBunscol. Some key elements are summarised in Figure 5.1 below. Specific recommendations are made regarding the selection of content that should align with the PE curriculum, and responsibility for the evaluation of coaching quality is given to school authorities. The guidelines envisage that coaches will liaise closely with teachers to plan and deliver a coherent series of lessons.

⁶ Each school principal was expected to sign the document before coaching commenced

Table 5.1 GAA 'Heads of Agreement' School Coaching Policy

<i>Summary of Heads of Agreement Policy between the GAA and Primary Schools</i>		
The NGB will:	The Coach will:	The School will:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a reliable and responsible coach fully qualified with the appropriate coaching and child protection requirements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present the GAA syllabus which outlines coaching activities that are planned in accordance with the aims and objectives of the primary Physical Education curriculum. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show the school policy on physical education to the coach to support him/her in integrating their games programme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an opportunity for all members of the community to meet and participate together. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with each class teacher on class rules, children with special needs etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate coaching for no less than 7 weeks, with the possibility of an extra-curricular slot also being provided to develop a club/school link.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote a Club/School link to ensure maximum benefit for all parties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present lesson plans at the beginning of each lesson, so teachers can follow and subsequently participate in the presentation of lessons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that class teachers always remain in the lesson and assist in the delivery of the session.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that Go Games blitzes offer maximum participation where all members of a class are offered the chance to play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve teachers, either in participation or in actual teaching during the lesson delivery. Lesson plans will be provided to the teacher at the start of the lesson for them to fill in and try out before the next visit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate and monitor the programme for the school, coaches and Games Manager.

This policy document aligns closely with DES curricular guidelines on the use of coaches in primary schools (Government of Ireland 1999b) by recommending collaboration between teachers and coaches, but requires the support of a variety of groups, including these teachers and coaches, in order for it to be implemented successfully. Data examined in Chapters six

and seven suggests this GAA policy has been largely ignored and I will explore why that has happened.

The outcomes of the GAA's policy formulation suggest a significant degree of negotiation from national to local levels. Individual units have considerable scope to modify national objectives but national policymakers can use funding as a source of power, as the achievement of defined Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) is tied to the granting of financial aid to provincial and county units. Consequently, persuasive and economic sources of power (Ken Green 2008) can secure the commitment of full-time GAA personnel to implement national policies more accurately at local levels.

GAA relationships with external groups

Having examined the expression of the GAA's primary school policies in the previous section, this section focuses on the GAA interaction with external bodies. Firstly, a brief overview is provided on the GAA's relationship with the DES and the ISC. Secondly, the role of the INTO teachers' union is examined and finally aspects of the relationship between the GAA and Cumann na mBunscol are explored.

Although the GAA has dealings with a variety of state bodies, Aidan, a GAA official, considered the relationship with the ISC⁷ to be the most important. Connections with the DES, in contrast, were described as being in the form of "some peripheral contact and communication". He characterized the role of the DES as follows:

I think they [DES] take the typical statutory approach: they identify what should be done, but they don't necessarily always back it up with action and it's left to others like ourselves to fill the vacuum

⁷ The GAA received €2.4 million from the ISC for games development in 2013

In his view, the DES ‘hands-off’ approach created space for a range of NGBs to implement sport strategies in schools. Based on the evidence from interviews conducted with representatives of the GAA, LGFA and the CA, developing any formal contacts with the DES did not appear to be a priority. In contrast, the relationship with the ISC was very important due to their dependence on ISC funding. As a consequence, ISC objectives were more significant than DES priorities when planning primary school development strategies. Interactions with the DES inspectorate will be examined in Chapter six.

Elaine, an INTO policy-maker, spoke of the “strong history” between her organisation and Cumann na mBunscol and noted that links between the INTO and GAA stem from “the strong tradition of the GAA games in our culture and our society”. The INTO is the largest trade union in the Irish primary system and has advocated consistently for gender equity in PE and school sport. The publication of a policy document “Fair Play for Girls and Boys: Sport in National Schools” highlighted examples of gender stereotyping in the primary PE curriculum and outlined a series of strategies to address the issue (Irish National Teachers Organisation 1993). With regard to Gaelic games, the document cited examples of inclusive practice, such as the participation of over 8000 girls annually in the INTO-sponsored GAA Mini-Sevens⁸ events. This programme, established in 1988, continues to be the only sports initiative sponsored by the INTO, demonstrating a close relationship with the GAA. It is also noteworthy because the INTO insisted boys and girls should have equal opportunities to participate. This was the first such programme operated by the GAA and demonstrates how the INTO was able to prompt the GAA to engage in more inclusive activities. This stipulation was a prerequisite of the INTO’s initial involvement and was instrumental in prompting Cumann na mBunscol county committees to organise games for girls for the first time (Vaughan 2000). Chris, a GAA official, commented that the INTO’s insistence on equal

⁸ The GAA/INTO Mini-Sevens initiative involves regional inter-school competitions, culminating with exhibition games during adult championship fixtures

access for girls was a significant influence on his organisation's approach to the promotion of Gaelic games in primary schools. This had prompted the GAA to review how school coaching is delivered, in order to ensure that boys and girls would have equal access to the coaching programme. In addition, subsequent GAA primary school initiatives have encouraged boys and girls to participate.

The GAA's relationship with Cumann na mBunscol is more complex, with both groups seeking to promote Gaelic games in primary schools in ways that are sometimes contradictory. At national level, Cumann na mBunscol policies aligns closely with those of the GAA. Cumann na mBunscol has also endorsed the philosophy underpinning the Go Games initiative and advocates a "balanced approach" to competition in primary schools where the emphasis is on "participation, skill, enjoyment and achievement" (Cumann na mBunscol 2009c, p. 26). Some units of Cumann na mBunscol, however, strongly resisted the implementation of Go Games. At the 2009 AGM, for example, a number of counties sought, and received, assurances that the Go Games model would not impact on the operation of traditional competitive structures in primary schools (Cumann na mBunscol 2009b). This led to tensions between the two organisations but county Cumann na mBunscol organising committees were sufficiently strong to resist change, and have maintained traditional competitive structures in spite of official policy guidelines to adopt models focused on maximizing participation.

A second source of tension between the GAA and Cumann na mBunscol centres on constitutional issues. A GAA review of primary school activities in 1981 recommended that Cumann na mBunscol should be integrated within GAA structures but this was resisted by Cumann na mBunscol personnel. Nevertheless, Rule 3.58 of the GAA's official rulebook now states:

Subject to the overall control of the Central Council, the following Councils shall be responsible for the organisation and control of all affairs at the Levels specified hereunder.

- The Higher Education Council in all Higher Education Colleges and Institutes.
- The All-Ireland Post-Primary Schools' Council for all affiliated schools at Second Level⁹.
- The All-Ireland Primary Schools' Council.

Other than where special sanction is granted by Central Council, the affairs of each Council shall be subject to the General Rules of the Association and such Bye-Laws as are sanctioned by the Management Committee, on behalf of Central Council.

(Gaelic Athletic Association 2012 p. 53).

Correspondence from GAA officials contends the primary schools' council mentioned in the rule refers to Cumann na mBunscol. If this is an accurate interpretation, then it suggests the latter is directly answerable to the GAA's central governing council, a position that would contradict the independent status outlined in Cumann na mBunscol's constitution. This debate impacts on the GAA's ability to implement national policy because implementation is rendered more difficult while Cumann na mBunscol maintains its independence. As a group outside formal GAA structures, Cumann na mBunscol retains significant power in the policy process. The lengthening "chains of interdependence" (Alfrey *et al.* 2012, p. 364) evident in this situation serve to bring greater balance to the power ratio between a large national body like the GAA and smaller groups of teachers represented by Cumann na mBunscol. The issues that arise will be examined in greater detail in Chapter six.

⁹ Second and Third level committees operate as GAA sub-committees.

Summary

This chapter has examined national policies on PE and school sport formulated by government agencies such as the DES and ISC, and by NGBs like the GAA. From an educational policy perspective, the inclusion of PE as a specific aspect of the primary curriculum has been a relatively recent phenomenon. Consequently, government inaction has enabled groups like the GAA to establish a strong sport presence in the primary sector. Furthermore, recent trends suggest that PE and sport policy initiatives, as outlined by the ISC and the DES, have diverged. In the context of GAA policy development, a shift was evident from objectives underpinned by nationalist ideologies to those that prioritize community development and physical activity promotion. In addition, it became clear that implementation of national policy was heavily dependent on groups within, and outside, the NGB. The complex network of relationships, involving professional and volunteer groups and individuals, can lead to unexpected outcomes. The data generated in chapters six and seven enable a closer examination of these relationships.

Chapter 6: Establishing Positions – Cumann na mBunscol and the GAA

Introduction

Having examined policy processes involving national government and NGB initiatives in the previous chapter, my main objective in this chapter is to investigate the influence of Cumann na mBunscol and the GAA on the promotion of Gaelic games in primary schools. It will examine how Gaelic games have come to occupy a dominant position within schools, and explore the relationships between these organisations as they seek to implement policies relating to competition and school coaching. While the parts played by the GAA and Cumann na mBunscol are central to this analysis, the actions of some other groups such as government bodies are also considered. Dopson and Waddington (1996, p. 546) point out that the perspectives offered by groups and individuals should be considered “as more or less involved expressions of their own perceived interests”. For that reason they advise that “A properly sociological analysis should, therefore, seek to explain those perspectives in terms of the players' specific positions within the figuration of relationships amongst those involved in the policy process” (Dopson and Waddington 1996, p. 546). That recommendation has served as a useful guide during the analysis of the data presented in this chapter.

The Influence of Cumann na mBunscol on PE and school sport

To gain a better understanding of how the GAA and Cumann na mBunscol have come to be significant forces within primary school PE and sport, it is important to track their long-term involvement in the sector. Liston (2012, p. 2) espouses a research position that moves “away from a retreat into the present and towards the need for a longer-term perspective”.

Accordingly, the adoption of a long-term perspective helps in understanding how current policy issues “have come to be the way they are” (Bloyce and Smith 2010, p. 16). Cumann na mBunscol is a voluntary organisation of teachers that is governed by a national committee (An Coiste Náisiúnta), four provincial committees and a county committee in each of the 32

counties. The main work of the organisation centres on the organisation of competitive inter-school Gaelic games programmes in every county at primary level. The next section presents a historical overview of how groups of teachers have implemented inter-school Gaelic games programmes since the early 1900s.

The origins of Cumann na mBunscol

The Cumann na mBunscol organisation¹⁰ was founded by teachers interested in the promotion of primary school Gaelic games in 1971. The initial purpose was to co-ordinate a series of exhibition games between teams selected from large urban areas like Dublin, Cork and Limerick. These games proved to be very successful and provided the catalyst for other areas to get involved. It has been suggested that its foundation was also influenced by a desire to attain funding from an Irish state agency, Cospoir. The role of this agency, a predecessor of the ISC, was to co-ordinate sports activities for all and only provided funding to grassroots organisations with national structures.

Prior to 1971, Gaelic games activities in primary schools were relatively unstructured and dependent on informal committees in individual counties or parts of counties. A committee was founded in Cork in 1903, in Dublin in 1928 and in Limerick in 1933. It is difficult to ascertain to what extent teachers were involved in these committees. Only one teacher attended the initial meeting in Cork (Nealon 2003), whereas the Dublin committee was made up entirely of teachers. The earliest attempts to formally organise competitive Gaelic games structures in primary schools appear to have centred on *ad hoc* arrangements involving a small number of influential teachers. The formation of the committee in Dublin is an example for this: “Informal inter-school competition had been going on for many years previously. Teachers who had discussed the idea over tea, chat and tin-whistle playing in the home of

¹⁰ The organisation was originally called Coiste na mBunscoileanna before adopting the title ‘Cumann na mBunscol’ in 1975

Frank Cahill - the inspirational figure behind O'Toole's GFC [Gaelic Football Club], met and drew up plans for a league" (Cumann na mBunscol Ath Cliath 2013).

There is some evidence of other attempts by county GAA boards to organise primary school competitions, but these appear to have been short-lived. In Clare, for example, the GAA board initiated a schools' hurling competition in 1923 and sought the assistance of the INTO. This help, however, was not immediately forthcoming as the teachers cited the following objections: "They had not any suitable ground in the school area; after school training would be an inconvenience to parents; Sunday matches would cause a problem for teachers. If they were present they would be taken as responsible for any injuries or other problems that might arise" (Vaughan 2000, p. 223). The lack of suitable transport in rural areas, and frequent disputes over the eligibility of players, appear to have inhibited the growth of school competition in the 1920s and 1930s (Sean Murphy and O Ceallaigh 1987; Vaughan 2000).

Development of school competition structures

Improvements in transport and teacher mobility contributed to a gradual increase in school Gaelic games activities. In Clare, an invitational schools' hurling tournament was started by two teachers in 1964. These teachers had previously taught in Dublin and, having participated in the games programmes there, decided to follow suit in their new schools. It seems that these competitions were frequently localised invitational affairs, rather than catering for entire counties. Typically they were initiated by small groups of teachers in specific areas. These informal committees, where there was "one meeting at the start of the school year and after that you got on with the job and didn't bother people with mundane matters like meetings for months" (Torpey 2013).

Such informal arrangements are in sharp contrast to more recent developments where schools are usually grouped with others of similar ability, leading to more comprehensive lists of

fixtures that also incorporate activities for girls and younger children. In Dublin, for example, over 2700 games are now played each year (Cumann na mBunscol Ath Cliath 2013). The most significant phase of expansion took place in the latter part of the 20th century. In Cork, for example, 28 schools participated in 1978; by the turn of the century over 240 schools were participating. This trend has been mirrored across the country. It is difficult to quantify accurately how many schools take part in Cumann na mBunscol activities nationwide, but a national survey of principals in 2013 reported that 93% of their schools take part in Cumann na mBunscol activities (Gaelic Athletic Association 2012). Aidan, a GAA official frustrated with the slow uptake of Go Games in primary schools, suggested reasons why competitive formats have remained popular:

I suppose it's the profile of the school and the buzz that they see the whole day creates, of getting to the final. For the school and for the kids I suppose that is the main reason why they stay with that side of things.

Accordingly, Cumann na mBunscol's interscholastic competitions have become deeply embedded in Irish primary schools.

Gender equity within Cumann na mBunscol activities

From the outset, all Gaelic games activities in primary schools were for boys only. In the broader context, although camogie has a long history dating back to the formation of the Camogie Association in 1904, the Ladies Gaelic Football Association wasn't founded until 1974. When attempts were made to involve girls in school Gaelic games activities, they were often met with little enthusiasm: when the county camogie board in Clare set about promoting camogie through the primary schools in 1975 there was a very slow response from schools "as prior to this sporting activities was the domain of boys while girls did cooking

and sewing” (McNicholas 2000, p. 191). This attitude was widespread and was not confined to Gaelic games (Irish National Teachers Organisation 1993).

Progress on gender equity in primary school GAA games for girls has been relatively slow within Cumann na mBunscol, with many units only offering activities for girls since the 1990s. Westmeath, for example, commenced girls’ games in 1992 (Cumann na mBunscol Iarmhi 2013), with Galway following in 1995 and Limerick in 1997. A similar trend was evident in Cork, where camogie competitions commenced in 1983 and girls’ football in 1991. A further milestone was reached when the girls’ finals were played in conjunction with the boys’ finals from 1996 (Sciath na Scol Chorcaí 2003) . Table 6.1 below illustrates the inequities that still exist in terms of schools’ participation in inter-school competitions. It would appear that opportunities for girls are significantly less than for their male counterparts.

Table 6.1: Percentage of Schools taking part in specific Gaelic sports

Sport	Percentage
Hurling	47%
Camogie	31%
Boy’s Football	82%
Girls’ Football	54%

(Adapted from: Cumann na mBunscol 2008)

Along with the issue of girls’ participation in Cumann na mBunscol activities, the role played by female teachers in administrative and coaching roles is also worthy of examination. The 1984 Limerick GAA yearbook includes an interesting commentary on primary school activities: “I must also congratulate the three lady teachers in Herbertstown for their dedication and commitment – they are putting many of the male teachers to shame” (Power

1984, p. 58). Despite this commendation, a photograph of this school's team featured two local male club coaches but no teachers. The perceived problem of the gender imbalance in primary teaching was articulated in a 2001 newspaper article where Cumann na mBunscol officials in Dublin had noticed "a nine to one ratio of women to men in teacher training, but in schools those coaching GAA were 20 to 1 in favour of males" (Foley 2001). Their solution was to develop initiatives to encourage more female teachers to become involved in the coaching of Gaelic games: "Once we did it we were amazed at the response, but the reality is we have had to actively recruit women to help, otherwise the games will die in the schools".

By 2009, seven (22%) Cumann na mBunscol county secretaries nationally were female, while three of nine positions on the national committee were filled by female teachers (Cumann na mBunscol 2009a). These figures seem surprisingly low considering that over 85% of the primary teaching workforce is female (Office of the Department of Education and Skills 2013), but might be considered to be quite high given the complete male domination of the organisation a generation earlier. With regard to specific counties, a discrepancy appears to exist between the involvement of female teachers in administrative roles compared to coaching roles. In Dublin, for example, all nine positions on the county executive are currently held by male teachers and five of these teachers are retired. In contrast, out of 287 schools in the county, the Cumann na mBunscol contact person is a female teacher in 128 of them (44.6%). This would suggest that while female teachers are underrepresented in terms of the overall proportion of teachers in the county, they appear to be heavily involved at school level. It appears that female teachers' involvement with school teams is not mirrored by their involvement in the organisational structures of Cumann na mBunscol.

Summary

Cumann na mBunscol has come to occupy a central position in the organisation of Gaelic games in primary schools. Although teachers have played an important part in the promotion

of Gaelic games since the early 1900s, recent decades have seen a shift from largely *ad hoc* local competitions to a systematic programme of competitive activities across the country, with over 90% of schools taking part. The original competitions catered solely for boys, and were administered almost exclusively by male teachers. Significant changes in these practices have occurred in recent decades, although gender inequalities are still evident.

The Influence of the GAA on PE and school sport

The GAA has sought consistently for Gaelic games to be included as part of PE and school sport programmes in Irish primary schools. In the previous chapter, the GAA's policies with regard to primary schools were examined, and this section addresses issues around how these policies are implemented. In many ways there is a 'taken for granted' assumption that Gaelic games should be an integral part of life in primary schools. Colm, a GAA games manager, was adamant that the GAA should maintain a defined presence within the school timetable, so that "we can maintain control over that period". For him, the maintenance of a situation where the "Gaelic games hour is engrained in the minds of the children" was of utmost importance and central to the development of the games.

The GAA's primary school coaching programme

The most visible manifestation of the GAA's presence in primary schools is through the school coaching programme. The notion of coach education within the GAA has developed on an ad hoc basis from the early 1960s. Subsequently, the first National Coaching Course, was held in Gormanstown College in County Meath in 1964 (McCormack 2007). The initial courses focused primarily on coaching the elite player but the expertise that was developed was gradually adapted to suit the development of younger players.

The GAA's school coaching programmes date back to the early 1990s. The first school coaches were typically high-profile players who were recruited to cover large areas within a

county or province. Given the sporadic nature of the service they provided, it could be argued that their main impact was to increase the profile of Gaelic games rather than to deliver a systematic skill development programme. Patrick, one of the first school coaches believed that he was providing a valuable service in schools because “when the scheme started, there was little or no PE going on in schools”. In his situation one elite hurler and footballer were employed “primarily to promote the games in the schools”. Elsewhere, it has been suggested that these early programmes were so limited that the number of sessions delivered in each school was “hardly enough to have a major impact anywhere” (McCarthy 2000, p. 192).

A noteworthy aspect of these early programmes was that they provided employment opportunities for elite players and it was evidence of a view that playing ability and coaching performance were closely related. The possibility for employment opportunities within schools for elite players still persists, and is frequently articulated as a possible career option for players who are unemployed. The GAA has been proactive in gaining access to government funded employment schemes in order to increase the numbers of coaches. The Tús programme, a general government initiative designed to provide unemployed people with employment and training, was welcomed enthusiastically by GAA officials as a mechanism to support unemployed players (McKeon 2010). This was a precursor to the JobBridge¹¹ scheme, where the GAA undertook to provide over 200 “quality positions and internships”, with a significant number in the area of coaching and games development (Lawlor 2011).

A second reason for providing coaching programmes in schools is underpinned by a sense of ‘crisis’, similar in many ways to the justification for change that has been noted in other countries (e.g. Swabey and Penney 2011). This is very prevalent among GAA members who perceive the position of Gaelic games within primary schools to be under threat from other activities or who ascribe to the view that games at primary school level will serve as an

¹¹ JobBridge is a national internship scheme operated by the Irish government since 2011

antidote to an apparent drop in standards at a variety of levels. It is, however, a view that is not new. GAA policy document warned, for example, that “we need to be ever-conscious of the fact that young people are being offered numerous alternative sporting and recreational opportunities in a society where leisure-time activities are assuming a new importance in the lives of people” (Gaelic Athletic Association 1981, p. 4). During this research Arthur, a full-time coach, outlined how his particular role was created “in response to the serious decline of juvenile hurling both within primary schools and clubs”. The gender imbalance in primary teaching is considered to be another element of the crisis: a provincial administrator explained how the coaching programmes in his province were created as a response to “the number of women teachers in the primary schools”. In a similar vein, comments that the number of female teachers was impacting negatively on the promotion of Gaelic games in primary schools have been attributed to the then chairman of the Dublin GAA board (Irish Independent 2002). A final aspect of the crisis discourse centres on the contention that the GAA has a contribution to make in increasing children’s general level of physical activity. The comments of a high profile inter-county manager in a newspaper article are illustrative of this viewpoint, as he argues for the recruitment of elite players to fulfil these duties: “With no proper exercise on the school curriculum, it’s an opportunity for the GAA to help the development of kids, promote our own games, while providing employment for players who are struggling in the different Ireland we’re living in now” (O Dwyer 2010).

A third justification for the school coaching programme is based on a growing awareness that primary schools were important centres for player recruitment: Ben, a games development manager, spoke about the importance of supporting an extensive programme of coaching and teacher CPD within schools in order “to get them early, to win over the hearts and minds”. Colm highlighted the importance of “getting the kids early and then hopefully they will stay

with the game”. For Trevor, coaching programmes in schools are beneficial because “you have a target audience, a captive audience”. In this context, GAA personnel value the position that has been established, because “the first contact for many children – and parents – with the GAA comes through primary school. It is now a central part of the rich tapestry of GAA life” (O Rourke 2013a).

GAA school coaching structures

The GAA organises the largest primary school-based coaching programme in the country. As a result, over 85% of schools avail of the services of coaches free of charge at some stage during the school year (Irish Sports Council 2014), and it is estimated that 8100 primary school teams play in inter-scholastic competitions (Gaelic Athletic Association 2012).

Patrick’s commentary on how the school coaching programme had changed during the course of his employment is reflective of an initiative that was based initially on *ad hoc* local arrangements before evolving into a more highly structured programme:

I suppose when I started off it was certainly up to my own devices. Then at the end there was a structure there. I suppose at the start it was a solo job. I was on my own.

At the end there was more support there from the County Board.

Another coach related a similar experience where he moved directly from factory work into a full-time coaching position. The organisation of his early coaching sessions was heavily dependent on “tips from teachers” (McCarthy 2000, p. 192). This involved informal guidance provided by teachers in the schools he visited.

The school coaching programme is funded by the GAA but development grants from the ISC are also used. From a position in the early 1990s where counties employed one or two coaches, the programme has expanded considerably. Recent estimates suggest that there are 347 full-time and part-time people working in grassroots games development positions

nationwide (Gaelic Athletic Association 2012). It is worth noting that the workload of full-time personnel generally includes a range of games development tasks of which primary school coaching is a part. Although overall policy for the programme is set at national level, primarily by the Games Development Committee (GDC), each province and county has a considerable degree of autonomy in the organisation of the coaches at a local level. In particular, county coaching committees have developed structures that are designed to suit their individual needs, while at the same time being somewhat constrained by national guidelines. Delivery of the school coaching programme in County D, for example, is dependent on third-level students on placement modules, while County B employs a team of part-time coaches to visit schools on a rotational basis. In Counties A, B and C coaches receive some payment for their services from GAA sources or government employment schemes. Table 6.2 illustrates how the school coaching programme operates in four counties:

Table 6.2: School Coaching Structures

	County A	County B	County C	County D
Co-ordination	County GDC and Games Development Manager	County GDC and Games Development Manager	County GDC and Games Development Manager	County GDC and Games Development Manager
Full-time Coaching Personnel	4 Full-time coaches 2 additional coaches are employed on a separate government-funded scheme	2 Full-time coaches	4 Full-time coaches	3 Full-time coaches
Additional Coaches	Club-School Link Coaches: Club members coach in local primary schools.	Part-time coaches: Up to 25 coaches are employed on a seasonal basis and coach in a cluster of schools	Government-Funded employment scheme: 12 Coaches work in clusters of schools	Third-level students: Students coach in pairs in a school
Cost	Coaches originally received €1200, jointly funded by clubs and county board. This sum was halved in 2012	Scheme is funded by provincial council, county board and clubs Some Government funding is also accessed	Funding is provided by county board and clubs	Scheme is funded by provincial council, county board and clubs
Duration	Schools receive 3 hours coaching per week over 20 weeks	Schools receive 2 hours coaching per week over 20 weeks	Schools receive 2 hours coaching per week over 12 weeks	Students attend their school for one day each week for 12-18 weeks
Coaches' qualifications	Foundation level	Foundation Level	Foundation Level	Foundation & Level 1

While there are some similarities across the four counties, there are also significant differences suggesting that it may be difficult to implement the national policy consistently nationwide. This issue will be explored in greater detail in Chapter eight.

The GAA coaching programme and PE

To date very little research has been focused on the quality of coaching programmes across the country. The interviews conducted with coaching personnel and teachers provided an opportunity to learn more about how these programmes operate and what they contribute to

schools. From the perspective of games development personnel within the GAA, there is an increased awareness of the coach's role in promoting Gaelic games through the primary school curriculum, and there is a belief that large portions of the PE curriculum can be taught through the medium of Gaelic games. For Alan, the coach has an important role to play in the teaching of the games strand of the PE curriculum: "I think that an awful lot of primary schools buy into it from the simple fact that the coaches help to cover, in some ways to help the teachers with the PE curriculum". Additionally, he believes the coaches should be formally recognised by the DES so that they would have "a role in delivering the curriculum, and not just "coming in and doing Gaelic games". More specifically, claims have recently been made that the coaching programmes can fulfil requirements across a number of strands¹² of the PE curriculum. Gabriel's comments are illustrative of this trend:

"So once the principal knows that we're delivering the three strands [Games, Athletics, Gymnastics] of the PE curriculum we're more than welcome. We're not a hindrance to the school; we're aiding and abetting the delivery of the curriculum. So we're not costing them time, we're saving time. And as that message goes out and more people understand it, an awful lot of people are on board now. In the last two years you could really say we have stood the whole thing on its head"

These comments help us to understand why the GAA's programmes might be attractive to schools, particularly in light of the claim to cover the games, athletics and gymnastics strands of the curriculum through FMS acquisition. They also suggest that the rationale underpinning the programmes has changed significantly in recent times, with an increased emphasis on ensuring an alignment with the curriculum. It should be noted, however, that the claim to cover aspects of the curriculum, other than games, is based on a suggestion that the objectives

¹² The six strands of the Irish primary physical education curriculum are aquatics, athletics, dance, games, gymnastics and outdoor & adventure activities

of the athletics and gymnastics strands can be covered through an FMS programme (Arthur). Consequently, it is probable that this cross-strand approach would lead to a very narrow range of activities, with an overarching focus on Gaelic games, where “70% of the PE curriculum could be covered from a GAA perspective” (Brendan). This simplification of the curriculum is reflected in Gabriel’s contention that:

the gymnastics programme is just physical literacy as we do in the GAA. The athletics is the running and the jumping and the throwing as we do in the GAA and the games is the catching and passing and kicking and striking.

Perhaps in contrast, a requirement to allow schools space for other activities is reflected in Gerard’s acknowledgement that the coaching programmes shouldn’t cover the whole year: “Whereas if we are in for the 40 weeks I think that the productivity and the goodwill of the teachers might be lost. The way we are at the moment, if they have other things...they can fit them in”.

Club school links

As outlined in the previous chapter, the central component of the GAA’s school coaching programme is the development of links with the local club through the club-school links initiative. These links were regarded as being very important for many of the participants in this study. The GAA was seen to benefit because children became more aware of the activities of the local club. Trevor, a GAA development officer, highlighted that this was particularly true in urban areas, where there might not be a strong identification with the local club. For him, the coaching programme in these areas should focus on the organisation of blitzes and informal games, with the actual game coaching taking place in the club. Alan also outlined the benefits for the GAA, but cautioned that the competence of the coaches was important. In his view, the link “would break down” if the school was unhappy with the

quality of coaching. This was also an issue for Brendan, a teacher, who was critical of the fact that schools generally did not have a role in the selection of coaches.

For Caoimhe, a camogie development officer, the system of having local volunteers involved in the school coaching programme is an advantage because “as soon as the coach comes through the school gates the children can automatically equate him or her with a local club, so that’s good for the club”. She conceded, however, that her organisation did not have the resources to build on the work of the coaches: “the GAA has been fantastic in putting a lot of coaches into schools but once the coach leaves the kids don’t necessarily go to the clubs and don’t identify the clubs with the school.” From her perspective, fostering a link between the school and local club is crucial in order to sustain the benefits of the coaching programme.

Gabriel cautioned that the ethos of the club may be different from the ethos of the school when he argued that “The school must be protected from the club”. He suggested that a club ethos based on producing successful teams may not be compatible with the school’s emphasis on the holistic development of the child. In this context, personnel employed in the school coaching programmes should have a child-centred rather than club-centred coaching philosophy. It is unclear to what extent this is happening generally, but there would appear to be enough evidence to suggest this issue deserves the attention of school and NGB authorities. Ian conceded that there may be weaknesses in how the sports coach contributes to PE, noting that “there is a grain of truth there that if the teacher is delivering PE it will be more child centred than the sport coach”. Raymond spoke about how “the ‘win’ mentality dominates in clubs but it is not so obvious in schools”. In that context, the ethos promoted by club personnel could have a considerable impact on school sport. This point was echoed by Brendan when he argued that teachers are “generally very child-centred”, whereas club personnel may lack skills in this area as “they wouldn’t be dealing with kids as a professional on a day to day basis”. Colm, a GAA development officer, believed that the ideal scenario

was to “get the teacher more involved” in the school and in the club in order to strengthen the link between the two.

The coach as a professional

Although the GAA’s coaching programmes have grown considerably in recent years and each county now employs a cohort of full-time games development personnel, a strong culture of volunteering exists parallel to the full-time, professional structures. Traditionally, this has involved parents or club coaches assisting with the preparation of school teams for extra-curricular competitions. While this practice continues, the establishment of formal coaching programmes within the school timetable has become the dominant feature of Gaelic games activities in primary schools. As a result, there has been a significant shift in emphasis by the GAA from preparing the school team to more participatory activities delivered during curriculum time. This change reflects national GAA policy on the optimum types of competition for young children and is examined in greater detail later in this chapter. With that, there has been a shift from viewing the coach as a volunteer to viewing the coach as a professional. When Laura comments that “there are no volunteers anymore now; sure it’s kind of gone isn’t it really? People expect something for their work”, she describes a situation that contrasts significantly with the traditional notion of volunteering at the local school. By expecting “something for their work”, coaches have taken on roles that are, perhaps, additional to what might be expected of a volunteer. This situation is evident in Arthur’s comments where he makes a clear distinction between his role as a full-time coach and the part role played by volunteer coaches: “I actually have to be very careful because I am the professional here and these people are volunteers; there is only so much you can expect from volunteers”.

The Club-School link programme that has been adopted as official policy by the GAA has facilitated the growth of structures that rely on the services of paid employees. In many

counties, an additional layer of coaching personnel has been added beneath the full-time personnel. A common trait of these practices is that in each situation coaches are receiving some form of remuneration for their services. In effect, these coaches are no longer volunteers in the strictest sense of the word.

Examples of current practices include the employment of part-time coaches that visit clusters of schools for 10-week coaching blocks, use of 3rd level college students on work placement programmes and the contracting of club personnel to coach in schools within a club's catchment area. The economic downturn has increased the demand for these paid coaching positions in many counties, despite the seasonal nature of school coaching programmes in some areas. In one county, coaches are employed in schools for two or three ten-week blocks and, in the words of Gerard, a coaching administrator, "all our better lads" are also employed in the talent academies for teenage players as a means to supplement their salaries. By starting out in primary schools, coaches get a chance to display their capabilities; those perceived to be performing well are then recruited into other areas of games development. In this instance, an informal career pathway is evident for the coaches who display particular competencies. Accordingly, Gerard's 'better lads' are rewarded with these additional employment opportunities.

Many of the interviewees suggest that the development of a cohort of professional coaches has positive impacts on policy implementation. Gabriel, for example, saw this as a central role of these personnel: "So, now with our full time personnel they're implementing policy". For Trevor, their impact is also crucially important: "Full time guys generally know what best practice is and then you will filter that down to maybe 10% or 5% of the coaches on the ground". Additionally he suggested that the full-time personnel offer an element of continuity as "you forget that every year there are new coaches coming in with children". The

implication of this is that full-time coaching personnel have a central role in the implementation of policy.

Within the primary school context, coaches are now delivering activities during school time on a widespread basis. Gabriel commented that “The coach now has a status in the staffroom. This is very important in terms of his or her professional identity. Many coaches have relevant 3rd level qualifications so this is fitting”. Similarly Alan, a coach with a secondary school PE teaching qualification, outlines that the coach is “a professional person coming in that has their head geared on to doing physical education”. Alan’s situation is unusual, however, as it is not typical that the coaches would have a background in PE. Colm pointed out that sport and leisure management qualifications would be most common. At one level it would appear to be surprising that these coaches, with qualifications that may have little or no connection to teaching, are so readily accepted in primary schools. The teachers who participated in this study, however, generally viewed the coaches as ‘experts’ who were providing a valuable service. Declan, a school principal, held the visiting coaches in high esteem, and affords them a significant level of respect as professionals:

I treat them as members of staff. They come in they are in the staff room, they take their tea at break time [and] they are treated just as a member of staff. The kids treat them as a member of staff and it works. I also think that teachers will buy into this if they see the level of expertise the coaches are bringing in.

He did, however, make a distinction between full-time coaches and volunteers who may be representing the local club in terms of their varying levels of competence. For him, the full-time coach provided a valued service to the school. This point was supported by Alan when he commented: “I would see the coach as being on level par or level playing field with a

teacher”. This viewpoint represents a significant contrast to the role played by the volunteer whose role might be to assist with the preparation of the school team.

Assisting teachers to upskill is articulated as an aspiration of GAA policy. Kevin, a teacher with close connections to the GAA argued that the purpose of the school coaching programme “shouldn’t be to deliver a Gaelic games programme to children; it should be about up-skilling teachers”. The reality on the ground may not be so straightforward. Gerard suggested that if teachers were upskilled to a sufficiently high level then there would be no longer a need for coaches. This, he says, would be akin to “turkeys voting for Christmas”. Additionally, it was not in his interest as a Games Manager for the perception to develop that “schools are going great” because “then not alone are those [coaches] losing their job but I’m actually losing my budget”. This viewpoint underlines a dilemma for coaching personnel in the way they carry out their duties. It could be argued that by adopting a role that displaces the class teacher they increase the sustainability of their own jobs. Harry echoes this view that doing an effective job can be counter-productive: “if a development officer was genuinely brilliant at his job, he or she should have themselves worked out of the job, you know after a period of time”. While many counties are actively involved in teachers’ CPD, Gerard’s perspective is valuable in helping to understand why the role of the teacher has not been located more centrally within games development practice.

Evaluating the school coaching programme

Although the GAA’s school coaching programme is embedded in most primary schools, there has yet to emerge any consistent attempt to evaluate its efficacy. To date, the key focus has been on ensuring the roll-out of programme across the country, and Trevor concedes that an evaluation of the school coaching programmes has only recently become a priority:

I am talking to somebody at the moment that has helped me put together questionnaires for schools, primary and post primary, and clubs to evaluate the service that we are providing.

Coaches employed in primary schools are monitored by their line managers within the GAA's game development structures. This is usually done on an informal basis and is typically dependent on feedback from a club or school (Arthur). Ian suggested that there "has been no definition as to what a quality session is" and any attempt at evaluation is largely based on anecdotal responses (Colm). Fiona believed that "it wouldn't be practical" to carry out structured observations of her coaches' practice and relied on written or oral reports from the coaches themselves. Gerard does visit his coaches while they are in schools, but these visits only involve "checking for time-keeping and checking content". This issue will be dealt with in greater detail from the perspective of schools in the next chapter.

It could be argued that the Heads of Agreement document, discussed in Chapter five, was an attempt to get coaches and schools to reflect on how the coaching schemes were being implemented. It appears that the impact of this document was dependent on the commitment of games development personnel in each county to promote it. Arthur regarded it as "a box-ticking exercise" where "things carried on almost regardless". He viewed this as a positive, however, as it indicated to him that schools trusted and "bought into" the service being provided by the GAA. Gerard, another GAA development officer, saw the benefit of the policy because it delivered a message to teachers that "it is important that you buy into this, and it is important that you are not correcting copybooks". As Cumann na mBunscol had taken responsibility for the distribution of the document in his county, he wasn't sure if all schools had signed it. Sean, in a similar role, wasn't "familiar with the document" himself but noted that "people [in schools] signed the document without reading it...because they just wanted coaching in the schools.

Teachers gave varied responses to the document. Declan, for example, was an enthusiastic supporter of it and reported that the contents were discussed by his staff each year as they formulated their school sport policy. Similarly, Nigel welcomed the document as he believed that it was important for school Boards of Management “to be aware of all aspects of school life...like outside coaches coming in and the teachers’ interaction and the pupils’ interaction with those coaches”. Orla, in contrast, “didn’t analyse it at all because we’d already bought into the coaching and knew what was involved”. As a result, it would appear that the potential of the document as a tool for evaluating coaches has not materialised.

Summary

The GAA’s coaching programme dominates provision of NGB coaching in Irish primary schools. It is based on an extensive network of full-time, part-time and, to a much lesser extent, volunteer coaches. The development of club-school links is a central objective of the programme, but the programme has evolved with a focus of accessing as many schools as possible rather than on evaluating the quality of the service. While a professionalization of the GAA’s coaching cohort has occurred over the past decade, a systematic attempt to monitor coaching quality is absent.

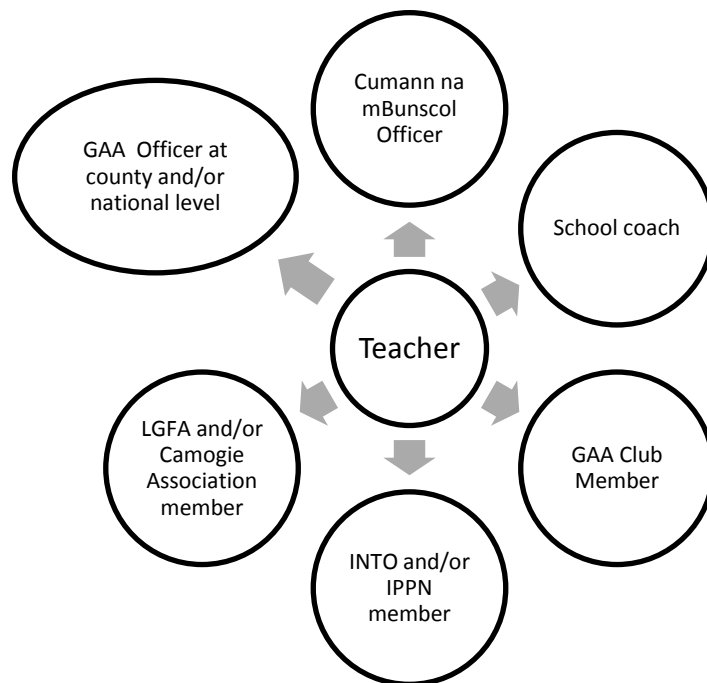
Multiple affiliations: a complex network

The previous two sections have, in turn, examined the parts played by Cumann na mBunscol and the GAA in the implementation of PE and sport policies in primary schools. To gain a deeper understanding of the issues involved, however, it is also necessary to study how these two organisations interact with each other and the relationships that have developed with other groups. Many of the participants in this study were affiliated to a number of different organisations. This serves to make the interdependency of networks more complex. As Bloyce and Smith (2010, p. 546) point out:

It is only possible to understand adequately the likely effectiveness of sport policies by recognizing the wider human figurations within which sport policy-makers, SDOs [sports development officers] and other interested groups are embroiled, and the tensions, conflicts and degrees of consensual elements that characterize those dynamic relationships

The data reflect the strong tradition of teacher involvement in the GAA at local and national level (Cronin *et al.* 2009). One interviewee, for example, spoke in glowing terms about his former teacher who had been a distinguished inter-county player and, subsequently, a provincial GAA official. A second held officer positions within Cumann na mBunscol and the GAA simultaneously within his county. Another was involved in both the LGFA and INTO. Similarly, the current GAA national president, Liam O’Neill, is a primary school principal and was heavily involved in the establishment of Cumann na mBunscol in his county (Leinster Leader 2012). In figurational terms, these examples are indicative of the way people are “bonded together in dynamic constellations” (Liston 2011, p. 171). In distinguishing between “individual and *social habitus*” [italics in the original], Keay (2009, p. 231) alerts us to the tensions that may exist as teachers express their identities in different situations. Moreover, their actions are constrained by the “ties that bind them to particular we-groups” (Ken Green 2003, p. 149). A teacher who is involved in Cumann na mBunscol, for example, may make decisions that are at odds with school PE policy. The relative strength of their affiliation to a particular group at a particular time can influence this decision-making. Figure 6.1 illustrates how a teacher who is involved in the promotion of Gaelic games in primary school may have affiliations to other groups, and usually in a voluntary capacity.

Figure 6.1: A Teacher's Affiliations



Separate and connected: Cumann na mBunscol and the GAA

Divided loyalties?

The role of the primary teacher has consistently been cited as a key factor in the development of Gaelic games, particularly within rural communities. Cronin *et al.* (2009, p. 259) note how young male teachers were often instrumental in setting up new clubs, enabling them to attain leadership status in their communities: “arriving as young single men, with the status and respectability of their profession, embracing the GAA presented an entry point into the homes of the local community”. While these young teachers frequently became involved in coaching and administrative tasks in the local GAA clubs, they also promoted Gaelic games within their schools. Official GAA statements tend to praise the primary teachers for their promotion of these games. Mulvihill (2003, p. 7), in his role as GAA CEO, mentions the “great service which bodies such as Sciath na Scol [Cumann na mBunscol] provide to the Association [GAA] and its young people”. The underlying sense of control expressed in this statement is interesting in terms of the way that the relationship between the bodies is portrayed, with the

GAA in a dominant position compared to the teachers and the children. In some ways, this positioning also creates an expectation that it is part of a teacher's role to promote Gaelic games in primary schools. Despite the rhetoric around autonomy and independence, Cumann na mBunscol remains closely connected to the GAA. The availability of large stadia for primary schools finals has been acknowledged as a key motivation in increasing the number of participating schools (Cumann na mBunscol Ath Cliath 2013). The Dublin finals in Croke Park receive national media attention each year (e.g. Irish Independent 2012), while in Tipperary, getting a chance to play "on the hallowed turf of Semple Stadium" is regarded as a significant reward for schools lucky enough to participate in county finals (Manley 2012). The added bonus of being able to charge an entry at these events gave financial independence to the body in Cork (Nealon 2003). In the 1980s, O Loughlin (1983a, p. 40) issued an appeal to clubs "to show more interest in the primary schools in their area". It was suggested that this could be done by visiting the school or by providing equipment. Such informal arrangements are now enshrined in national policy with the development of school-club links.

The GAA expects that Cumann na mBunscol should not operate as an independent entity (Gaelic Athletic Association 2012). The views of the two teachers (Aidan and Mary) demonstrate contrasting views of the relationship between the GAA and Cumann na mBunscol. Aidan, a GAA administrator, commented that "it [Cumann na mBunscol] will remain populated fundamentally by teachers- but that they will operate in cooperation and collaboration with the other [GAA] committees". For him, Cumann na mBunscol should operate as a GAA sub-committee. In Mary's opinion, the organisations were "distinct and separate" and she believed in Cumann na mBunscol's independence from the GAA. At national level this relationship was described as "uneasy" (Declan) as the GAA sought to exert more control over the activities of Cumann na mBunscol. Indeed Chris, a GAA official, suggested that, given the increasing strength of the GAA coaching structures in clubs and

schools, his organisation could now “do without Cumann na mBunscol”. Nigel, a teacher, also noted: “If Cumann na mBunscol was gone in the morning the GAA would survive at underage because the clubs are so well organised and structured. I wouldn’t have said that twenty years ago.” In terms of exercising control over what happens in schools, a view within the GAA appears to be forming that GAA policy can be implemented more effectively within schools by coaches rather than by teachers, particularly teachers involved in Cumann na mBunscol.

Mary offered a contrary view. Although she welcomed coaches and club officers into her school currently, she argued that “there are more club people coming in and they seem to be muscling in on our ground and they want to take over things”. She articulated a position that suggested that there were entrenched positions between school personnel on one hand and club personnel on the other. She warned that a continuation of this trend could lead to unforeseen consequences:

I think at the moment schools appreciate the fact that it [school competitions] is run by teachers and that there is an atmosphere of ‘school’ wherever you go. There would be an idea that we would have fair play on and off the pitch with the appropriate language and there would be caring for children on the sideline of the pitch. I think that if the GAA push it and presume that if they get rid of the teachers that they will still have total control of the schools, I think they would be mistaken.

Ian, a GAA coaching administrator, acknowledged that his relationship with Cumann na mBunscol was improving but expressed annoyance that he was not always made aware of Cumann na mBunscol decisions:

They tend to go off and do something without [telling us]. It’s like you get a run on the fella you are marking [in a game] and the next minute he is gone from you, you go

to grab his jersey tails and he is gone away. Like with the county final exhibition games this year, we always bring in the teams but Cumann na mBunscol wanted to do it this year and instead of us actually trying to do it together, a certain individual there went off and circulated all the stuff to schools before telling anyone.

To gain an understanding of why these tensions have come about, an exploration of the relationship between the two organisations since the foundation of Cumann na mBunscol in 1971 is important. Some early data suggest that teacher-led committees were formed initially in order to provide an alternative to the prevailing GAA practices at the time.

The organisers in Clare, for example, set out clearly that they wished to be viewed as totally independent of the local GAA board:

“Our conception of the competition was that it would have no ties or connection with the clubs and it would be run by the teachers of the schools involved. We felt quite confident that the teachers, being professionals, would act professionally, giving full regard and allegiance to the ethos of sportsmanship in the playing of the matches”
(Vaughan 2000, p. 3).

This meant they believed their competition was not subject to general GAA rules.

Nevertheless, they were willing to accept the assistance of local clubs that provided playing pitches and for other supports, including jerseys and equipment (Vaughan 2000). Elsewhere, clubs were criticised for failing to provide sufficient support for schools that were “their main source of material” (O Loughlin 1984, p. 77). This is probably indicative of a time period where clubs’ focus on activities for children was still underdeveloped, leading another teacher to assert:

primary school competition offers the best and possibly the only method of ensuring that hurling will be played by a significant number of our youth, and that they acquire the skills to safely enjoy the game” (Ryan 1981, p. 104).

These views suggest that Cumann na mBunscol’s efforts to develop child-centred Gaelic games activities in the 1970s and 1980s were more developmentally appropriate and progressive than activities organised by the GAA. It is interesting, then, that the expressions of Cumann na mBunscol independence, as articulated by the teachers in this study, retain a belief that its approach is still more child-centred than that of the GAA. The data generated suggest otherwise. Firstly, GAA policy documents now advocate for small-sided, non-competitive games (Gaelic Athletic Association 2011). Cumann na mBunscol national policy concurs (Cumann na mBunscol 2009c), but practice in schools remains focused on competitive representative games. Observations carried out during this study noted that the GAA’s Go Games blitzes were non-competitive events where all children participated for the full duration of the games. Cumann na mBunscol’s activities, in contrast, were highly competitive with no provision for all children to take part. It appears that GAA practice now aligns better with curricular objectives than that of Cumann na mBunscol.

The processes underpinning Cumann na mBunscol’s development as an organisation have contributed to the national committee’s difficulty in controlling policy implementation. Although the first national committee of Cumann na mBunscol was formed in 1971, there does not appear to have been any sustained attempt to entice the various groups who operated primary school competitions across the country into the centralized national structure. The teacher-led organisation in Limerick City was still operating under the name “Limerick City Primary School GAA Committee” in 1981. Its aim was to “promote athletics and Irish national games for primary school boys in Limerick City and its environs” (O Rian 1980, p. 87) The organisation of athletics activities was not unusual, and continues in a number of

counties today. Significant growth occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s. These new committees were typically set up on the instigation of one or two committed teachers in an area, and regularly crossed county boundaries in terms of the schools invited to participate. The formal organisation of Cumann na mBunscol in Galway in 1995 came about when the county GAA board approached some teachers to take over the running of the county schools competition. As a result, a city-based teacher-led committee that had been organising independent competitions was disbanded and reformed as the county Cumann na mBunscol committee (Cumann na mBunscol Gaillimh 2014). Consequently, local committees retained a degree of independence that enabled them to resist national policy initiatives. Furthermore, if good relationships existed with local GAA committees they could remain financially independent from Cumann na mBunscol national committee.

Funding issues

Despite attempts by Cumann na mBunscol to access government funding in the early 1970s, and again in 1996, government policy has been to distribute sports development funding through NGBs. As a result, Cumann na mBunscol is heavily dependent on the GAA for financial support. Until 2009, the GAA provided Cumann na mBunscol with an annual development grant of up to €80,000. This grant was then distributed by the national committee to its constituent units. Since then, however, funding has become a more contentious issue (Cumann na mBunscol 2011). In 2010, the GAA's finance department reduced the autonomy of Cumann na mBunscol significantly and put structures in place to manage this funding centrally. This action limited the national committee's power and decision-making capacity regarding funding allocations. Laura, articulating a Cumann na mBunscol perspective, suggested that this represented a lack of trust on behalf of the GAA. She disliked new practices and commented that "everything is accountable...they're scrutinizing everything now". From the GAA's perspective, more stringent criteria imposed

by the ISC were partly responsible for the increased levels of accountability. These criteria, however, also enabled the GAA to exert more control over the activities of Cumann na mBunscol. The merit-based funding system introduced for all aspects of GAA games development in recent years places an emphasis on yearly, largely quantitative, targets. These targets reflect games development policy and performance based grants. Evidence from the 2013 AGM suggests that some groups within Cumann na mBunscol resented the application of this system to their organisation. Evan, a Cumann na mBunscol officer, feared that this increased emphasis on “targets and budgets” would discourage teachers from taking volunteer positions within the organisation. Funding to Cumann na mBunscol for 2013 was subsequently cut by 15% to €68,000 and was made dependent on the production of an annual plan and report. These stipulations suggest that the GAA expects Cumann na mBunscol to manage its activities in a similar manner to all other GAA units. Funding arrangements are further complicated by the fact that individual provincial and county GAA boards also give funding to Cumann na mBunscol units in their area, while some county Cumann na mBunscol committees are financially self-sufficient due to earnings accrued through local sponsorship arrangements and gate receipts from county finals. As a result, the impact of the GAA’s ability to impose financial penalties for not reaching games development targets is weakened differentially by county.

Interactions with the education inspectorate

The GAA has been influential in shaping PE and sport policy. In this section, the role of the DES inspectorate in monitoring Gaelic games activities in schools will be examined from the perspective of GAA personnel and teachers. It explores whether or not the inspectors’ role in evaluating school practice impacts on the actions of coaches and teachers.

Colm provided an interesting overview of how full-time coaches carry out their duties when inspectors are in a school for a WSE. At one level, the GAA personnel were aware of the importance of the inspectors' visits and were anxious to create a good impression:

We would have been very conscious on the day that the inspector was going to be calling, and we would be very conscious that everything that we would be doing would be to complement the school work. So in other words that our work was going to be meticulous on that particular day

In Colm's opinion, however, the coaches did not have any sense that their work was being inspected. Instead, they believed that they were providing a very specific service that was not under the mandate of the inspectorate:

I think most of our fulltime staff are very conscious that the day the inspector was in the school he wasn't necessarily there to observe what was happening in the GAA. I suppose we never saw that link; we just happened to be there on that day. He was arriving in, we were performing our part but we were still leaving and we were not interacting with him. We were not talking to him after but, if we were, it was mainly just kind of small talk as in 'the session went great, the kids are great'. It wasn't necessarily on a critical analysis of either their physical fitness or their obesity levels, or their need to be out more. It was never about that. All of our staff realise that we we're there on a specific job and that was our role only.

Finally, although the school principals would probably have informed the inspectors that there were external personnel operating in the school, Colm did not get the impression that these inspectors saw it as part of their remit to evaluate the coaching:

At some stage the inspector might come out, observe, stand off. They might salute from a distance. We might be like 'I can't talk to you right now because I am with the group'. I suppose we would never have felt ourselves that there was a need for us to go over and talk globally about the physical education in the primary sector

The experiences of Fiona, a games development officer, were broadly similar and she commented that "anybody I speak to tells me that if the coach is there and the inspector is there at the same time, that the inspector isn't really concerned with what the coach is doing". Likewise Trevor, a games manager in a different region, had never encountered a situation where the inspectorate had sought to evaluate a school coaching programme. Furthermore, Fiona believed that evaluating what the coaches did "was not part of the inspectors' brief". Lastly, Kevin, a school principal, was adamant that the inspectorate was not interested in "monitoring school sport and the effect of school sport and the effects that school sport can have either positive or negative". Although Mary, another school principal, was concerned that inspectors might be critical if the standard of coaching was poor, she hadn't heard of school reports where inspectors had commented adversely:

I was wondering if the inspectorate had been in any schools where the coaching scheme had been going on but I haven't heard anyone saying anything about it and I haven't seen it in any of the evaluations. PE actually hasn't been examined around here at all yet

Frank, a school inspector, provided some clarity on the role of the inspectorate with regard to school sport and part played by coaches. He outlined that his role during a WSE was to evaluate provision:

It is a case of what we evaluate rather than who...we want to gather enough evidence to make a judgement on whether or not the curricular aims have been adhered to. It is up to the Board of Management (BOM) to guide practice around who does what.

In effect, his view suggests that it is not the remit of the inspectorate to monitor the quality of school coaches, even when they were providing a service during curricular time. Instead, he argued that this was the responsibility of the school BOM.

The impact of the overall inspection process was a concern for some teachers. Robert believed that it had resulted in a reluctance to engage in school sport activities as teachers were now constantly “looking over their shoulders” in case these activities might not be deemed acceptable. He related a story where an inspector commented negatively about a teacher who was not in school as he had taken a team to a Cumann na mBunscol fixture. For him, “The whole school evaluation thing, all of that has become a huge monstrosity hanging over teachers. You almost have teachers on permanent teaching practice and that is not good”. This contrasts with his childhood memories where the inspector “would come in and talk to us and we would talk about football so it was part and parcel of our growing up”. Orla expressed similarly negative experiences about the inspectors’ attitude towards PE and sport, and cited an example where her inspector had asked her to reduce the time given to the school’s aquatics programme:

So basically what they’re saying is that they don’t value what is being done at all. So it’s token: they want to be able to say that we have it, but they’re not willing for us to give it the time to develop it.

The GAA ‘family’: common goals?

The phrase “family of Gaelic games” is used frequently to describe the associated games of hurling, Gaelic football, camogie, handball and rounders (e.g. Camogie Association 2013).

Although the games are linked culturally, a number of separate governing bodies are involved in the organisation of the sports. This section examines how the relationships among three of these NGBs affect primary schools provision of Gaelic games for girls. The CA describes itself as “an independent voluntary organisation” that “regularly liaises with the other Gaelic games’ NGBs. Similarly, the LGFA is committed to “working in co-operation with other units of our Gaelic games family” (Ladies Gaelic Football Association 2011, p. 7). In terms of structures and resources, the GAA holds a dominant position within the Gaelic games figuration. Aidan, a GAA policy maker, talked about the progress that had been made with the CA and LGFA who have adopted the key aspects of the GAA’s games development programmes. Nevertheless some problems persisted: “They have resources problems, tutor resource problems and capacity issues around those areas. But I think we’re working well, we’re working with each other in an organised coherent way”. His solution to these resource issues was that the GAA should “look after” what happens for all children in primary schools, allowing the scarce LGFA resources to be targeted on secondary schools and clubs. Trevor, a Games manager, agreed with this position, adding:

Why duplicate? Why waste their [LGFA & CA] resources in primary schools when they need to be holding on to them as much as they can and they need to put their energy into post primary?

Implementing policy in this manner potentially results in GAA coaches delivering their programme to boys and girls in all primary schools, and it is a practice that has become accepted as the norm in most cases. Gabriel, a coach, believed that this had been beneficial for the LGFA and CA:

Camogie and Ladies Football are small organisations with very small resources but the benefits that they can get from the full time [GAA] coaching programme are

enormous. And so the numbers playing camogie and ladies football are increasing by the week.

Some coaches, however, were not convinced by this approach. Sean, for example, grudgingly accepted the practice saying that “it was coming from the top down that you took the girls but you would prefer just to have the boys”. It was also reported that some GAA officials were unhappy that girls were being coached as they questioned if the practice represented ‘value for money’ for their association.

One area of contention centred on girls’ primary schools with some games managers resenting that coaching should be provided by the GAA in these schools and argued that the LGFA and CA should be providing coaching in those schools themselves. Gerard, a Games manager, had asked the LGFA board in his county for a financial contribution in return for including the girls’ schools on his coaching schedule. This was not forthcoming, however, so a service was not provided in those schools. Ian, another Games manager in a different county, only provided coaching if a girls’ school made a formal request, while Trevor took a more pragmatic approach stating that his coaches provided coaching in all schools because “I wouldn’t risk the flak that not doing it would bring, to be quite honest. I wouldn’t because you don’t win in a situation like that. So I try my best to be as diplomatic as possible”. He did express concerns, however, that some of the female coaches on his staff were inclined to spend too much time in those schools:

And I might look at a coach’s schedule and say ‘Jesus she is spending too many hours there’. That is something I would have to deal with because she’s spending a disproportionate amount of time in a girls’ school

It would appear that, despite rhetoric that supports inclusive practice, the priorities of GAA coaching personnel are focused on boys. The GAA games managers and coaches claimed to

have very little contact with the LGFA and CA during the course of their work. These data suggest a definite sense that the GAA coaching personnel were willing to provide a coaching service *for* the LGFA and CA, rather than working *with* them in any integrated way. Indeed Ian commented that while his coaches coached boys and girls in the primary school setting, they were not particularly active in seeking to develop links with local camogie and ladies' football clubs. Critically, the extent to which girls are catered for within the coaching structure largely depends on the philosophy of individual coaches. As Sean pointed out, he wasn't very keen on coaching the girls in the classes he visited. Despite his misgivings, he used the club-school link programme to facilitate a girls' section in his local club because the "girls were cracking up: they loved playing in school, but here was no club for them". Arthur took on an inclusive approach despite the limitations that he identified in his own GAA contract. While his contract stipulated that "it's the male sports that we are contracted to promote and to develop", he felt that he had gone "above and beyond the call of duty" in his efforts to foster links with the CA and LGFA, sometimes on a voluntary basis. This was driven by a belief that "the GAA is about the community and what makes up the community families and the interaction between those families...we need to totally and utterly embrace that". Based on the evidence of other interviewees and on my observations, Arthur's perspective was a minority one.

Significantly, the absence of a local camogie or ladies' football club in a locality can have a negative impact on girls' levels of participation. As Evan, a teacher, explained "the girls only play while they're in school, and that's the end of it" because there was no local club to join. This point was backed up by an LGFA official in his county who estimated that only 6% of girls in primary schools there were members of a club, suggesting a significant problem in terms of creating a link between girls' school and community participation.

Building better relationships among the groups was a common theme in the interview data. Brendan, for example, spoke about the importance of having an integrated approach, but admitted that he didn't "have enough contact with them". Similarly, improved co-operation based on better communication was a key aim for Caoimhe, a CA development officer:

We are going to have to try and I suppose, support the angle that Cumann na mBunscol is taking and vice versa. It's a difficult thing and again it comes back to resources and personnel

From a Cumann na mBunscol point of view, developing links with the CA and LGFA does not appear to be prioritized highly, while the CA and LGFA are lacking the personnel and other resources to make a sustained impact at school level. It would appear that the GAA is the only organisation among this group with sufficient resources to change this situation. Significantly, developing a more unified approach has recently become a shared policy objective of the GAA, LGFA and CA¹³ (Gaelic Athletic Association 2014c).

The GAA, Cumann na mBunscol, the CA and LGFA are all involved in the implementation of Gaelic games policy in primary schools. While early games development initiatives were relatively uncoordinated, there has been a distinct trend towards centralization in recent years. This shift towards a more centralized model of games development was evident when Aidan commented that "the danger when you leave people to their own devices is that they tend to head off in all directions and there can be an element of headlessness about that". This was, in his opinion, particularly true in this context, as "games development is a relatively new phenomenon". It could be argued that adopting this centralized approach was seen as a way to reduce the potential impact of policy slippage. Trevor, a Games development manager, believed in a 'bottom up' version of policy development that is at odds with the centralised

¹³ In 2014 a process commenced to merge the GAA, Camogie Association and LGFA

approach: “I really do because I think all good things in the development over the last twenty years has come from the ground up and I think that it has to be encouraged and facilitated more”. Nevertheless, he was frustrated in his dealings with a variety of groups that “are all like little independent republics and nobody is willing to really grasp the issue”.

Kevin occupied a middle ground to some extent when he argues for an element of local autonomy, and he suggested “anything that is seen to be imposed by Croke Park [GAA at national level] is a negative”. Mary, speaking from a Cumann na mBunscol perspective, expressed a similar view and noted that, within her organisation, county delegates resented some decisions of the national committee: “they thought we were trying to tell them what to do”. Brendan, also expressing a Cumann na mBunscol perspective, believed that groups within the GAA were trying to exert more control over Cumann na mBunscol but he favoured the development of a more co-operative relationship: “I think it is important to have two way conversation, as opposed to [GAA leadership in] Croke Park saying this is how it should be done”. This frustration, rooted in an apparent lack of involvement in decision-making process, led these groups to resist new policy initiatives. The contested nature of these comments help to contextualize the wide range of issues that affect policy implementations from the perspective of the organisations involved. A challenge for the GAA is to involve a range of diverse groups in the policy-making process, while at the same time achieving its own policy priorities. As the GAA, Cumann na mBunscol and other organisations become involved in “denser chains of interdependence” (Dunning and Hughes 2013, p. 67), the power to enact policy becomes more diffuse. In Chapter 7, these issues will be examined at school level.

Summary

This chapter has traced the growth of Cumann na mBunscol since 1971 as it has worked to establish a dominant position for Gaelic games in primary schools. It has also examined how

Gaelic games activities, as promoted by the GAA, have become more aligned to the primary PE than those practiced by Cumann na mBunscol. The data suggest that while Cumann na mBunscol has a close but complicated relationship with the GAA, links to the LGFA and the CA are tenuous. The complex nature of these relationships ensures that national policymakers can exert less control on the policy process due to the actions of various groups within the figuration. Chapter seven examines how teachers and coaches shape practice at school level.

Chapter 7: Implementing Gaelic Games activities at School level

Introduction

In Chapter 5, macro policy issues relating to primary PE and school sport were examined in the context of Gaelic games, and in Chapter 6 the focus was on how the actions and interactions of different groups impact on the implementation of these policies. The central objective of this chapter is to examine how Gaelic games policy is enacted at school level. It investigates how national policy is enacted, and seeks to develop our understanding of why Gaelic games have become embedded in school practice. Baur and Ernst (2011a, p. 124), in attempting to understand the role played by individuals, note that “depending on their position within the figuration, they have more or less power to act”. Gaining an understanding of the micro-level interactions between individuals in school settings is important in order to answer the overall research questions. Teachers, for example, while displaying a strong commitment to Gaelic games promotion, interpret GAA policy in ways that were not originally intended. Likewise coaches, operating on behalf of the NGB, displace teachers during PE in a way that runs counter to national education policy.

Justifying the inclusion of Gaelic games in primary schools

Gaelic games as an expression of national identity

Gaelic games occupy a dominant position within PE and sport activities in Irish primary schools. The conditions that led to the establishment of this position have been traced back to the early years of Irish independence (Sciath na Scol Chorcai 2003) and coincided with a movement to foster a distinctive national identity of which Gaelic games were an integral part (Liston 2005b). A considerable amount of rhetoric has connected the promotion of Gaelic games activities in primary schools with the maintenance of a particular form of national identity, and this ideology formed the basis for justifying why Gaelic games should be

prioritized. This is evident in the historical documentation that was examined in the preceding chapters, and the association of Gaelic games with a particular form of national identity as expressed by teachers and GAA personnel. The aims of promoting Irish games and culture have always figured prominently in the stated aims of Cumann na mBunscol and a close affinity with the Irish language is evident in documents published by the organisation (e.g. Cumann na mBunscol Ath Cliath 2013). A desire to promote what are typically described as “our national games” (O Loughlin 1983b, p. 28) is frequently cited as an important motivating factor for teachers, as is expressed in the following quote: “while, naturally, everybody wanted to win they were involved because of their love of the games” (Vaughan 2013).

The desire to have these games enshrined in the PE curriculum is articulated in a newspaper article from the early 1970s, where the newly introduced PE curriculum was criticised for the lack of attention given to Gaelic games:

What distinguishes us as citizens of this country? You will quickly answer: our native language, native games, our folklore and pastimes. Parents, teachers and educators have the responsibility of inculcating a love for the above into the minds of the young” (Liddy 1973).

In a similar vein, Vaughan (2000, p. 194) was equally critical of the 1971 curriculum for failing to give enough attention “to our national games”. In both cases, an argument was to grant a privileged status for Gaelic games on cultural grounds.

Many interviewees who participated in this study argued for the inclusion of Gaelic games in primary schools on the basis of a particular view of national and cultural identity. Alan’s comment that “Gaelic games are central to who we are” suggested that for many people, an affinity with Gaelic games is a key component of the articulation of a particular form of

national identity. Arthur, a GAA coach, highlighted the part played by teachers in the development of this identity when he commented that:

We are privileged and we are very reliant on the fact that the teachers in general I find are quite nationalistic or patriotic, if you want to use that word, by nature. There is a long history of interaction between teachers in primary schools, the GAA and Cumann na mBunscol

Similarly Chris, a GAA administrator and teacher, remarked that the GAA had been lucky that “most teachers have nationalist views and backgrounds”. Aidan, a Gaelic games development officer, also cited an allegiance to Gaelic games based on nationalism as an important factor: “I suppose a lot of schools have a love and an affiliation to the GAA. They love to see the kids playing the national sport and a national game”. Elaine, an education policy-maker not connected to the GAA, spoke about how “it was part of our national identity to have the game in the primary school system”. She traced this back to the foundation of the state when “the schools are very much part of the core of revitalising the Irish identity, the Irish tradition”. Evan, a teacher, argued that the continuation of these traditional activities was important and he was adamant that Gaelic games activities should be maintained in primary school “because we need to keep our national games alive”. This was important for Kevin also, when he asserted that “it is important for GAA to be a part of the curriculum, as it is part of our history and a unique part of our culture”.

Gabriel spoke about Michael Cusack, a primary teacher and a founder of the GAA in 1884, and asserted that he had “renewed Ireland in a cultural way through the playing of our games and...his whole idea was that Ireland would regain its self-esteem that it had lost”.

Interestingly, while De Burca (1989, p. 54) also mentions “Cusack’s advocacy of the cultural aspects of Irish nationalism”, most of his initial efforts were centred on athletics and not on

hurling or Gaelic football. It would appear that his change of focus was influenced as much by political and cultural reasons as by his allegiance to particular Gaelic games.

Mary asserted that “within most teachers there is still a love of the Irish [language] and promoting your own games and promoting that. So maybe it is not as strong as it used to be traditionally when it was the only sport in school, but it’s still there”. Her final comment on the changing nature of school sport suggested that Gaelic games were becoming less dominant than heretofore. There was a sense that the privileged position of Gaelic games, based on the promotion of national identity, may be under threat. This viewpoint was expressed elsewhere also. In one instance, this was articulated as a potential crisis where the argument centred on a perception that teachers in nationalist communities in Northern Ireland were more committed to the promotion of Gaelic games than their counterparts in the Republic of Ireland: “A determination to promote Gaelic Games on similar [nationalist] origins and beliefs doesn’t exist within the Republic, particularly when working conditions are changed” (Cumann na mBunscol Limerick 2011). The ‘crisis’ in this case was attributed to a deterioration of teachers’ working conditions and it was feared that these altered economic conditions would undermine the commitment of teachers to promote Gaelic games. It is worth noting, however, that this sense of crisis is not new. A GAA official, for example, warned in 1931 that “the promoters of foreign games [in primary schools] were becoming very energetic, and the problem was assuming serious proportions” (Limerick Leader 1931). The expression of this sense of ‘Irishness’ through Gaelic games would appear to be a significant feature of the habituses of the teachers and GAA personnel that participated in this study. The construction of a clear ‘We’ identity through Gaelic games featured prominently in the data and supports the assertion made by Liston and Moreland (2009, p. 127) that “sport is thus inevitably implicated in questions of identity.

Gaelic games as a means to develop school identity

While GAA personnel were keen to justify the inclusion of Gaelic games within the primary school system by focusing on the learning of new skills, many teachers highlighted that school sport, through the medium of Gaelic games was an important factor in the maintenance of school discipline and the establishment of a particular ethos or identity. The opinions expressed by teachers in this study highlighted how these factors underpinned a rationale for promoting school sport and outlined what they consider to be the benefits for the school.

Neill focused on the importance of sport in maintaining discipline and social cohesion in a school. An involvement in games, particularly, was seen as a way of managing the behaviour of children, especially in senior classes. Speaking about his school's involvement in inter-school sports competitions, he noted that "Once there's another game coming up you've so much more control over those classes". Laura's explanation was consistent with this view:

"I think it's easier to discipline the children because you can more or less use sanctions against them: 'If you don't behave yourself now, you can't go with the school team' or 'you can't go out and train', so I think it gives you more clout to discipline the children".

In this scenario, sport was seen to be important tool in the maintenance of control in the school. Paul recalled advice given to him by his first principal noting: "the best way you'll gain respect here in the school is by getting involved with the children in teams and extra-curricular activities". He highlighted the importance of games for the maintenance of a cohesive school environment as they contributed to the child's social integration within the school and local community:

Playing games in school, and then playing with the club, they're forming identities, forming friendships...I think it's crucially important and it's wonderful that children would participate in school and outside.

Neil reiterated this when he commented that "the kids are together they are doing it for the school, there is a spirit there". These teachers valued what they saw as the benefits of representative sport for their schools. Being involved in sport generally, and Gaelic games specifically, was a trait of "the established" (Dunning and Hughes 2013, p. 63) group in the school.

The teachers justified their promotion of Gaelic games in cultural and historical terms and saw it much more than just involvement in a game. Participation in Gaelic games was seen as important as it enabled schools to connect with the local community. Orla described the importance of the school-club link programme as "bringing your school out into the community, and the community back into the school". Paul also acknowledged the benefits of situations where "the school is feeding into the club, and whatever is being done in the school is being developed in the club". He argued that "you're trying to develop children who'll develop habits that they'll bring to their later lives – being part of a club...that's very important and can be fostered". Kevin talked about a "strong culture of Gaelic games" in his school and central to that tradition was a close relationship with the local GAA club. As there are no other sports clubs in the community, the link provided the children with "something for them to feel part of the community and feel part of the parish". A child's involvement in sport was regarded as something positive that should be encouraged. This group of teachers and coaches share the common perception that the positive effects of PE and sport "will occur automatically" (Bailey 2006, p. 399).

Maintaining a Gaelic games ethos in a changing society

The development of a strong sense of ‘pride of place’ has been a characteristic of how the GAA has come to occupy such an influential position in Irish society. In this way, the GAA has established “a sense of communal coherence” that has been “based on the co-option of intense local loyalties into a wider sense of national identity” (Lee 1989, pp. 80-81).

Elaine highlighted the close association between GAA clubs, primary schools and the notion of parish identity. In her opinion, the GAA’s work to develop a community presence has “helped to imbed the games in the psyche of the country”. Robert, a school principal, echoed these sentiments in a way that emphasised the impact of the local community on the overall development of the child:

The most important thing about Gaelic games is a sense of identity. It is identified with your school, parish and for instance if you have grown up in this parish you become part of the GAA family. The Gaelic games thing is not just a game.

Kevin made a similar point, but specified that this was particularly strong in rural areas:

I think, particularly in rural areas where there is a tradition of the GAA being involved with the local school, there is such a link because of the whole existence of the parish system¹⁴ within the GAA.

Tina, a teacher, and Vincent, a GAA games manger, both mentioned that many schools were considered “good GAA schools”, and that this was an attractive characteristic for many parents who valued this “GAA ethos”. Patrick, a GAA coach, suggested that this strong community link placed an onus on the school to promote Gaelic games: “Because the GAA is a pillar in every community there is an obligation on the school to organise the games”.

¹⁴ GAA club catchment areas are based on the Roman Catholic parish system. Players must play for the club within the parish where they reside

Louise, a principal teacher with no affiliations to the GAA, while welcoming the contribution of the local club, also believed that there was pressure from the local community to promote Gaelic games.

Perceptions that the GAA's traditional position of strength in primary schools is under threat were touched on in the last section. The process of urbanization in Ireland was deemed to be a factor in this regard, as it was believed that the type of community identity fostered in rural areas was more difficult to replicate in towns and cities. As one group expressed it, "Anonymous urban sprawl is the antithesis of the type of community in which the GAA thrives" (Cumann na mBunscol Ath Cliath 2013). This notion of identity, based on pride of place, has been central to the development of the organisation. Aidan outlined a contrast between the stereotypical "small rural school where you will have a teacher who generally has some involvement with the club" and "a big urban school where you will have a minimum number of teachers catering for big numbers of people". Irrespective of whether or not these stereotypes are accurate, the suspicion that there is a 'problem' in urban schools is widespread. Ian's concern was that children in urban areas were not able to identify their local GAA clubs and had stronger links with rival sporting organisations. Michael's perspective was different as he argued that some urban clubs, with large catchments areas, had neither the capacity nor the interest to actively encourage children from minority groups to become involved in Gaelic games.

A trend towards urbanisation has been evident since the foundation of the Irish state in 1921 when around 70% of the population were classed as rural dwellers (Byrne 2012). By 2002, 60% of Irish people were living in towns with populations of greater than 1500 (Bannon 2004). This demographic shift has considerable implications for the continuation of a Gaelic games ethos that is based on close connections between a primary school and a local club. Gabriel feared that the GAA might become a predominantly rural organisation, as it struggles

to adapt its recruitment strategies in response to the changing social structures that arise from this process of urbanization.

Skill learning as a justification for Gaelic games

Although many interviewees, particularly teachers, used national identity to justify their promotion of Gaelic games in primary schools, there were some attempts by GAA personnel to argue for the inclusion of these activities based on the potential for children to learn an array of relevant sports skills.

Aidan offered a justification for the inclusion of Gaelic games coaching in primary schools, proposing that the skills learned by children can be transferred to other activities:

I suppose the other thing is that the teacher understands that the fundamental of every sport is the same. If they come out and do the fun games and the enjoyable games and activities with them then they are doing a job for every sport. They are teaching them the basic fundamental movements, and every sport will benefit from the type of session our coaches are doing with the kids, that it is not just Gaelic football. Actually is it a broad spectrum of sports and other sports will improve because of the work we do with them.

This viewpoint appears to be based on the assumption that PE and sport are the same, while at the same time defending the dominance of Gaelic games activities within the content choice.

Using Gaelic games to assist in the development of fundamental movement skills (FMS) was a common argument put forward by GAA coaches and development officers. Fiona spoke about how “the basic skills of hurling and camogie will set you up for life with whatever sport you want to do”. Gerard mentioned the need to develop “flexibility, agility and

movement” skills through an organised programme. Ian’s rationale for the promotion of Gaelic games centred on the idea that these games offered a broader range of skills than other sports:

It exposes them to more movements than others do because they are complex games. They are not simple games. There is more coordination, handpassing, catching, kicking as opposed to just throwing it and booting it on the ground.

These comments suggest general support for the development of a comprehensive FMS programme provided that the chosen skills are connected to Gaelic games, and that this focus on Gaelic games would benefit children in the longer term because of the presumption that there was a degree of skill transferability to other activities. Writing about Australia, Swabey and Penney (2011) describe how the promotion of initiatives such as FMS development have facilitated particular groups within the policy making process to achieve broader political goals. In Ireland, it would appear that the GAA has been successful in carving out a niche for Gaelic games through the development of FMS and physical activity initiatives in Irish primary schools.

The Role of the Principal

Context

There are 3,159 primary schools in the Republic of Ireland (Department of Education and Skills 2012c), and the school principal occupies a key leadership and management role within the school (Drea and O Brien 2002). In 1,920 schools (60.8%) the principal combines this managerial role with the teaching of a class (Department of Education and Skills 2012a). This occurs in schools with up to eight teachers (Department of Education and Skills 2012d). Drea and O Brien (2002, p. 26) suggest that one particular indicator of success in the role of principal is “evidence of a positive learning environment as measured through attainment in

academic, social, cultural, sporting and other norms”. Current figures indicate that only 13.9% of primary teachers are male (Department of Education and Skills 2012a) representing a decline from 30% in 1970 (Irish National Teachers Organisation 2004). Nevertheless, a majority of principalships were occupied by men until 2000 but this dropped to 47% in 2004 (Irish National Teachers Organisation 2004; O Connor 2007) and 35% in 2013 (Office of the Department of Education and Skills 2013). While male teachers still hold a disproportionate numbers of principalships, the rapid decline in recent years has had implications for the GAA community who adhere to the viewpoint that the presence of a male principal is crucial for the promotion of Gaelic sport.

Expectations

Given the historically strong connections between the GAA and schools it is not surprising that, in many situations, parents and club members expect the principal will play an active part in the promotion of Gaelic games within the school. Brendan recalled how expectations in the community were very high when a new principal was appointed to the local primary school. It was presumed he would promote Gaelic games heavily:

His replacement was a man seen as a serious recruit. Indeed a lot of boys left [a neighbouring school] to come there upon his appointment. The expectation was that he would run an academy like [a principal in a neighbouring school] but it never happened.

In a similar vein Robert, a principal himself, was highly critical of a principal employed in a neighbouring school because “he didn’t play ball” with the local GAA club. Robert had close ties with that club, and the general feeling within the club was that the new principal had failed to promote Gaelic games sufficiently. Mary suggested that, particularly in smaller

schools, the principal is “expected” by members of local clubs to lead school Gaelic games activities.

John, remembering his own school days commented: “I was very fortunate in the school I went to because the principal was big into sport and so it was all sport, sport, sport and we were very fortunate that we got to play a lot of sport”. He contrasted his experience as a visiting coach to the same school where “the principal at the moment wouldn’t be into sport so you know”. His primary concern was about the possible negative impact on the local club:

The club would be missing out. If you have a teacher who is big into sport you will see that with the clubs underage system, you will see the success. If you have the principal on board and they are into sport you will see it

Orla articulated a similar view that places the requirements of the local club in a central and privileged position: “If the GAA community want to go into a school and they say, ‘sure that principal has no interest in sport’ and it actually puts them off a lot”. These comments illustrate the complex power balances that exist in communities where teachers are expected to promote particular activities. The teachers with a strong background in Gaelic games who participated in this study were generally uncritical of these expectations, and sought to strengthen the links with the local club. Being a GAA teacher was “second nature” (Ken Green 2002b, p. 67) to them, and was a trait they were proud of. Indeed, they are critical of teachers who did not share the same values.

The principal as leader

Participants in this research identified the role played by principals as important in the selection and promotion of school sport activities. When discussing how different schools prioritised different activities, Laura argued that “it depends too on what the principal is in favour of, you know?” The part played by principals in promoting the Gaelic games culture

of a school was highlighted by class teachers, coaches and principals themselves. Kevin suggested that “the culture has to be set by the teachers and particularly by the principal in the school”. Declan articulated a key role for the principal as ‘gatekeeper’ for Gaelic games in the school: “It depends primarily...on the principal’s view of Gaelic games: does that principal give Gaelic games precedence, or a place at all in the primary school curriculum?” Kevin’s comments are similar, in outlining that:

Ultimately the principal has to be driving it [an interest in Gaelic games] and has to be ensuring that teachers are first of all out there, and second of all are going to be up-skilled.

Ronan, in praising his principal’s support of Gaelic games, ascribes a quasi-religious significance to this support when he comments “We’re lucky that the bossman has the faith”. He was delighted to have a principal who supported his efforts to promote a Gaelic games ethos in the school.

The principal’s ideological preferences are emphasized when Neill argued that:

The only one who can do it is the principal and... I consider it important that we have games for kids; I consider it important that the school has a team and that we would play these games, they’re Irish games and that it’s important for kids to run, jump, be active and that I believe doing it through our own national games is very important...the principal can do that and I don’t think any other teacher can.

Orla reflected on how a principal can set criteria for new teacher appointments in a school. By identifying particular requirements for the school- an interest in languages, music or games had been important for her during recent appointments- the principal can encourage the selection of candidates who can make a particular contribution to extra-curricular activities.

Robert commented on the difference between the role of the class teacher and the principal. Becoming principal enabled him to become fully involved in the activities of Cumann na mBunscol as before he was isolated from the organisation:

You are not involved with the decision-making or involved with the organisational [aspects of school sport]. You are kind of the boy and when you are treated as the boy you don't get to engage with Cumann na mBunscol. So it was only when I became Principal myself and became my own man, shall we say, that I got the chance then to get involved

Mary felt a lot of the work involved in organising activities was left to the principal, who frequently did not get enough support from other staff members:

I suppose there has been a lot of extra work put on the principals of small schools, and in the main I would say 90% of principals of small schools are the people who are promoting GAA. So you know if they have too many things to do, like I know if I stopped doing it in my school there is nobody to do it, even though there are 3 other staff there. I am not saying they are not able to do it, but there is nobody else that would take it on. At a recent blitz all the teachers there were principals; even an administrative principal said he couldn't get a member of staff to go

Neil suggests that the promotion of Gaelic games is dependent on the principal: "the principal is vital. I think that if the principal doesn't promote the game, the game won't be promoted. If the principal isn't interested the chances of the game happening are nil". Evan, a school principal and Cumann na mBunscol administrator, mentioned that "we have schools [in the area] where the principal has no interest whatsoever in Gaelic games. They are entering competitions but it is an uphill struggle for the teacher." He gave a specific example of a principal who was not supportive of school sport in general. This was leading to difficulties

for the teacher who wanted to develop an extra-curricular games programme but had to organise all games strictly after school time. In his view, this principal was “a problem”, for not allowing games to take place during the school day.

Nigel’s comments go further, arguing that Gaelic games activities are heavily dependent on the efforts of male teachers. He indicated that, in his area, “in about 85% [of the schools] the responsibility for Gaelic games is either that of the male Principal or a senior male teacher”. This view is countered by Robert’s assertion that “I have met the finest of woman principals who have a fantastic interest in Gaelic games”. Nevertheless, the perception that the presence of a male principal is important is prevalent among coaches. While Alan, for example, compliments the enthusiasm of female teachers in promoting Gaelic games, he suggests “the only place where there may be a small difference is the actual getting out and doing the coaching on the ground especially with the boys. Where there is a male teacher involved there is more done with the team side of things in the schools.”

The principal, as a school leader and member of the Board of Management, has a central role in the formulation and implementation of policy for his or her school. One facet of that is the acceptance of external personnel to support aspects of curriculum delivery and the promotion of particular extra-curricular activities. Alan, a coaching administrator, mentioned the importance of dealing with principals who were supportive of his programme and suggested that the children made more progress when the principal actively backed the work of the coaches:

The schools where the principals are very supportive, the difference in the [interest] levels of the kids is very clear. In general the principals are very supportive, it’s just you would know the difference between the ones who have a big interest and the rest

Vincent acknowledged that the principal's potential role in the promotion of Gaelic games is "huge", and warns that "if they have had a bad experience with the GAA they will close the door and we have had situations like that, that the doors of the schools have been closed to the GAA coaches so it had a huge effect on how we do".

The Teacher

The Role of the teacher

The caricature of the Irish primary teacher devoting time to extracurricular activities after school, and contributing to other community activities also, is a common one. Many of the interviewees defined the overall role of the primary teacher as much as by what happens outside formal curriculum time as by what happens within it. Gabriel, a GAA administrator and former teacher, described how teachers have, traditionally, contributed to an extensive range of activities:

Teachers give a massive amount in the areas of music and drama and games.

Teachers give a massive amount of hours, millions of hours voluntarily to communities in all kinds of areas.

This is a view that is supported by Elaine, who suggested that teachers "are part of the community, they are not strictly 9am to 2.30pm workers". She elaborated on this point by arguing that the extra-curricular commitment is largely unquantifiable, but an integral part of the teachers' role in a school:

There is that dimension of teachers' work that is not quantified. It never has been and in one way I would argue maybe should not be, because it is part of the essence of being a teacher... I would hope that the engagements in extracurricular activities will still remain part of our culture in Ireland

This description of the teacher's role aligns very closely with an identification of primary teaching as a vocation. Orla commented that finding candidates who had a commitment to extracurricular activities would be important when she was recruiting new staff. In particular, having additional expertise "in languages, music or games" would top her list of priorities. Robert, describing teachers' contribution to school sport in particular, also argued that this additional involvement was an integral part of their role and expressed disdain for the teacher left school immediately at school closure time. He articulated a "taken-for-granted" (Ken Green 2003, p. 5) view that commitment to extra-curricular activities was deeply engrained in a particular group of teacher. He considered teachers who did not share this commitment to be part of an outsider group:

They [wider society] do expect it, and they are entitled to that. I would consider it part of their job that you just can't push that aside and say – that has nothing to do with me. If you want to be a complete teacher you just cannot...walk out the door at ten past three.

This characterization is illustrative of the traditional expectation that teachers should devote time to extra-curricular activities in general. Ian, a GAA Games Manager, expresses a solution that encapsulates the stereotypical gendered thinking within the GAA: "if the male teacher isn't a GAA man you have to find someone to do it, and it is up to the GAA to equip the clubs and to get them to come in and do it". Effectively, he is using the gender imbalance in teaching to justify the deployment of coaches in primary schools.

Teacher biography and the commitment to games' promotion

The personal biographies of the teachers in this study featured strongly in their commitment to school sport. Peter's background in Gaelic games, strongly inspired by his father, had a significant influence on his promotion of school sport. The games were "a huge part of my

upbringing”, and “formed a lot of my values”. Hurling, in particular, became a significant part of his identity: “From a very early age, the hurl¹⁵ became part of who I was, as extension of my arm”. Mary’s home environment was also influential: “Well I suppose like most people we had the tradition at home of listening to the Gaelic games on the radio”. Liam commented that “the love of the game, it all came from childhood”. Orla’s father was also a significant influence on her early development and she described home as “a strong GAA household”. Neill’s interest in Gaelic games was also rooted in his childhood, as he had started playing “because there was nothing else to do”. This interest was sustained through his primary school days and although “we never won a game, we had great fun”. Brendan’s interest in school sport could also be traced back to his own primary school experiences. For Brendan, the motivation to coach comes from a desire to give “the players chances at school to really improve hurling and football that I never got in primary school”.

At a later stage, his biography influenced Peter’s interest in coaching. His comments suggested a sense of inevitability in the way that this interest developed:

“I always had an interest in teaching so I went down that road and I suppose as a man in that profession, an interest in Gaelic games, the natural progression was to get involved in coaching young people”

The comments also reflect a stereotypical view that male primary teachers, who have a background in Gaelic games themselves, are expected to promote the games in school.

Gabriel’s comments underline this:

I started coaching when I was in college as a student and I really don’t know where it came from but I suppose we always played and the opportunity came and I went into first year in college and taught at schools as a teacher, I presumed that’s just what a teacher did

¹⁵ A ‘hurl’ or ‘hurley’ is similar to a hockey stick and used in the game of hurling

Orla expressed a similar view: “I’ve been coaching since forever and I suppose the interest is coming from home, as well as being part of my job”. The complexity of this situation is illustrated in Tina’s comments:

As I was playing with the County and when I was involved with my club, I suppose it was kind of natural for me when I went for my interview it was one of the things [help with school coaching] I offered to do it and when I got it - I suppose it wasn’t expected of me to do it but I was happy enough to do it anyway because I knew what I was at but I suppose it is a given now if you can play that you are able coach but it is not always the way.

She regarded her own elite participation as a positive attribute when being interviewed for a teaching position, but acknowledged that being able to play is not necessarily an indication of being able to coach. Nevertheless there appeared to be a degree of inevitability about her involvement: “*obviously* when I started teaching then I would have got involved with the school teams” [italics added].

The perception that male religious teachers would promote Gaelic games was highlighted in Declan’s comments: “I am a former Christian brother so I suppose the love of the games was part of my early teacher training and I just got involve in coaching games in school”. For Robert, the connection between GAA membership and his contributions to extra-curricular activities were inextricably linked:

As a GAA person you don’t ever count it in an amount of hours. You never count that time. It is part of your job and you see it as part of your job. Even though it is not written in your contract it is part of your job because you grew up with it.

This relationship was also emphasised by Elaine:

the GAA has supported teachers themselves and then a lot of teachers themselves would have been players as they grew, so there is a combination of a number of factors that have made it quite strong in our school system.

Patrick added the rural dimension, noting “you would get a lot of teachers that would be from a rural background and from a GAA background as well.” The background of these teachers, typically grounded in early positive experiences of the GAA, appear to have been influential in their commitment to promote Gaelic games as part of their teaching commitments.

A hidden curriculum

Teachers’ comments in the previous section are noteworthy in the context of what type of activities might form part of a ‘hidden’ curriculum. Kirk (1992) has suggested that this concept “deals with the invisible or opaque forces that, together with the official and visible programs of teaching and learning, create the dynamic of educational activity”. Given the strong commitment of a sizeable group of teachers to Gaelic games, it is not surprising that these activities have come to occupy a significant place in Irish primary schools.

In Nigel’s wide-ranging justification for time spent on team games, he articulates values for these activities that are difficult to quantify:

It teaches them how to win, how to lose, how to compete, how to be part of a team game as opposed to an individual game, learning the opposite to being selfish, to be generous in sport and accept your own limitations and that you can all contribute something very meaningful. We mustn’t forget the value that sport has on well-being, on health. Teaching them [about] diet. Teaching them [about] the value of exercise. The body yearns for exercise. The mind yearns for stimulation in terms of problem solving. We talk about the holistic approach in the curriculum. That is it in a nut shell really.

It is a theme that features in the interview data from other teachers also, and is inextricably linked to the idea that Gaelic games, in particular, are valued elements of school ethos. Paul's comments back this up:

So it starts with...you know where in the curriculum it says it's spiral, so can almost see that in how Gaelic games impact on children in a spiral way during their educational development. They're developing skills, but they're also life skills: how to make friends and to socialize and to interact, and you can't underestimate that.

Similarly, Orla argues that the playing of Gaelic games is an integral part of school life:

Well first of all, because it's not just a game. Gaelic games are part of the Irish culture, so you have so many different subject areas incorporated. I suppose the first thing is that children just love playing games, number one, but there's a sense of Irish identity, there's putting on the school jersey, the club jersey and they all want to wear the county jersey. It's cross-curricular, it covers everything.

Neil emphasizes the life skills that are learned during games participation and, to an extent, elevates this learning to a level higher than formal lessons within the classroom:

I think the games are very important: you learn so much from playing a game. Like that game the girls lost in the camogie final - when I spoke to them afterwards I said "look it this is what life is like, sometimes things go wrong, people make mistakes, people do nasty things and that is part of life" and I think you can learn a lot from games that you won't learn in other areas as quickly nowadays

These comments are underpinned by an assumption that all children value the ethos of team games, particularly when representing the school is involved. They do not appear, however, to consider the implications for children who are not selected to play.

Changing model of activities and the impact on the school day

The organisation of school Gaelic games fixtures has undergone a significant change in recent years. While school competitions traditionally took place directly after school, in the evenings or, less frequently, at weekends, there has been a distinct change in practice in the past decade. Increasingly, school fixtures are being organised during school time with implications for other school activities. There is a lack of empirical data detailing these changes. However, data gathered during an internal 2008 Cumann na mBunscol audit suggest that at least 44% of regular season games, and 35% of finals, take place during the school day. Before examining how this may impact on the school timetable, the reasons why this change has occurred are explored. Evan suggests that the change is partly due to a desire of teachers to avoid an extension of the school day: “I suppose teachers don’t want to stay on after three o’ clock in the evening, they want it to be built into the school day”. Paul outlines a similar view: “giving up time after school is difficult. People have their own commitments, and it’s not easy going after school”. This is backed up by Laura when she expresses her view that the issue is particularly problematic for female teachers:

Well I know from the early years on I was teaching that they always took place after school, but then it kind of gradually changed. I suppose, with more women teachers and they had family to go home to, and a lot of it now takes place during school time. I think it’s probably no harm really because it is hard for women if they have children at home, staying on until all hours after school. It’s not on really, you know?

These comments raise particular issues about gender and the divide between teachers’ private and professional lives that will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter eight. Mary suggests that children’s dependence on the school bus service for transport home has been a key reason for scheduling games during school time. Similarly, Tina’s comments outline how the

inflexibility of parents' schedules has impacted on her school's decisions on the organisation of extra-curricular activities:

So if it was after school I would reckon that we wouldn't have as many numbers and, as well, parents having set schedules I wouldn't know if they would be able to bring them. Like, myself and other teachers would often have to drop them back to their house because they would have no way home otherwise.

Evan's career experience over thirty years ago, when all games and training took place after school, contrasts markedly from the current situation where "the vast majority of teachers want it done during school time". This perspective suggests that, in conjunction with other societal changes, the characterization of teaching as a vocation is changing to one where professional contracts are to the fore.

Neil offers another reason for playing games during school time:

Well I personally think that school time is the best time to have it and I have played both. In the beginning when I was here everything was in the evening and honest to god it was tribal warfare. You would go up to a field and there was no referee and maybe you had to referee it yourself and you just can't referee your own team. And you have all these parents on the side line whereas when it's during school time at least you have some control over the parents that are with you

This viewpoint highlights two key issues. Firstly, it hints at the 'win at all costs' mentality that has prevailed in youth Gaelic games activities until very recently. Secondly, it expresses a desire by teachers to maintain control over the organisation of extra-curricular activities in the context of tensions with parents and the wider GAA community.

These teachers' comments help to increase our understanding of why there has been an increase in the number of games played during school time. There is some resistance to this process, however. Nigel argues for the retention of the traditional format of after-school fixtures as "we don't want to upset the relationship that we would have with the Principals and the Board of Management of those schools". Paul is also keen to avoid disruption to the school day, but acknowledges that his view is a minority one:

I, personally, whenever I can, try to do things after school but the Cumann na mBunscol ethos is to play them within school time so I keep to that, but if I had my own way, I'd like to leave them until after school

His position as a teaching principal influences his point of view, as he is concerned that his absence from the school will have negative outcomes:

I know the movement within the Cumann na mBunscol organisation has been to play [games] during school time, but that's challenging, in that I generally go with the teams and that means I'm leaving anyone who's not on the teams behind with the teachers, you know, the day you're gone is often the day that something will kick-off or something will happen.

His concerns are two-fold: firstly, there is the issue of what to do with the children who are not on the school team. The competitive nature of these fixtures means that not all of the children in senior classes will be selected to travel to the game, particularly in large schools. By leaving some children behind, an image of the school team as an elite unit is cultivated. Furthermore, both sets of children (the players and non-players) are missing out on curriculum time. Neil outlines a situation where a teacher in his school complained about the amount of time devoted to team games during the final term. She was concerned that children in her class were missing out:

At this time of the year we spend a lot of time going to games and we are using more than the discretionary time and more than the 1 hour for PE, but I have had complaints from the 5th class teacher who said she won't get the curriculum covered if they keep playing games

His response was that "the games are more important as the children are learning a lot from them...I would consider them to be part of the curriculum". The concerns raised by the class teacher about the impact of school fixtures on the formal curriculum were countered by the principal's view that the games programme was a sufficiently important part of the school life to override these concerns. This view is supported in Evan's comments, when he makes a case for the time spent on extra-curricular activities:

When fellas leave school you know afterwards they don't remember the amount of time they spent trying to learn Irish and English and maths, they remember the time you took them for games and the school tours and you went swimming with them and games, that's what they remember

Secondly, another teacher has to supervise the children who are not playing, potentially causing disruption in their own classrooms. Evan concedes that playing games during school time can cause difficulties for schools, particularly smaller ones, and acknowledges that "you depend a lot on the good will of teachers who don't go to games to look after your class while you are away". In that context, Robert expresses a concern that teachers are becoming more reluctant to allow curriculum time to be eroded by sports activities:

My experience is that the younger Principals and especially female Principals are very hesitant to give the time that more experienced teachers are. They feel they are almost a slave to the curriculum

These comments fail to acknowledge the extent to which competitive extra-curricular activities may favour a minority of students (Ken Green 2008; Penney and Harris 1997). The organisation of games during school time intensifies this imbalance.

School communities are certainly becoming more conscious that issues arising from extra-curricular activities need to be addressed. In order to overcome these problems, schools devise local arrangements to minimize disruption. Orla acknowledges the dilemma faced by schools, and outlines what she does to address it:

What we try to do here to minimize the disruption is to get our boys and girls playing on the same day...So for example our home games last year, we managed to get them all, boys and girls, playing on one afternoon, so really all the top half of the school was below at the pitch. So it worked very well from that point of view. Otherwise, it can be difficult.

In Tina's school, the games are usually fixed for the afternoon, so the children "never miss more than an hour at school". Nevertheless, it would appear some teachers consider that playing games during school time has a negative impact on general curriculum time and on the PE curriculum at specific times of the year. The tensions arising from attempts to challenge the dominance of competitive game structures will be dealt with in the next section.

Organisation of school competitions

Gaelic games competitions organised by Cumann na mBunscol dominate the inter-school competitive sports scene in Irish primary schools. In the forthcoming section, the attitudes of teachers towards representative school games are explored.

Competitive versus participatory models

Cumann na mBunscol activities have traditionally been based on a format of competitive league games, culminating with a relatively high profile county finals. Recent GAA policy initiatives have sought to replace this format with a more inclusive structure based on non-competitive blitzes. As we have seen in the previous chapter, these proposed changes have met with stiff resistance from groups of teachers. Data generated during the semi-structured interviews with teachers suggests they hold a diverse range of views on this issue.

It is in the approach to the organisation of competitions that the greatest diversity of teacher opinion could be seen. Brendan recalled a conversation he had with another teacher where a trophy awarded at the conclusion of a competition was described as “a weapon of mass destruction”. For that teacher, a highly competitive ethos had an extremely negative impact on the school sport experience. Brendan pointed out that he was radically opposed to this view, and favoured a mixed approach where non-competitive blitzes were organised in conjunction with formal competitions. Orla’s view was broadly similar, noting that “the competition element is important; I think there’s a place for both”. She stressed the need to modify competitive structures to suit the developmental needs of children, and spoke negatively about teachers who were overly competitive:

we need to educate the competitive people to realise that the ideal is not to go out to hammer a team, the ideal is to give everyone a fair game...competition is fine as long as it’s managed well.

Roy, however, in describing the local rivalry that is sometimes evident comments that “a lot of staunch GAA teachers like to beat the neighbouring school, and to beat them well”.

Paul’s approach to competition displayed a significant change of emphasis during his teaching career. During his early career, preparing extremely competitive teams was

important “because as a new principal you’re trying to build up the reputation of the school”. He described returning home after matches “with a thumping headache”, wondering “what’s the point of this?” Having reflected on these experiences over a period of time, his approach is now more “child-centred” with an emphasis on enjoyment, both for himself and the children. Despite this philosophical change, he still enters teams in formal competitions but gave examples of children who loved participating in internal school leagues but “wouldn’t touch the school hurling team because of the competitive nature of the Cumann na mBunscol games”. Paul acknowledged that competitive games have some positive aspects:

Well, look, I’ve won titles myself, and it generates a sense of pride in the school and of excitement that it brings and parents are proud to have them playing and love to see them playing in finals

Despite this, he now favoured a series of non-competitive blitzes where all children could play. By adopting such a structure he saw no need to continue with the existing competitive model, but conceded, he probably wouldn’t receive “whole scale” support for this idea. Neill cited examples of teachers using abusive language towards referees as a negative component of the competitive structure and admitted that it was “very hard to change” that mind-set. Nevertheless, he believed that “if you don’t have a final at the end of the day...I don’t think schools will bother taking part”.

The teachers who had the closest connections to GAA and Cumann na mBunscol national policy development each articulated arguments that were highly critical of the traditional competitive structures. Kevin spoke of the potential negative consequences where a “school wins the county final but there are ten children who didn’t get the opportunity to play”. While three teachers were in favour of the participatory model advocated in national GAA policy, the other four argued for a twin track approach that featured a formal competition along with

blitzes that involved maximum participation. Even within this latter group, however, the underlying philosophies showed marked differences. For Brendan, the formal competition took precedence, with blitzes organised as an additional activity for those children who didn't make the school team. In his view, "you need a situation, to a certain degree, where everyone gets a game, but you're holding back your good fellas". Elite talent identification was important for him.

The impact of competition on children's participation levels

A number of interviewees were concerned about the potential negative impact of competitive structures on children. This was seen to be an issue that highlights the difference between small and large schools. In small schools, the lack of numbers usually meant that almost all children were required to play, as exemplified by Laura:

I was teaching in a small school and every child played on the team because I might only have 14 in my class, 7 boys 7 girls. So I'd field the teams, that they'd all just go out and play and they'd enjoy themselves. They didn't win all the time, but it was just taking part really that mattered and I suppose getting respect too on the side-line from parents and supporters is very important as well.

Mary's comments illustrated a very different situation in some large schools:

But in the bigger schools obviously they have bigger numbers and there is competition for places. I did hear this year of a school having trials, internal school trials, and announcing the panel at assemblies and having children at assembly crying because they didn't make the panel

Similarly, Elaine warns about the competitive format: "The possible down side is when schools have teams entering competitions, that it would only be the select few that get to play

and represent their school". Some teachers and coaches try to address this issue. John's solution was to play a game including all the subs when the official game was over:

Even if there was 18 aside we tried to play them all and give them all a game at some stage, so get everyone on the field... that only happened in two of the schools that we played because the other school just went away when the match was over.

While this was a limited attempt to include more children in the game, it was subject to the co-operation of the other team, and the large-sided nature of the arrangement was unlikely to provide less-skilled children with opportunities to increase their proficiency (Wein 2007).

The influence of external groups

The emphasis within Cumann na mBunscol on county finals confers a significant degree of importance to these occasions within the broader school community. While this can be beneficial for schools in terms of their involvement in high profile, exciting events, there may be unforeseen consequences in the way parents and coaches, rather than teachers, assume responsibility, as described by Gerard:

I have even seen instances out there where I would feel sorry for the teachers. I have seen quite good female teachers out there and when it gets to final days, in particular keenly fought finals days, they are almost on the fringe. I would have seen two or three girls out there who would have been excellent in preparing kids all year, but some of the parents, some of the daddies of good kids, took over. They certainly don't have the tact that the teachers would have. They start shouting at kids and taking kids off for the wrong reasons.

In this example, (male) parents' assumptions of sports knowledge and expertise adversely affected the involvement of teachers and children. Mary suggested that the removal of

competitive games at club level had caused more club coaches to seek to be involved in their local schools' competitions:

We saw some teams who maybe won matches this year in the final that they didn't celebrate with the teacher they went to the club man. I suppose within the club matches anyway they're not competing for a trophy in the club scene, so maybe with the Cumann na mBunscol competitions, they had a little of a chance of getting a trophy. There was a little bit of an honour there where they weren't getting the same at underage club level

In essence, the retention of the traditional structures within Cumann na mBunscol may have provided club coaches with an opportunity to remain involved in a competitive format, at a time when that opportunity had been removed from their clubs. This is an unforeseen outcome of the removal of competitive structures by the GAA at club level while they have been retained by Cumann na mBunscol in schools. While the GAA has been able to have policy implemented to a significant degree within its own club structures, the resistance provided by Cumann na mBunscol has, to date, led to an anomalous situation where competitive and participatory models co-exist. Significantly, in the wake of this opposition, the GAA has modified the terms of the Go Games directive to allow for formal competitions at the senior end of primary school. In effect, the “multipolar” (Dunning and Hughes 2013, p. 67) power balances that exist within and between these organisations has contributed to differences between policy and practice, along with contested interpretation.

Summary

These four sections have outlined the part played by teachers in the promotion of Gaelic games in primary schools. The personal biographies of teachers who are positively disposed to Gaelic games suggest that an interest in these games has been evident from a very young

age. Teachers have traditionally devoted considerable amounts of their own time to coaching and games promotion activities in their schools. While this continues to be the case, there is also a noticeable trend towards integrating these activities into the school day, with a number of unforeseen consequences for the way the formal curriculum time is allotted. The data generated in this study suggest that principal teachers have an influential leadership role in shaping how school sport is organised and prioritised.

The Coach

Introduction

In Chapter 6, the organisation of the GAA's school coaching network was examined. In this section, the focus is the impact of the coaches on PE and school sport. In the first part, an overview is provided of what coaches do in schools. The data suggest that coaches are entrusted with the delivery of significant portions of the PE curriculum. The second part deals with issues concerning coaches' levels of expertise, and questions if they are sufficiently skilled to teach lessons of an appropriate quality.

The role of the coach in primary schools

There appears to be a general acceptance by teachers that coaches provide a valuable service. John, a coach, commented that the teachers "were delighted to see me coming in". Tina, a teacher, noted the coaches' ability to impart technical skills in activities where some teachers might not feel confident: "I know the First Class teachers are delighted because they wouldn't be as comfortable teaching hurling as someone that comes in".

The role of the professional GAA coach is focused on skill development for all children rather than team preparation. As a result, it involves a presence in the school during the school day and the coaches' contributions are embedded within formal curriculum time. This sees the coach involved with the official curricular content. As Elaine, an education policy

maker, explained, “We know anecdotally that there is a tendency for it to happen that the coach becomes the PE [teacher] and yet it is only one dimension of the PE curriculum”. Alan, a coach administrator, presented an alternative justification for the use of coaches in primary schools. For him, the coach’s role is akin to that of a specialist PE teacher: “Teachers probably wouldn’t be doing PE at all because of a lack of confidence. That’s why the coaching schemes are so important”. While issues regarding the expertise of coaches will be dealt with later in this chapter, Alan’s comment is also relevant in the context of the wider debate on the confidence and competence of the generalist teacher to teach PE to a sufficiently high standard (Carney and Howells 2008; Timothy Lynch 2013; Morgan and Bourke 2008).

The interview data illustrates the diversity of GAA coaches’ contributions to the PE programme. Arthur’s experience as a coach suggests that his contribution forms part of the children’s PE experience:

Sometimes they would embrace it [GAA coaching scheme] as part of the PE program but generally I find that they still have their own PE program and they devote time [to it]; I don’t know if there is a contradiction there, but they do allocate half an hour or three quarters of an hour to take their own class [per week]

Colm, on the other hand, felt that the coaching programme was considered to be PE in most schools: “I think most schools in the last number of years in particular would have seen the GAA as part of their main PE hour as such”. Fiona agrees when she comments that “my impression would be that, yes, the coaching that would be coming in would be substituting [for] PE hours”. Liam is of a similar view: “The term when it is in place...most teachers use it as their PE time”. Paul, a school principal confirmed that in his school the coach’s work constituted the children’s PE programme. Robert, another principal, agreed that in his

experience that the coaching programme replaced the PE curriculum for its duration. In Walter's school, the coach delivers a 30 minute coaching session weekly for a six to eight week period and this is considered to be part of the children's PE provision. Although he stressed that "most teachers" teach an additional lesson each week, he admitted that some didn't "due to time pressures". In terms of planning, the teachers write 'Coaching' in the PE section of their monthly reports, and this practice had not been questioned during a recent WSE. From the teachers' point of view, the coaches are delivering elements of the PE curriculum and in this case at least, that DES inspectorate does regard this as a problem. These practices raise questions about what content is valued within PE, and how certain activities are prioritised.

Patrick, one of the first full-time GAA coaches, described the varied nature of the practices he encountered:

You would get some schools where there was no PE done. I would come across teachers who would say that this [the coaching programme] was the only exercise that kids would get. You would get other schools where it would be completely independent of the PE. It had the full spectrum.

Arthur outlined how he modified his programme to cater for specific class groupings, "generally speaking it is from 1st to 3rd class", based on the wishes of the host schools that require him to "come in and provide a service". In his view, the 'service' is to teach particular elements of the PE curriculum.

From these data it can be concluded that the contribution of the GAA coaching takes up a considerable amount of PE time at particular times of the year. Furthermore, it is unclear whether or not the practice of these coaches is aligned with PE curriculum guidelines. When Alan notes that the NGB is most concerned with establishing a presence in the school, there

is no certainty that this presence is sufficiently child-centred to reach curriculum objectives.

Brendan, a teacher, expressed a particular view on the school coaching programme that is not compatible with the objectives of PE curriculum:

Even though they [coaches] may be in during school time, I think they have nothing to do with the PE curriculum. I think if a teacher wants to implement a PE curriculum it's up for them to do it. I think if you are bringing in someone on the club-school link programme I think they are there for the benefit of the club and the benefit of Highfield county board to coach the skills of the players. If there are players who do not want to play I think the teacher should remain in class looking after them and the coach should cherry pick those who want to be there...I think there is a need to get away from this thing where the GAA coach is seen as the babysitter for the teacher. I don't think they are going to be of any value [to the club] if the teacher is going to be sending out all the kids out to the field just to get rid of them for half an hour.

Although his opinion ran counter to the more inclusive views expressed by other teachers, it aligned with the views expressed by some GAA personnel. Ronan, a GAA administrator, wondered if it was really necessary for a coach to accommodate all the children in the class and commented that "it's a waste of time for some of them [children] to be going out as they've no interest, and will only cause trouble". Dan, another GAA administrator, while disagreeing with this exclusive philosophy noted that:

We're coming to a bit of a cross roads with the coaches in school - principals are going to want far more focus on the curriculum, but informal feedback from some coaches is that a number of clubs and counties are unhappy that they are delivering PE and not Gaelic games in the school.

This perspective reflected comments made at a GAA meeting attended by this researcher where it was reported that some provincial administrators questioned if the school coaching programmes represented ‘value for money’ and argued that resources were being “wasted” on the coaching of girls in primary schools. There were clear tensions between those who advocate a coaching model that promotes maximum participation and those who favour an emphasis on elite player development from a very young age. In addition, tensions are evident between groups within the GAA who assume that schools can be utilised to promote Gaelic games, and those who position the overall development of the child more centrally.

Coaches’ expertise: fulfilling a specialist role?

As can be seen in the previous section, it appears GAA are coaches responsible for the delivery of significant elements of the primary PE curriculum. The data raise questions about the competence of these coaches to teach the PE curricular content.

While most full-time games development personnel have a third-level qualifications, Colm and Trevor pointed out that graduates from health and recreation management courses are more prevalent than those from an education background. The GAA units that operate placement schemes for third-level students invariably select candidates from recreation and leisure management courses in institutes of technology (ITs) because these courses typically include off-campus placement opportunities. It would appear that these arrangements have flourished due to opportunistic connections locally, rather than as a result of national policy objectives.

This has led to some difficulties, as Mary, a teacher, pointed out:

Now the coaches I suppose they are doing a leisure management course and they are not doing an education course and I did think this year, and probably last year if I'm honest, they seemed to have a lack of knowledge of what children are able to do.

Fiona outlined how the type of training these placement students receive is on the rudiments of the sport, rather than on the requirements of the curriculum:

these work placement students would have been trained up going in following the GDAs [full-time coaches], they would be coming from a point of view of 'let's get the basics of camogie', they certainly wouldn't be integrated into 'this is what the national primary teaching PE curriculum is, I need you to integrate this in'.

Nevertheless, she was confident that the coaching certification that they receive is sufficient for them to provide an appropriate level of service:

The IT students are doing sports and recreation courses or sports and business studies so they would have all their certification done. They would be Garda vetted...and they would have at least a Level 1 coaching course for hurling and camogie completed and their ethos and all they would be doing within their course makes them very suitable.

In effect, their qualifications are geared towards fulfilling statutory child protection requirements as per standards for a specific sports organisation, rather than specifically towards the requirements of the PE curriculum.

A review of one scheme highlighted a number of weaknesses that were identified by school principals. Concerns were raised about the students' ability to plan a progressive set of lessons and it was felt that they had difficulty in pitching the lesson content at an appropriate level for the children. The duration of the placement was also questioned as some principals believed that it was too long, thereby curtailing the children's experiences in other areas of the curriculum. These concerns were the catalyst for a formal review carried out by GAA staff and teachers' representatives. The GAA Games Development Manager responsible for

the scheme suggested, however, that the teachers' expectations of these coaches are unrealistic:

Teachers expect the exact same thing off the two [student] coaches that they expect from a fulltime person and that is just not possible because these guys are doing it day in and day out and they are professionals

Nevertheless, if these students are required to teach aspects of the PE curriculum, then it is reasonable to expect that they that they have an appropriate level of expertise to do so. The available evidence suggests that there is a mismatch between the GAA's desire to give the students coaching experience and the teachers' desire that the students be able to teach aspects of the PE curriculum competently.

Elsewhere, the coaches recruited to work on Club-School link programmes are frequently third-level students who fulfil their coaching duties on a part-time basis. John, for example, described how his course was not in any way connected to education or sport:

No I wouldn't have had any formal training. I would have just been using my own experience from coaching in the club. I didn't do a course in sport. I did a course in construction in college so I wouldn't be aware of the PE curriculum.

Despite this, he was entrusted with teaching the entire PE programme in two of the three schools he visited : "I was mainly doing the PE as well, in [School A] and [School B] that was definitely their PE but in [School C] the male teacher there, he would do a lot of work". Nevertheless, the teachers seemed happy to have him: "They were all for me coming in and they all made a big deal about me coming in and they were delighted to see someone coming in".

Philip, an accountancy student and inter-county hurler, was employed on a similar programme. He delivered a fundamental movement skills (FMS) programme through hurling in one primary school. Orla, the school principal was delighted to have him:

Now we're fortunate with him because he's available, number one, but he's also been teaching, coaching on the Cul Camps¹⁶ for the last two or three years and he's just very good at what he does. The fact that he's an idol does help. There's definitely no doubt about that.

Her biggest concern was that he would be leaving the coaching scheme once he graduated from college. Although the class teachers supervised and assisted Philip during his coaching sessions, his competence was based on his playing experiences and the experience he had picked up while working on GAA summer camps. His status, however, as a prominent player ensured that he had the respect of the children, despite the absence of any formal curriculum knowledge.

The level of training provided to full-time GAA coaching personnel does not appear to be comprehensive. Patrick admits to not having had "a clue" about the content of the PE curriculum when he started out in his coaching role. Arthur explained how his knowledge of the primary school curriculum would have been driven by his own motivation to engage in professional development:

Now I would have done a lot in my own time, but I was never encouraged from a professional point of view. It was never required either but I would have sought out for my own professional development certain aspects of the primary school curriculum. But I think the general awareness is pretty weak"

¹⁶ Cul Camps are summer camps organised by the GAA

He did concede that a once-off workshop on the primary PE curriculum had been organised at provincial level. Despite the lack of formal CPD opportunities in PE, Arthur believed that the coaching content being taught is broadly in line with the ethos of the curriculum:

What we are doing in the GAA through our coach education programs and through the actual coaching on the ground...is very much in line from a general perspective with the primary school curriculum, but I have to make this point that it is very much down to the individual

Colm's observation that "by and large the coaches wouldn't have an awareness of the curriculum" suggests, however, that an alignment between coaching practice and curricular objectives is haphazard. Neil, in his role as a school principal, raises doubts about some coaches' ability to manage a typical class: "my experience would be that they have difficulty handling more than 20 kids and we have no class with that few kids in it". This concern was replicated during a formal review process in another county where coaches themselves complained about the difficulty in managing large classes. Their suggested solutions involved recruiting additional coaches or confining the coaching to half the class.

Given that the duties and responsibilities of full time GAA games development personnel cover a diverse range of areas other than primary school coaching, it is perhaps understandable that graduates with leisure management qualifications have been recruited heavily. Nevertheless, the apparent lack of expertise in the primary PE curriculum is problematic. This issue is amplified when we take into account that many part-time coaches have only the most basic coaching qualifications and arrive in schools with a very narrow range of priorities centred on player recruitment.

Towards a culture of coach evaluation

The evaluation of coaching performance is a relatively recent development. Gabriel's comments are indicative of the way thinking on this aspect of school coaching programmes is changing: "Coaches are now being dismissed if they are not doing their job. This represents new thinking about the role of the coach. It is not just a job to be given to a talented player: the coach must be able to deliver."

Data presented in Chapter six suggested a growing realisation among GAA policy-makers that the quality of the coaching is at least as important as the quantity. However, much of the discourse around quality control at school level is aspirational. Alan suggested that the demand for coach evaluation is coming from the schools. Teachers have begun to request formal assessments of the coaches' work and "more and more the schools seem to want a link between the PE curriculum and the coaching". Furthermore, Alan suggested that a key challenge in the coming years will be to get "them" (the teachers) to

understand the link between the curriculum and the actual coaching, because with so many other different things going on in the school now, instead of just having Gaelic games coaching they want to know how it is linked, what is the reason, why are the coaches coming into the schools over a number of weeks.

Trevor outlined a similar experience noting: "teachers are more aware of what should be done and I think they are concerned about the quality that is being delivered to the student".

The questioning of the relevance of aspects of the coaching programmes is understandable in the context of education policy where schools are required to engage in detailed self-evaluation exercises (Department of Education and Skills 2012). This was highlighted by Mary when she noted how other principals were becoming more aware of quality issues, due to the requirements of the WSE and SSE processes. Interestingly, Alan went on to express

how his coaching personnel would need to engage in a reciprocal evaluation process to ensure their coaching content was aligned with the curriculum:

The teachers are beginning, and in some quarters, are beginning to throw their back up against us because they say that the Department of Education is looking for this, this and this, and I suppose that is why we need to maybe look at devising a set of plans that go out to the schools every year of how it [the coaching content] is linked [to the curriculum].”

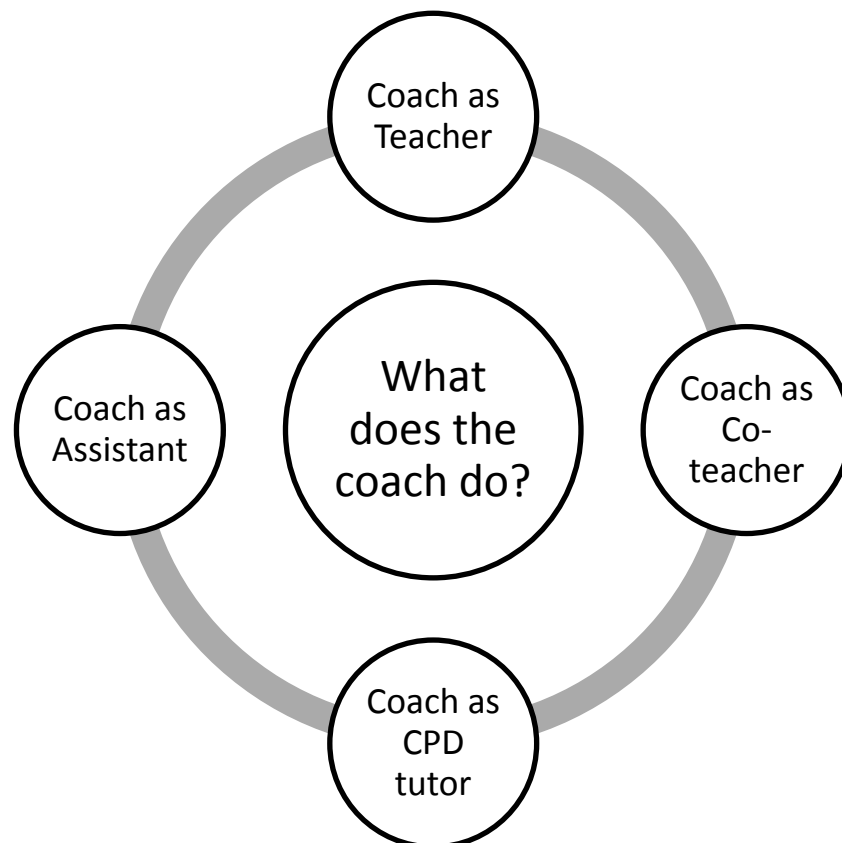
The concentration on evaluation demanded by the DES through WSEs and SSEs appears to be encouraging school communities to question the role played by external providers, and may also be prompting these providers to look at the quality of their provision. However, considering the earlier evidence of a WSE report that didn't question the coaches' teaching of the PE curriculum, the overall impact of DES policy guidelines is unclear. This issue will be dealt with in greater detail in the forthcoming section dealing with the inspectorate.

The teacher-coach relationship

This section focuses on the relationships between teachers and coaches in school situations. Although the principal teacher has a specific 'gatekeeper' role in allowing NGBs access to the school, the interaction (or lack thereof) between the coach and the class teacher is a key aspect of curriculum implementation. DES policy states that the coach should be working as an assistant to the teacher, who remains in charge of content selection and planning. The existing research on the involvement of sports coaches in the teaching of the primary PE curriculum does not examine the interface between teacher and coach (e.g. Fahey *et al.* 2005; Woods *et al.* 2010). The data presented in this section suggest the relationship between teachers and coaches is played out in four ways. Firstly, the coach replaces the class teacher; secondly, the coach and class teacher work co-operatively together; thirdly, the coach assists

the class teacher; and, finally, the coach performs the role of tutor for formal or informal teacher CPD. Overlap may exist between this final scenario and the second or third. These four ways are outlined in Figure 7.1:

Figure 7.1: Interactions between coaches and teachers



Elaine, a former teacher involved in education policy development explained that if a teacher lacks expertise in a particular area “it doesn’t mean they can’t teach the PE”. Instead, she described a scenario of support for the teacher:

They might welcome the support of a coach doing the coaching with the children, so I think there is a role for that as long as it’s not replacing the class teacher’s role as the teacher of the physical education curriculum.

Aidan, a GAA policy-maker, echoed this point: “I think it is important that the two of them would work in partnership, number 1, and have a fundamental understanding of what each other was trying to do”

The data suggest practice in schools is very different to stated policy, as the coach frequently implements a programme with no input from the teacher. The working relationship between the coach and teacher was a focus of this research project, with a view to gaining a greater understanding of how the current situation has evolved. One strand of GAA policy promotes a co-operative relationship between the teacher and the coach. This perspective could be classified as informal professional development for the teacher. In this context, Gabriel outlines a scenario whereby the primary school teacher learns from what the coach does, and then uses the knowledge gained throughout the rest of school day:

She’s seeing it from a whole curriculum point of view whereas the specialist is delivering the PE, she’s seeing the gains and she’s noting the gains so she can capitalise on them later

Aidan’s perspective as a policy maker is that a positive relationship is being developed:

You’d like to think, not like to think, would think that the class teachers would be involved as well and they’d be benefitting as well from the exposure and the experience and getting an understanding of what is required

This viewpoint makes two assumptions that require closer examination, namely that the coach is sufficiently skilled to deliver a programme that involves appropriate learning for the children and that the teacher has an in-depth understanding of what the coach is doing.

Caoimhe outlines how, from her perspective as a coach, this relationship might develop:

I think for the first couple of weeks you could say to the teacher “All I want for you is to come out and observe” then gradually incorporate them into the session with the hope that by the end of week 8 or 9 that they would be fully supportive of your role in the coaching and they become more involved with the kids.

Caoimhe’s model suggests that the teacher in is in the role of ‘apprentice’, learning from the ‘expert’ coach. A small-scale pilot programme organised by Alan successfully adopted this model:

In a lot of the schools up until now it has just been us going in and coaching the kids but we piloted a number of programs and we had a very successful one this year where we actually ran a program where the coach and the teacher assisted and the coach brought them through all the different sessions, and in the end the teachers was actually helping to take the session

Gabriel, when articulating a view that runs counter to a traditional view within the GAA that female teachers are a “problem” (Brendan), argues that the coach can also learn from the teacher:

Female teachers have an awful lot to bring because of their management skills and their ability to get kids listening, which is far, far ahead of some of the male coaches going in.

Although expressed in language that affirms traditional gender stereotypes, it proposes that the teacher has valuable skills that can enrich the coaching process.

This collaborative perspective contrasts markedly from Michael’s experience where the teachers did not appear to have a significant level of engagement with his work: “no, they never ask me [about my content]. No, I wouldn’t be planning around their programme”.

Alan admits that very often the “link is missing between the teacher and the coach”, and outlines four scenarios of how teachers interact with his student placement coaches:

Number 1 is the teacher gets very involved. They were very involved and helpful and very good on the yard and got involved in a very supportive way. The second one is they [the teacher] overpower the coach because they see that they are young and that they will come in and step over the coach and once again [this is] very isolated. Third then is that the teacher will go into the window and look out and be watching the thing from inside doing corrections and sometimes the teacher is alongside doing the corrections as the session goes on. And the unusual case is that teacher is not seen at all. The teacher just sends out the children.

Stephanie, uses some of the activities taught by the coaches in her own PE classes, she doesn't get involved in the coaches' sessions “except to discipline the children sometime”. The idea that the teacher's main role is to act as a disciplinarian is common across a number of settings. Declan, a school principal, reinforced this point:

We make it very clear that the teacher is in charge at all times even, for example, if there is a matter of discipline. The teacher disciplines, I don't like the coach disciplining children. The teacher has to be in charge at all times.

However, he hoped this would lead to a situation where there was “a good working relationship built up between the teacher and the coach...a good rapport”.

A perceived benefit of the coaching programme is expressed by Vincent, a coach, and Julie, a teacher. They both value the shift in responsibility from the teacher to the coach. Vincent notes that the coaches “do take the pressure off teachers for looking after those kids for little periods of time”, while Julie suggests that “it's great for the children to get a break from us”.

There is evidence to suggest that some teachers are motivated to engage in coaching as a result of what they see being done with their classes. These are more isolated experiences and appear to be driven by the teachers' own interest. According to Vincent:

Some of them would get very involved in the session and have a great interest in the sessions and they would be looking for little tips and picking up little tips. I know in one case in our own school a teacher just got interested in watching the coaches working with kids and helping him out and now is taking the school team. She went and did the foundation course herself. She is a teacher and she is doing a great job, that's how she got involved in the coaching

It would appear that the likelihood of the teacher learning from the coach in any meaningful way is dependent on the coach's ability to mentor the teacher, and on the teacher's recognition that what goes on during the coaching session is relevant and useful. It is doubtful that this is happening except in isolated situations. On the contrary, it would appear Michael's perspective is more representative of what is happening on a widespread basis:

They just hand [the class] over to me. They bring out their copies...they can get their correcting or planning done... they feel it's free time for them and they get their own work done...you'd hear some of them saying 'it's great to get my PE done, because I hate doing PE'

Moreover, the general acceptance of coaches by teachers within the schools context is encapsulated by Arthur: "they would always be very respectful to coaches coming in and of our roles and what we do". This perspective is in stark contrast to the more collaborative approach that is advocated in other areas. This is also reflected in Robert's comment that "they should tell us what they are doing so we would know what is happening. I don't think we are told that. They just come in and they do their own thing".

The replacement of the class teacher by the coach has a potential to impact on the quality of the curriculum that is subsequently taught, and can be viewed as a significant deviation from official GAA policy. As Kevin argues:

I suppose the coach should be selecting teachers who are interested in working with them; it is not their role to replace a teacher...It must be working in a partnership for it to be effective and if that's not happening, it is not sustainable

He goes on to describe what happens in his school where club coaches are involved in the implementation of an FMS programme in the junior classes. Initially, the coaches take charge of the sessions, but the teachers become more involved as the weeks progress: "the teacher is more or less following the lead and towards the end of the 6-8 weeks the teacher starts taking the lead".

While the increasing culture of accountability in primary schools may be acting as a stimulus for a more critical evaluation of the teacher-coach relationship, financial constraints have the potential to accelerate the process. Budgetary reductions by the ISC for coaching programmes may prompt a closer examination of the sustainability issues Kevin mentions.

These funding cuts to the GAA have, to date, been offset by the use of internal funding streams and by accessing government schemes such as JobBridge. This situation, however, is under review (Cian Murphy 2012). As a result, a model that involves GAA personnel replacing the class teacher may have to be modified if there is a decrease in the number of coaches. Consequently, a greater effort to engage with the teacher may be demanded by these circumstances.

The Inspectorate

The evaluative role of the DES inspectorate has been noted earlier in this chapter. In this section, data from WSE reports are presented and provide another perspective on teachers'

and coaches' efforts to promote Gaelic games in primary schools. These reports comment on curricular and management practices in schools and in some cases include specific commentary on PE provision. Data from the WSE reports support existing research highlighting the dominant position of Gaelic football, hurling, soccer and rugby in Irish primary schools (e.g. Broderick and Shiel 2000; Fahey *et al.* 2005; Woods *et al.* 2010).

PE or Sport: is there a difference?

The PE section of WSE reports covers a wide range of issues but there does not appear to be any sustained attempt to distinguish between what occurs during the PE class and what occurs as part of extra-curricular programmes. One report mentioned that “sport and athletics are an important feature of school life”. The teachers in the school were “commended for freely giving of their time to provide coaching in a broad range of sport activities” while pupils were provided “with a variety of structured, progressive activities and games that promote the development of specific skills and ensure the participation and enjoyment of all” (2006, 47). Another report notes that “sport is an important feature of the curriculum, particularly the playing of Gaelic games” (2007, 21). The following comment demonstrates how PE and sport programmes were considered to be closely connected:

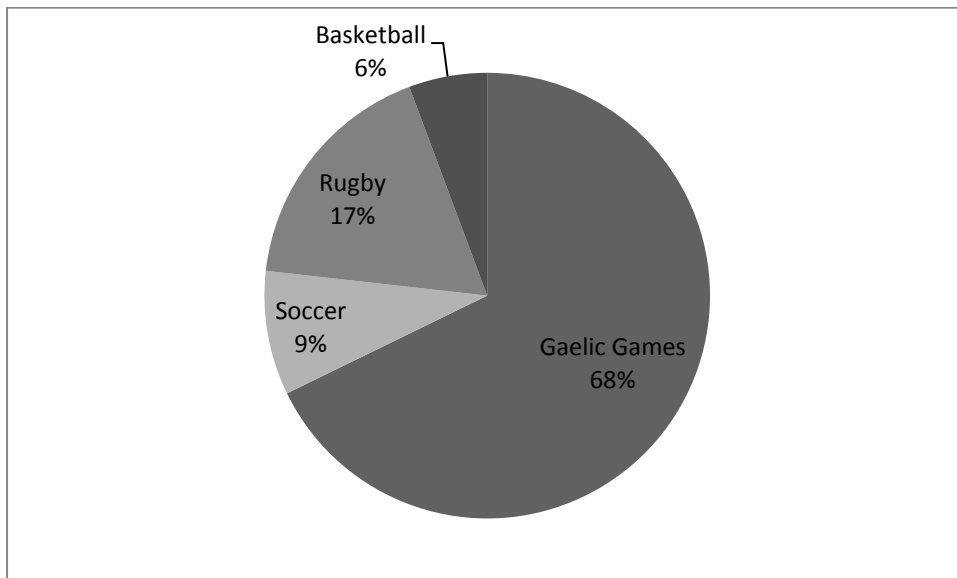
Appropriate drills and the use of non-competitive playing situations form the dominant strategies in these lessons. The result of this strategy was that pupils who may never represent the school in competitive games are as enthusiastic about their learning and achievement as those who do make up the school teams (2006, 67)

This examination of the reports suggests the inspectorate affirmed close links between PE and extra-curricular sport. The inspectorate valued the contribution of teachers to extra-curricular activities, and there was evidence of what Pickup (2012) describes as the “conflation of PE and sport”.

The role of the external coach

Evidence from the WSE reports suggests that external personnel are involved in the delivery of PE in a wide range of schools. External personnel who deliver portions of dance, gymnastics or aquatics strands of PE are usually employed by the school with fees covered by parental subscription and/or fundraising activities. In contrast, the games strand provision came from coaches representing a variety of NGBs and typically provided free to the school. These coaches were present in a voluntary capacity on behalf of a club or were professional coaches employed by NGBs. A breakdown of the prevalence of external team game tutors in the WSE documents is contained in the following table (Figure 7.2):

Figure 7.2: Frequency of Mentions of Team Game Coaches



There are only isolated references to the involvement of other coaches in the games strand. The GAA, FAI and IRFU provide the vast majority of external coaching capacity. It would appear that the strong position of their respective games within the primary school sector is unlikely to change while they are in a position to provide an extensive programme of free coaching.

The WSE reports shed some light on how the delivery of PE by external personnel is viewed by the national inspectorate. On one level, there were neutral descriptions of common practice: “the development of the strand unit on games is developed with assistance from a GAA football coach who works with the school for an eight-week period each year” (2007, 12). Another report mentioned “All the pupils get support in football from an outside trainer for two hours every week. FAS [government employment agency] funds this service... The Board of management employs a dance teacher to teach national dances... The teachers emphasise creative dancing” (2006, 44).

Elsewhere, apparent good practice of external providers is commended. There was praise for “a visiting parent who gives of her time at no charge to the school and she was to be congratulated for her generosity and for the level of success she achieves” (2006, 11). It is unclear if the class teachers are involved in this “level of success” or what that success entailed. A template of best practice could be interpreted from the following comment: “teachers’ responsibilities with regard to in-school and extra-curricular activity, the role and duties of external coordinators, extra-curricular activities and parental involvement ... are clearly outlined” (2006, 63). Likewise, comments that “some of the lessons are supported through the involvement of visiting tutors” (2006, 64) and “The school welcomes the support of a visiting coach for Gaelic games” (2012, 05) used language that is broadly in line with the curriculum requirements. One school was congratulated on its success in this regard: “The teachers are commended for the manner in which they work collaboratively with visiting coaches” (2011, 10).

There were also notes of caution as to nature of teacher involvement: “It is advised that the work of all external tutors be monitored carefully to ensure that the programmes followed are in line with the curriculum (2006, 42). In the same school, in the context of a dance tutor, “teachers are reminded of the need to be aware of the content of the programme followed, the

need for supervision and the issue of payment for the tuition”. Another school is advised to ensure that “the lessons are supervised by the class teachers at all time” (2006, 40). The inspector did not always have first-hand evidence of the part played by the external coach, as evidenced by the following comment: “The teachers report that they take responsibility for all matters involving childcare and discipline during these external coaching sessions” (2006, 9). In this instance, there was no evidence to suggest that the teachers take on any direct role in the planning, implementation and assessment of the lesson taught.

If the inspectorate had concerns about the quality of coaching provided by the external personnel, it was not commented on in these reports. The reports are also silent on coaches’ expertise and qualifications. On the contrary, commentary is generally neutral or positive: “a tutor supplied by the IRFU and a tutor provided by the GAA support the teaching of games skills” (2007, 20) or “a volunteer GAA coach contributes admirably to the development of these programmes” (2007, 39).

Games, school sport and the role of Cumann na mBunscol

Lunn (2008) highlights the importance of volunteer teachers in the provision of extra-curricular school sport, and the inspectorate praises their contribution within WSE reports. There are numerous references to Gaelic games activities and competitions organised by Cumann na mBunscol: there are references to the organisation in 19% of the reports examined. These references in WSE reports suggest official approval for this model of school sport provision. Typically teachers are complimented for time committed to activities outside of school time: “members of staff are commended for their very generous commitment of time to after-school coaching of games” (2007, 107). Moreover, there is an affirmation that these activities are beneficial to the general life of the school:

The school participates competitively and successfully in a variety of sporting activities including hurling, camogie and football, all of which help foster team spirit and a sense of pride in the school (2006, 2)

One school was praised for the amount of time devoted to sports competitions:

The school's participation in various inter-school competitions, particularly in hurling and football, is considerable and is facilitated through the commitment of teachers and the involvement and support of dedicated parents (2012, 05)

However, this school was also advised to address the narrow scope of curricular provision:

Development of provision in PE needs to focus on the full implementation of a broad and balanced programme to include an adequate delivery of all strands of the curriculum.

It is not clear from the reports whether these organised sports activities take place during school time or after school, and the Inspectorate does not appear to comment on this aspect of school sport provision. It is important to note that these activities are not part of the formal PE curriculum but it is noteworthy such prominence is given to them in WSE reports. There appears to be an implicit acceptance that competitive (team) sports are an important part of primary school life. It is important to remember, then, that GAA policy seeks to move away from a competitive games structure in clubs and schools up to, and including the age of 12 (Gaelic Athletic Association 2008, p. 26). This contrasts with commentary within the WSE reports on activities of Cumann na mBunscol linked to competitions (2006, 32; 2006, 47; 2007, 10). At the same time, other reports advocate alternatives to the highly competitive system that exists in practice. A selection of comments on the appropriate management of

competition recommended the adoption of a balanced approach along the lines of the PE curriculum:

The school's policy with regard to participation in competitive sport is that the primary focus is on involvement of the maximum number of pupils and the promotion of qualities such as self-belief, leadership, team spirit and co-operation, rather than competitive achievement" (2006, 53).

It would appear that a diversity of views exists within the inspectorate, suggesting no agreed position on how competitive activities should be managed in primary schools.

Summary

This chapter has focused on three groups that have an impact on how Gaelic games activities are implemented in primary schools, namely teachers, coaches and school inspectors.

Teachers, particularly those who are positively disposed to Gaelic games, play a central part in how a Gaelic games ethos has developed. This group makes a significant voluntary contribution to the coaching and management of schools team. There has also been a discernible shift towards the playing of competitive school games during the school day from after school with a significant impact on curricular provision and the management of other school activities. External coaches are involved in delivering large elements of the PE curriculum. As a result, Gaelic games hold a dominant position in terms of external curriculum content provision. The DES inspectorate through its WSE reports praise teachers for their commitment to school sport with some concern expressed about an overemphasis on the games and a narrow interpretation of the PE curriculum. There is no indication that the inspectors monitor the work of coaches. Teachers make a considerable contribution to Gaelic games activities but competitive structures, valued by many school communities, contradict GAA policy on maximizing participation. It seems, however, that traditional views of

competition are sufficiently powerful to resist the NGB's policy as it had been originally planned.

Chapter 8: Discussion

Introduction

Informed by the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter three, the aim of this chapter is to interpret the findings of the previous three chapters in order to attain a deeper understanding of how Gaelic games policy is enacted in Irish primary schools. I provide an analysis of the processes that underpin these games' dominant position within PE and school sport. The processes that have been studied will be interpreted in the context of the complex network of interdependencies that are evident at national, regional and school level (Ken Green 2003). As the general structure of the preceding chapters had a focus on the macro, meso and micro levels of policy development and implementation, this chapter seeks to examine the interplay between policy and practice in how Gaelic games are implemented in primary schools.

My theoretical framework, outlined in Chapter three, has guided my interpretation of the findings that are presented as four major themes. Penney and Evans (2005, p. 23) have welcomed a shift in the analysis of policy and practice whereby “a focus on connections” has become important. This approach has, in turn, the potential to show how individuals are bound up in “social networks of interdependencies” (Platts 2012, p. 5). These interdependencies are apparent at a variety of levels, and processes of change are best observed by taking a long-term view (Penney and Evans 2005). The relationship between a teacher and school principal, for example, is visible and relatively easy to identify. Other relationships are, however, “more opaque but potentially every bit as significant” (Ken Green 2003, p. 24). The relationship between a teacher and an NGB policymaker fits into this latter category. As Dunning and Hughes (2013, p. 148) point out, the question “*how did 'this' come to be?*” [italics in the original] provides a succinct summation of Elias's epistemological stance, and “facilitates an engagement with processes”. Specifically, an understanding of the relational nature of power (Penney and Evans 2005) as the chains of interdependency

lengthen within figurations was important. Aspects of the theory of established-outsider relations (Elias and Scotson 1994) were used to understand how some of these groups negotiated positions within the Gaelic games figuration. In Chapter three, the use of game models (Elias 1978) was examined in the context the overall theoretical framework that underpins this study. Accordingly, upper level groups like the DES, ISC and GAA each define education or sport policy based on a range of diverse objectives. Their success in implementing these policies, however, is dependent on other groups at the same level. The ISC, for example, sets clear criteria that may impact on an NGB like the GAA, and attempts to control the outcomes by using economic rewards or sanctions, among other means. Policy implementation is also dependent on the actions of groups at lower levels. The interpretation of policy by mid-level players like Cumann na mBunscol or GAA regional committees shapes how that policy is transmitted to schools. The interaction between a teacher and coach is a visible relationship characterized by a distinct power ratio at the lower level. Moreover, a teacher involved in Cumann na mBunscol may adhere more closely to the policies of that group than to those of the GAA. As the number of interdependent players increases, the ability of any individual or group to control the overall course of the game decreases, and it becomes more difficult for participants to understand the processes involved (Elias 1978). The forthcoming discussion centres on four themes. Firstly, the role of ethos and identity in the promotion of Gaelic games in primary schools is discussed. Secondly, a process of centralization in policymaking is identified. The third theme focuses on the contested nature of policy implementation, while a blurred understanding of PE and sport is discussed in the final theme.

Justifying Gaelic games in primary schools: ethos and identity

The GAA and national identity

The GAA played a prominent part in the “network of movements and associations” that were involved in establishment of a particular form of national identity prior to, and immediately after, Irish independence (Farren 1995, p. 16). The promotion of aspects of Irish culture, including music, sport and language, was deemed important by groups within this network for the construction of a distinctive identity in the early years of the new state. The GAA’s overt historical links to Irish nationalism aligned well with broader government policies on sport that prioritized “nation building and an emphasis on national health” (Liston 2005b, p. 182). For members of the GAA, the formulation of “a particular national we-image” (Connolly and Dolan 2012, p. 9) proved to be a powerful motivation. Not surprisingly, this was also reflected in the changes that occurred in the primary school system in the early 1920s and it is significant that the GAA and the INTO were among the groups that participated in the initial conference to shape the primary school curriculum in 1921 (Farren 1995). Over the course of the following decades, PE received little attention in curriculum development and the GAA’s relative strength in schools contributed to it not being a priority (Duffy 1997). On the one hand, many Irish teachers believed that a comprehensive Gaelic games programme fulfilled the children’s PE needs while, at the same time, the GAA’s strong presence enabled successive governments to adopt a ‘hands-off’ approach to primary PE (Houlihan 1997). The participants in this study articulated a consistent view that maintaining a strong presence in primary schools was a crucial aspect of Gaelic games promotion. The maintenance of this presence is facilitated by official curriculum policy that singles out Gaelic games for “particular consideration” within the Games strand (Government of Ireland 1999a, p. 4).

Concepts such as national identity are not static, however. Instead they are more accurately conceptualized as expressions of “complex and fluid realities of social relations between interdependent people” (Liston 2006, p. 617). The influence of “cultural nationalism” in Irish educational policy discourse has been in decline since the early 1960s (Denis O Sullivan 2005, p. 103). While the strength of this position was particularly evident in the early years of the state, the apparent decline has implications for organisations like the GAA that thrived in this environment. Success on the international stage can, potentially, be delivered by soccer and rugby teams in a way that Gaelic sport cannot. Consequently, an adherence to Gaelic games as the sole national sport has become outdated. In that context, interview and documentary data presented in earlier chapters suggest that documentation produced by the GAA has a decreased emphasis on national identity. Instead, objectives that focus on the physical and social benefits of participation are more prominent, particularly in policy documents prepared by coaching and games development personnel. There has been a noticeable shift in the rhetoric of GAA policymakers as they sought to establish a niche for Gaelic games within national health promotion and physical activity initiatives.

Not surprisingly, teachers and coaches who were also involved in the GAA’s policymaking process expressed views that were most closely aligned with official policy. In contrast, expressions of cultural nationalism are still strongly evident in the comments of some teachers and coaches who participated in this research. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that a rationale for participating in Gaelic sports that is based primarily on a narrow sense of Irishness will engage an increasingly diverse population ascribing to a globalised view of sport. While my data suggest that the delivering of Gaelic games has served to integrate children from multi-cultural backgrounds within some school communities, clubs have not been as successful in integrating these same children. This apparent disconnect between schools and their local clubs was particularly striking in urban areas where the transfer from

school to club is not effective. Although children may play in school because of the ethos promoted by teachers in school, the data suggests that the traditional club structure, underpinned by a strong sense of place, may be less effective in recruiting and retaining these children, particularly if their parents are not encouraged to become involved. The GAA development officers noted how the implementation of school-club link policies was flawed in urban areas where a sense of community, centred on the local GAA club, was not as strong, and where more physical activity choices were available. As a result, a persistent referral to Gaelic games as ‘national’ sports may be less effective as a recruitment tool in modern society.

Teacher habitus and the GAA

The teachers who participated in this study consistently mentioned the influence of their families and early educational experiences on the development of a strong allegiance to Gaelic games. They were influenced also by older teaching colleagues when they embarked on their own teaching careers. Their experiences were similar to the development of teacher habitus as described by Ken Green (2003) and Keay (2009), and to descriptions of the intergenerational socialization of teachers (Brown and Evans 2004). The sometimes slow rate of change of these deeply held perspectives can mean that they are bound to what van Krieken has described as “yesterday’s social reality” (cited in Ken Green 2003, p. 18). This suggests that their decision-making in PE and school sport may be influenced greatly by their own experiences of a narrow range of activities based on team-based competitive formats. Furthermore, the GAA’s focus on ITE and teacher CDP highlights how it has sought to maintain a cohort of teachers who are committed to Gaelic games promotion. It also helps to increase our understanding of why Gaelic games activities have become, and remain, firmly embedded within primary schools.

The data indicate that there is a sense of expectation that teachers will devote time to school sports activities and, in particular, Gaelic games. This sense of expectation comes from a variety of sources. In rural areas, for example, the close connections between the GAA club and the primary school have lead club personnel to expect that teachers will promote Gaelic games. This is frequently expressed in terms of gender, where the ‘taken-for-granted’ view within the GAA has been that the presence of male teachers in primary schools is necessary for the survival of a Gaelic games ethos there. This view, in turn, has contributed to a crisis discourse that will be explored in greater detail in the next section. This crisis is typically framed in terms of the male/female gender balance, giving rise to unchallenged (and unrealistic) assumptions that all male teachers ought to promote Gaelic games.

Teaching colleagues are also a source of these expectations. Ken Green (2003, p. 149) identified the influence on teachers of “the ties that bind them to particular we-groups”. Organisations like Cumann na mBunscol form a powerful ‘we-group’ in the Irish context, where the promotion of Gaelic games helps to form a strong social bond. In contrast, these strong bonds also serve to identify what might be described as “they-groups” (Connolly and Dolan 2012, p. 4). At various times, the local club and the wider GAA community were described in these terms. Other teachers who didn’t promote Gaelic games, or who weren’t perceived to value particular conceptions of school sports, were considered to be external to the group. It should be noted, however, that teachers’ multiple affiliations could be described as a reflection of the multi-layered development of habitus. Allegiance to a particular group changes, albeit slowly in most cases, based on the complex nature of interdependencies within the figuration. Evidence of this was apparent in the way some teachers altered their approach to competition, for example.

'Crisis' discourse and a culture of blame

Expressions of a crisis discourse concerning Gaelic games in primary schools have been prevalent among members of the GAA and associated groups since the foundation of the state. Early expressions of crises centred on issues of identity and the protection of particular expressions of Irishness (Connolly and Dolan 2011b). More recently, outsider groups like female teachers are blamed for perceived problems. Perceptions that the dominant position of Gaelic games is under threat are based on at least three issues. The decrease in male primary teachers has been commonly cited by GAA officials as a threat to the continuance of their organisation's dominant position in school sport and has been used as a justification for the provision of its school coaching programme. Secondly, a perceived threat posed by the development of other school sport coaching programmes also contributes to the crisis discourse. In the context of the primary school, the preservation of a narrow iteration of school sport, based on Gaelic games, is deemed to be important by many GAA officials. Thirdly, the sense of crisis generated internationally by concerns over childhood inactivity and obesity has more recently been used to support the presence of Gaelic games based initiatives in primary schools. The findings of this study suggest that these three aspects of a crisis discourse are expressed differently by groups within the GAA and, secondly, may depend on the development of myths around these particular issues. In addition, these crises serve as a catalyst in terms of the development of policy initiatives. The apparent problem caused by the gender imbalance in primary teaching was most often articulated by GAA officials who were not centrally involved in games development roles and by Cumann na mBunscol officials. This is characteristic of a traditionalist view based on hegemonic masculinity where "dominant versions of masculinity" are perpetuated (Chen and Curtner-Smith 2013, p. 2). GAA games development personnel were, on the other hand, generally more willing to accept that female teachers had a positive role to play in the promotion of

Gaelic games in primary schools. In contrast to the continued decline in the number of male teachers, the number of inter-school games has increased significantly in recent decades. While the presence of GAA coaches may be partly responsible for this increase, it is not the only reason. It would appear that some teachers are devoting more time than ever before to Gaelic games, although this is increasingly taking place during, rather than after, school time. In addition, female teachers have impacted positively on the coaching and organisation of school games, and have begun to take up leadership roles within Cumann na mBunscol. This development may be an example of what Liston (2005b, p. 302) described as a gradual shift “in the balance of power between males and females in a gynarchic direction”. It would appear some groups within Cumann na mBunscol and the GAA have resisted continuing to see a dominant female teaching force as a problem for the promotion of Gaelic games. Simultaneously, other groups within the same organisations have been more open to recruiting female teachers into a domain that was exclusively male until the early 1970s.

A Process of centralization

The advancement of a neo-liberal agenda that promotes greater government control, standardization and accountability in education is a common theme globally (Ball 2004; Ball and Youdell 2007). Similar trends were identified during the course of this research, particularly regarding a centralization of power. This was evident in the Irish government’s policies relating to evaluation and curricular targets in literacy and numeracy. It was also evident in the way that the GAA has sought to assume greater control over Gaelic games activities in primary schools. It is this latter trend that will be the main focus of this section.

Centralization, the GAA and Cumann na mBunscol

Connolly and Dolan (2011b) have described a process of organisational centralisation within the GAA since its foundation. The non-linear nature of the process, however, is evident when a long-term perspective is adopted. They conclude that “the formation, and subsequent

amplifying and de-amplifying, of specific organisational and intra-organisational we-identities remains both an impediment and spur to further integration” (2011b, p. 55). Evidence of a similar process is evident within the data generated during the course of this research. The recent development of formal coaching and games development programmes is a particular example of this where a clear hierarchical structure is now evident. A national committee oversees activities at regional and local level. Of particular interest during this study has been the interaction between these committees within the GAA structure and Cumann na mBunscol as initiatives have been rolled out in primary schools. At one level, these groups share a strong identity centred on the promotion of Gaelic games. This has facilitated the acceptance, among other things, of coaches within the school system and the development of inter-school game structures that are unrivalled by any other sports organisation. An understanding of the “interwoven nature of figurations” (Connolly and Dolan 2011b, p. 45) however, where people are frequently part of different (and sometimes competing) groups, is important when considering the tensions that exist within and between these organisations. In this regard, there is evidence Cumann na mBunscol has resisted the introduction of a number of GAA policy initiatives. Many interviewees within Cumann na mBunscol and the GAA expressed a distrust of their respective organisations, where ‘we-’ and ‘they-’ imagery was apparent in their descriptions of the other group. Within Cumann na mBunscol, however, tensions were evident between people who supported a completely autonomous organization and those who favoured integration with the GAA. In particular, the former group had constructed a clear identity based on teacher professionalism and an adherence to traditional forms of school competition. Members of this sub-group believed they had been excluded from the GAA’s policymaking processes. In contrast, GAA games development personnel expressed frustration that policy initiatives had been delayed or rejected, and appeared to have been bypassed by the formal Cumann na mBunscol structures.

Writing about game models, Treibel (2001, p. 181) suggests that as the chains of interdependencies in an organisation increase, the ensuing complexity can lead to “frustrations, especially among those established at the upper levels”. GAA policymakers, for example, expressed frustration with what they saw as a lack of support from Cumann na mBunscol. It appears their ability to control policy implementation is diminished through the development of “an intertwining network of more and more players” (Elias 1978, p. 85). Nevertheless, the strength of the GAA has meant that some initiatives have been implemented without the assistance of Cumann na mBunscol at national or county level. In terms of understanding the implications of these decisions, it is useful to bear in mind the overall figurational context as “shifting networks of people with fluctuating, asymmetrical power balances” (Dunning and Hughes 2013, p. 52). As Bloyce and Smith (2010, p. 15) point out, “those involved in the planning and implementation of policy, however, rarely reflect upon the possible side-effects”. In that context, given the relative strength of Cumann na mBunscol among teachers, there may be unintended negative consequences for the GAA when its policy initiatives ignore the organisation completely, as some teachers become marginalized and less committed. Considering that interviewees regularly described GAA games development policy as emanating centrally from national committees, it is not surprising that resistance from some groups within Cumann na mBunscol has characterised the implementation process. An example of this was observed in the way these groups within reacted negatively to the Go Games concept, perceiving it to be a threat to their traditional practices. This issue will be examined in greater detail within the next theme.

Centralization, accountability and evaluation in Schools

A process of centralisation is also evident in government education and sport policies in Ireland. While Coolahan (1989, p. 62) used the term “pragmatic gradualism” to describe the Department of Education’s stance up until the 1980s, recent educational policy is more

reminiscent of what has described as a shift towards a more business-oriented culture that facilitates “new modes of surveillance of teachers’ work” (Troman 1996, p. 475). Irish educational policy has begun to prioritize systems of evaluation where “greater accountability and more effective learning are not options, they are essential, if we wish to retain the support of our taxpayers at home and the trust of our partners overseas” (Quinn 2013a, p. 7). This trend has implications for NGBs like the GAA.

The publication of whole school evaluation (WSE) reports, and the subsequent policy shift towards school self-evaluation, has initiated processes within schools whereby ‘taken for granted’ practices have begun to be examined. While the WSE regime itself does not appear to have had any major impact on the practice of coaches’ practice in schools, there is now a requirement to comply with child protection policies that are mandated in government policy. As a result, school authorities are expected to ensure that visiting coaches have appropriate clearance. Although some coaches viewed these developments as negatively bureaucratic, they are obliged to comply with legal requirements and standards set for educational institutions. Compliance with these protocols, however, has also enabled GAA personnel to construct a professional identity for themselves as they seek to justify their position within the school system. For these coaches, the attainment of basic coaching certificates and child protection clearance raised their status and legitimized their presence in schools.

In Britain, it has been noted that primary schools principals are now expecting higher standards “from their outsourced physical education lessons’ (Bishop 2012, p. 23). Teachers who participated in my research have begun to question the quality of the coaching service provided and are setting demands for higher standards. This questioning was usually set against the backdrop of the DES WSE and SSE processes; in contrast, the GAA Heads of Agreement policy document that set out guidelines for school coaching schemes, had been largely ignored. In effect, their concerns appear to be motivated by a wish to comply with

DES policy, rather than by a desire to see better coaching *per se*. Writing about the English policy landscape, it has been argued that central government retains a powerful position in policy development and implementation in both sport and education, despite pronouncements that appear to advocate a decentralizing trend (Mark Goodwin and Grix 2011; Grix and Phillpots 2011). In this study, teachers' reaction to the evaluation policies of the DES suggests that a similar trend is happening in Ireland. They expressed frustration at what they perceived to be a high level of surveillance and accountability. They were critical of what they considered to be undue pressure to conform to a narrow range of targets, in a manner that mirrored the ill-feeling expressed by some members of Cumann na mBunscol towards the GAA. In both cases, teachers had constructed a narrative based on a strong "we-image" to justify their resistance to policy initiatives that had been developed by other groups. The strength of some groups within Cumann na mBunscol, has therefore hampered the implementation of GAA policy in primary schools. This is particularly evident in the stance taken by various groups on the organisation of competitive activities.

Negotiating policy: From development to implementation

A contested landscape

When governmental organisations or NGBs like the GAA embark on the development of general policy texts, the selection of groups and individuals who contribute to the process is important in shaping the final document (Gray *et al.* 2012). During the course of this research, we have seen instances where members of Cumann na mBunscol believed that GAA policy impacting on primary schools was formulated without their input. It is not unusual for particular groups to be deliberately excluded from the policy development process (Lindsey 2006). Although policy documents outline an organisation's stance on a particular issue or range of issues, the implementation of policies may involve the emergence of "alternative voices" (Piggin *et al.* 2009, p. 477). Denis O Sullivan (2005, p. 87) notes "the

actors, social configurations and sites involved in this process do not have equal power”. The extent to which some groups are relatively privileged, and others are relatively marginalized, would appear to be an important factor in understanding how Gaelic games policy is implemented in primary schools. Some Cumann na mBunscol officers believed their organisation is not adequately represented in the policy-making process. These comments were noteworthy when viewed in the context of the GAA’s discourse on Cumann na mBunscol. Officially the organisation was respected and praised for its contribution to the development of Gaelic games in primary schools; unofficially, there appears to be frustration over apparent lack of support for a range of GAA policies. These frustrations were articulated most by games development personnel, while the more positive stance towards Cumann na mBunscol was expressed by elected GAA officials less familiar with games development policy. The necessity to be circumspect due to their involvement in electoral contests may have been a factor in how members of this latter group viewed Cumann na mBunscol. As Bramham (2008, p. 12) argues, the desire of some groups to achieve “short-term gain to appease interested parties, to secure re-election and to maintain control over the policy process” can impact policy implementation. Strategic plans and other framework documents reflect the contested nature of their content both during their formulation and, later, during implementation. During the development of the Cumann na mBunscol strategic plan, for example, some proposals reflective of GAA policy were omitted from the final document because the design committee believed they were unattainable. While the design of the document itself received financial support from the GAA, there were insufficient resources made available to support the implementation. While GAA personnel expressed general support for the document, its proposals were not incorporated into the work of development officers to any great degree. In addition, as a number of county and provincial units of Cumann na mBunscol did not engage with the strategic plan’s proposals the strategic plan did

not impact on its volunteers in a significant way during implementation. Bloyce *et al.* (2008, p. 359) argue that

the growing complexity of the networks involved in sports development may undermine the extent to which government is able to achieve its sporting priorities because it is dependent on the actions of other, seemingly less powerful, groups such as SDOs, who simultaneously seek to protect, maintain and advance their own individual and/or collective interests

In a similar way, the dissemination of the Cumann na mBunscol plan was heavily dependent on other groups who adopted it with varying degrees of commitment. While the overall rhetoric around making “Gaelic games the games of choice” (Cumann na mBunscol 2007, p. 3) of Irish primary schoolchildren continues to be articulated widely, the specifics of the implementation process have not been sustained.

Competition, participation and policy slippage

The development of policy implies a need for change, and policy statements become an articulation of how things ought to be (Penney and Evans 2005). In the context of this research, policy debates on the format of games for primary school children in Ireland are illustrative of how specific policy initiatives are resisted and adapted by different groups. The introduction of the GAA’s Go Games policy is an important example of this.

The existence of formal Gaelic games competitions in Irish primary schools were initially an urban phenomenon, led by the religious teaching orders in the major towns and cities. The spread of inter-school competitions to rural areas in the 1970s was facilitated by teachers who had experienced the urban competitions earlier in their teaching careers. This was reflective of a sense of dissatisfaction with the way mainstream GAA competitions were organised at that time. Teachers argued that the competitions organised by them were more professionally managed, and were conducted in an atmosphere that was more appropriate educationally.

This deeply-held belief was articulated more recently by teachers who were resistant to

changes suggested by the GAA. It could be argued that the progressive values and systems that were initiated by groups of teachers since the early 1970s were superseded by proponents of the GAA Go Games policy three decades later. In effect, current GAA Go Games policy aligns better with modern educational objectives than Cumann na mBunscol's competitive model which had been perceived as more educationally appropriate to GAA game formats in the 1970s. As Keay (2009, p. 231) has suggested, habitus may not change at the same rate as "context and social relations change".

Although the GAA's Go Games policy was opposed vigorously by groups within the organisation itself, there has been enough support to attain a level of implementation that has been deemed to be successful. It would appear the GAA's games development structures have facilitated the introduction of the new initiative with relatively little slippage at club level. The uptake of non-competitive blitzes in primary schools has been very different, however. This is due, in part, to the relative independence of Cumann na mBunscol there. Because a structure of competitive school sport had been firmly embedded, with the widespread support of a large cohort of teachers, county units of Cumann na mBunscol has been sufficiently strong to resist national GAA policy, even when that policy has the support of Cumann na mBunscol's national committee. Pajares (1992, p. 235) has argued that "belief change during adulthood is a relatively rare phenomenon". Consequently, it may be a slow and difficult process for policy-makers to attain the support of a majority of teachers in moving towards a model of competition that caters for the needs of all children. The teachers in this study do not articulate a unified view on the most appropriate competition format for the primary school child. The comments on competition might best be described as forming a continuum from the traditional competitive structure at one end to the participatory model at the other. While it seems these teachers are beginning to gravitate towards the participatory model, their attitudes are nuanced, with some considerable deviation from official policy.

Those teachers who have close connections with GAA policy-making groups have moved further towards the participatory or ‘Go Games’ perspective. Other teachers favoured the maintenance of formal competitions they placed a greater importance on the perceived benefits of sport to their school rather than to a commitment to national policy. Teachers working in a school where the games programme has winning competitions as a priority may struggle to promote more participatory models (Stidder and Hayes 2013). Additionally, government or NGB policy directives may be resisted by the presence of a contradictory ethos within a school community (Burrows and McCormack 2011). Consequently, policy slippage is most prevalent where teachers have adhered to a traditional model of inter-scholastic sport. It is worth noting, however, that the process of policy change is not linear. As Bramham (2008, p. 11) argues, “policy can be irrational, pragmatic and incremental, driven forward or subverted by powerful vested interests”. The Go Games policy has undergone change since its initial publication, with a lowering of the age range from Under 12 to Under 11, and the provision of formal league structures in the Under 13 age group. In primary schools, the GAA has conceded that some formal competitions can take place on a league format, and Cumann na mBunscol can apply to organise these leagues on a 15-a-side basis. This represents a significant shift from the original proposals, and was a response to some resistance from clubs and schools. It is a good example of a power balance becoming more equal in the context of lengthening chains of interdependency (Dunning and Hughes 2013). The GAA has been able to implement Go Games policy relatively successfully at club level where there is a direct line of control through provincial, county and club units. This has, among other strategies, involved “coercive” (Ken Green 2008, p. 27) sanctions such as fines for non-compliance. Its influence over Cumann na mBunscol is less clearly defined, thus enabling the latter to resist policy change more robustly.

This section has examined how a specific policy document has been contested by various groups within the school sport figuration. In the next section, the discussion will focus on some of the factors that underpin this resistance.

Promoting a competitive games culture

While GAA games policy for children has undergone a significant shift in emphasis towards a participatory model over the past decade, Cumann na mBunscol's status as an important organisation remains linked to its organisation of competitive primary school games. This has caused tensions within the organisation itself, and with the GAA. The evidence from this research suggests that efforts to resolve these tensions have been relatively unsuccessful with entrenched positions that are characterized by a reluctance to compromise. The GAA's stance has been to seek to assert control over Cumann na mBunscol by insisting that it is part of the GAA and, therefore, obliged to adhere to official policy directives. The Cumann na mBunscol position views itself as an autonomous body. What has been largely absent to date are attempts to understand why some teachers within Cumann na mBunscol have resisted a games model that maximizes participation and aligns broadly with PE curricular guidelines. During the course of this research, it became evident that that a number of factors contribute to teachers' adherence to competitive games structures. Writing in the context of teacher participation in CPD, Alfrey *et al.* (2012, p. 375) argues that "teachers' philosophies – an amalgamation of the figurations of which they are part, their biographies and their ideologies – have constrained their engagement...over time". In a similar way, it would appear that some teachers' adherence to a highly competitive games structure has constrained their engagement with models that have a stronger focus on participation. A number of other factors were evident at school level. In particular, teachers valued the opportunities that competitive successes gave in terms of raising the profile of the school with important public relations benefits for the school. In some ways, the type of event was largely irrelevant: for

many school communities Gaelic games activities were simply a vehicle to promote the achievements of the children, and the opportunity to win a trophy was deemed to be more attractive than just participating in physical activity. In these cases, the motivation for the school to play sport was to garner publicity whereas the NGB's aim for school sport was to recruit new members. It is noteworthy that teachers who favoured the competitive model believed that schools would not become involved if this structure was changed. This contrasted with reports from GAA personnel and other teachers who expressed a view that non-competitive blitz events were becoming more popular due to their inclusive ethos. Crucially, they also suggested that teachers who did not have a strong Gaelic games background were more positively disposed to this type of event.

Teachers also valued sports competitions as a disciplinary tool within a school. By focusing on the positives of representing the school, teachers believed that they could exert control over children's behaviour. Loyalty and teamwork were fostered, while students who misbehaved could be deprived of the opportunity to play in the competition. Lastly, teachers who favoured competitive structures believed that these competitions were important for the development of elite players. For those teachers, school sport was an exclusive activity for the players who were perceived to be the most talented, and primary school competitions were deemed to be crucial for talent identification purposes. Keech (2013, p. 183) argues that school sport programmes that prioritize formal competitions are "most likely to be beneficial to young people who already participate and/or who are at the elite end of their sport". Significantly, the maintenance of these structures is in marked contrast to the more inclusive formats that are provided for these same children in a club context.

Gender issues and policy

The depiction of the gender imbalance in the primary teaching workforce as a crisis for the promotion of Gaelic games has been noted earlier in this chapter. In the context of this

imbalance, Evans *et al.* (1997b, p. 45) argued that female teachers must play a central role in any changes in practice; consequently “for this to happen they will have to be treated by policy makers not as barriers to effective change in PE but as a central resource”. Any examination of Gaelic games policy and gender in primary school needs to take account of the wider social context. Although the current GAA president has initiated a process of amalgamation of the various Gaelic games NGBs (Kenny 2013), the LGFA and Camogie Association have both held an autonomous status since their foundation. This independent stance is curtailed by the necessity to use the GAA’s facilities at local and national level. In this regard, Liston (2005a, p. 77) described “the formation of we-group and they-group images” within the context of outsider-established relations. It seems reasonable to argue that in primary schools female players and teachers occupy ‘outsider’ status in the ways that GAA and Cumann na mBunscol policies are designed and implemented.

Deficiencies in teacher confidence are frequently cited as problematic for the delivery of primary PE and school sport (e.g. Morgan and Bourke 2008). This is frequently presented as a particular problem for female teachers. Sebastian Coe, for example, has been criticised for characterising female primary teachers in the UK as not confident in teaching PE (Gary Anderson 2013). It could be argued that the GAA coaching programme is also based on this premise. While GAA policy documents regularly prioritise the importance of recruiting female teachers as coaches, specific policy interventions to achieve this goal have been rare. Furthermore, coaching personnel interviewed for this research consistently depicted female teachers as a problem. However distinct changes are evident across the primary school system. More female teachers are involved in coaching activities, while Cumann na mBunscol officeholders are increasingly female teachers. Although Cumann na mBunscol is still dominated by male teachers, significant changes have taken place since the early 1970s. Liston (2008, p. 123) described the shift in the balance of power from males to females as a

shift from a position of “harmonious inequality towards inharmonious equality”. Whereas the issue of female teachers is addressed in official GAA policy, very little attention has been given to female primary school students. Constrained by a lack of resources, the LGFA and Camogie Associations have set some general targets for player development in primary schools but have, in general, trusted that GAA coaching personnel will deliver specific coaching inputs for girls, there is little evidence to suggest that the coaches are actively encouraging girls to join their local clubs. While some GAA coaches are proactive in this regard, others do not see it as part of their official role. Indeed, negative comments by some GAA officers suggest that they would prefer not to provide coaching for girls. In this regard, it is interesting to see that equality policy promoted by external groups like the INTO have had a significant influence in ensuring that school sport activities are made available for girls. Because of the INTO’s relative strength and their commercial sponsorship of the GAA’s mini-sevens initiative, it was able to promote the equitable treatment of girls at a time when this issue was not a GAA priority. Due to external pressures, Cumann na mBunscol competitions were extended to include girls, as the interaction between various groups resulted in unforeseen and unintended consequences (Patrick Murphy and Sheard 2006). When the GAA entered into sponsorship negotiations with the INTO it had no plans to include girls in the initiative; decisions made by the GAA and INTO at national level impacted on Cumann na mBunscol’s organisation of games at local level, even though it had not been involved in the negotiations.

Despite these advances, activities for boys in senior classes remain more widespread than those for girls. Lunn *et al.* (2013, p. 25) have identified these years at the end of primary school as pivotal in the establishment of positive attitudes towards physical activity. In addition, they suggest that selection of particular activities during this time period may be “an early indication of different preferences for types of activities among males and females”. My

research suggests that the more limited availability of team sports for girls may also be a factor, as girls' teams are less prevalent and, in some areas, are offered fewer matches. Moreover, the interview data shows that teacher commitment to girls' teams is weaker than to the boys' teams. Cale and Harris (2006) have suggested that targeted initiatives have positive impacts on girls' participation levels. Accordingly, it may be necessary for teachers and coaches to do more than merely include girls in school activities.

Blurred understanding: PE, school sport and the position of Gaelic games

What is PE?

The crowded policy space (Houlihan 2000; Penney 2008) inhabited by PE is subject to pressure from a number of prominent policy lobbies including education, sport and health (Griggs 2012a). Garrett and Wrench (2007, p. 40) have highlighted the “inherently complex and multifaceted” nature of the outcomes of PE. The health and lifelong participation discourses feature prominently in the purposes that are articulated for primary PE in Ireland (Coulter and Ní Chróinín 2013). Evidence from my research suggests that the GAA has begun to position itself as an organisation that promotes community-based, lifelong and health-promoting physical activity in schools and clubs. This recognition by the GAA that it has a role in PE and physical activity promotion contrasts with a lack of trust between the GAA and the PE community in the 1970s (Duffy 1997). The requirement to adhere to the aims of government policy, as articulated through ISC funding criteria, appears to have been a factor in this change.

Penney (2007, p. 15) has warned that some forms of PE can contribute to “fundamental educational and social inequality” and may reinforce “the dominant forms of hegemonic masculinity” that were typical of traditional models of PE (Stidder and Hayes 2013, p. 7). The evidence from this study echoes previous Irish research that describes primary PE

practice as a narrow range of activities centred on invasion games and, particularly, Gaelic games. The dominance of games within the PE curriculum can be partly explained by the desire of many teachers to pass on their own preference for games to their students and by the availability of facilities that are conducive to the playing of games (Capel and Whitehead 2013). These reasons were strongly evident in my research, where teachers tended to replicate their own game experiences in a way that favoured traditional games. In addition, the absence of indoor facilities in smaller primary schools constrained teachers from exploring curricular areas like dance and gymnastics. While these infrastructural deficiencies are frequently cited as inhibitors of a broad PE curriculum (Deenihan 2005; Irish National Teachers 2008), there is no indication in my data that the availability of more adequate facilities would prompt the participants to alter their bias towards team games.

In Ireland very little attention was given to PE curriculum development in primary schools prior to the publication of the 1971 curriculum. Duffy (1997, p. 193) has described how the publication of the 1971 curriculum was not supported by a coherent CPD programme after 1974, resulting in the continuation of a “physical education vacuum”. My research suggests that this vacuum has been filled with a range of multi-sport activities, particularly at the senior end of the primary school. Griggs and Ward (2012, p. 212) argue that the “‘sportification’ of PE serves to confirm its peripheral role in the curriculum” because sport is considered to have a lower status than academic subjects. The teachers in my research however, have a very high regard for sport. In particular, Gaelic games have a high status in their schools. As a consequence, space is found for coaching and competitive sport fixtures at the expense of curricular PE and, indeed, other subjects at particular times of the year when interscholastic fixtures played.

In Britain, the rise to prominence of games-based activities in PE has been traced back to the increased influence of sports NGBs in the mid-1970s (Capel and Whitehead 2013). This

research suggests that the games ethos in Irish primary schools dates back to the foundation of the state in the early 1920s when there was an impetus to establish a distinctive Gaelic culture in Irish schools. The notion of the male teacher promoting Gaelic games in his rural school and club featured strongly in the interview data, and interviewees presented this as a mythical ideal that was used to justify traditional values. For them, the games equated to PE and this view was a distinctive feature of teachers' habitus. As a result, many teachers and coaches articulated a view that failed to distinguish between sport and PE. This lack of clarity on the purposes of each will be discussed further in the upcoming sections.

School sport: curricular or extra-curricular?

Games occupy a significant place in popular culture, and the “powerful cultural positioning of games is reflected by their prominence within school curricula” (Gavin Ward 2012, p. 68). In many ways, the strength of this games culture within society has accorded the playing of games a status greater than, and somewhat external to, the delivery of the PE curriculum. Existing evidence suggests that the bulk of extra-curricular PE is directed towards team sport activity that is “conventional and conservative in nature” (Blair and Capel 2013, p. 173). In the context of my research, sport is an important part of life in Irish primary schools. The ways that sport is organised, however is contested by a variety of groups and could be described as “a social process characterised by unplanned as well as planned components (Dunning and Hughes 2013, p. 152). As De Knop *et al.* (1999, p. 154) point out, participation in sport “does not occur in a social vacuum”. Although a number of other Irish NGBs have developed primary school programmes their relative impact has been dwarfed by the extent of the GAA's investment in primary schools. This is hardly surprising when, for example, the GAA's financial resources are compared to those of smaller bodies, but it is noteworthy that the GAA has also managed to retain its dominant position over the FAI and IRFU. In 2012, the ISC provided grants to a combined value of €9.2 million to the GAA, IRFU and FAI for

youth sport development, while 58 other NGBs shared €11.7 million (Irish Sports Council 2012). This dominance cannot be explained in financial terms solely, and it must be considered within historical and cultural settings also. It is clear that the GAA has identified the development and maintenance of a strong presence in primary schools as a key priority for player recruitment. This has been supported by the volunteer presence of Cumann na mBunscol teachers and, more recently, by the GAA's extensive school coaching programme. The reluctance of government bodies to become actively involved in school sport has facilitated this also. As I outlined in Chapter five, for example, the ISC has reduced its focus on primary schools in favour of community sport objectives.

This research has identified an important trend whereby school sport has increasingly shifted from being an extra-curricular activity to one that is carried out during school time. This particular process will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

Are PE and sport synonymous?

Capel and Whitehead (2013, p. 4) note that "in some countries 'sport' and 'physical education' are synonymous". Such a position contrasts with the official Irish curriculum position which emphatically states that the two are "not synonymous" (Government of Ireland 1999a, p. 6). This research suggests, however, that many Irish teachers and coaches do not readily differentiate between the two, while WSE reports published by DES inspectorate are equally ambiguous. This situation has been exacerbated by the inclusion of sports coaching activities during schools time in recent years. The GAA's school coaching programmes invariably occur within the school day, rather than being offered as after school activities. Additionally, teachers have willingly accepted the presence of coaches in their schools and it appears that they consider these coaching sessions to be part of their PE allocation for the week. As a consequence, it would appear that, as Blair and Capel (2013) point out the use of coaches from specific NGBs may serve to narrow the curriculum on

offer, because these coaches do not have a depth of knowledge, or a remit, across a wide range of activities. In essence, this interpretation reinforces the view that PE and sport are synonymous.

Cumann na mBunscol competitions were traditionally organised as after school activities. While some counties still maintain this tradition, it is now common for games to take place during school time also. Interviewees reported that, particularly in senior classes and at particular times of the year, school fixtures replaced the time devoted to formal PE classes. This has implications for children who are not involved in the school teams, and it is especially problematic if a competitive model of school fixtures that prioritises winning is used instead of one that promotes maximum participation (School Sport Australia 2012; Way and Balyi 2007). External factors, including national pay agreements and an apparent decline in teachers' willingness to volunteer for after-school activities have contributed to this trend.

There was an acknowledgement in Chapter two of this study that the use of the terms 'physical education' and 'sport' is sometimes problematic, and that the term 'physical education and sport' is used increasingly in policy documentation (e.g. Department of Education and Skills 2012b). In that context, Flintoff (2008a, p. 145) has claimed that "tensions between sporting and educational discourses within PE...continue to impact on contemporary practice". This is not surprising, considering the contention of Evans and Davies (2006, p. 796) that "all forms of physical education inevitably involve a selection from the variety of knowledge forms and physical cultures prevailing locally, nationally and internationally".

The confusion around the relationship between PE and school sport may be partly explained by what Duffy (1997, p. 287) has described as the failure to agree for PE "a culturally specific definition and sense of identity which is fully congruent with the education system

and the society in which it operates”. The teachers and coaches who participated in this research placed a higher value on Gaelic games in comparison to the constituent strands of the PE curriculum, and they displayed what Curtner-Smith (2001, p. 83) has described as a “coaching orientation”. Teachers who have excelled at a particular sport may use the PE lesson “to produce versions of themselves within their class”, thereby treating it as “a vehicle to develop the school...team” (Gavin Ward 2012, p. 70). This appeared to be a motivating factor for the teachers in my study. Indeed, the image that they projected of themselves as that of a Gaelic games coach, rather than as a teacher of PE. They traced their interest in Gaelic games back childhood and, although many had limited playing experience themselves, they endeavoured to ensure that the children in their schools developed an allegiance to these games. Consequently, curricular PE appeared to be ranked lower in their priorities. In effect, PE either served as a vehicle to promote Gaelic games or was entirely substituted by these games. The findings of this study support the contention that there has been a “conflation of physical education and sport in rhetoric and policy language” (Griggs and Ward 2012, p. 215) and echo the suggestion that the dominant policy perspectives have made it more difficult “to conceive of physical education as ‘other than’ sport” (Penney 2007, p. 16). The next two sections discuss how this conceptualisation of ‘physical education-as-sport-techniques’ (Kirk 2013, p. 222) impacted on the practice of teachers and coaches in these primary schools.

Who is teaching PE?

The Irish PE curriculum document stipulates that parents and coaches can be recruited to “support”, rather than to substitute for, the teacher (Government of 1999, p. 27). The findings of this research, however, suggest that much of the work of NGB coaches involves taking the lead in teaching situations. Additionally, it would appear that lesson planning tasks have devolved to the coach, despite the policy mandate that “the teacher must retain overall responsibility for planning, organisation, control and monitoring” (Government of Ireland

1999b, p. 28). As a result, external personnel, frequently with only basic coaching qualifications, are teaching significant portions of the PE curriculum. A number of factors have contributed to this development. Some teachers are content to cede responsibility for the teaching of PE based on negative perceptions of their own ability to teach the subject. Fletcher and Mandigo (2012, p. 372) suggest that “many classroom teachers feel that they simply do not have what they perceive as being the qualities necessary for teaching PE, based on a belief that PE is a place reserved for those individuals who have experienced success in physical activities and fit their image of a physically active person”. The description of GAA coaches as experts by many teachers who participated in this study supports this view, when ‘not being into sport’ was used as a justification for the acceptance of a coach who clearly was. Concerns about teachers’ confidence and competence to teach PE are well documented internationally and in Ireland (e.g. McGuinness and Shelley 1996; Morgan and Bourke 2008) and this apparent lack of competence may have made it easier for NGBs to negotiate access to primary school curricular time. This has implications for how policy in PE ITE and CPD is designed and implemented. Additionally, the concerns expressed by members of the GAA that the gender imbalance in primary teaching workforce had created a crisis for the promotion of Gaelic games in primary schools have ensured that the organisation has been prepared to provide a high level of financial support for the development of these games on a voluntary to schools.

The use of external personnel in New Zealand has been cited as an example of “quick (yet potentially shallow) responses to complex long-term issues” where the provision of funding for these personnel is prioritized over the upskilling of teachers (Petrie and Lisahunter 2011, p. 333). The increasing use of coaches to deliver significant portions of the Irish primary PE curriculum mirrors what has occurred in Britain over the past decade (Griggs 2012b). In contrast to the British situation, however, where schools usually pay for the services of the

external providers (Blair and Capel 2008; Griggs 2010), the situation in Ireland is different in that cost of provision is generally covered by the NGB. There seems an assumption made by school principals and teachers that coaches are adequately qualified to carry out their role in primary schools. Furthermore, the GAA's extensive network of connections and their dominant position in the sporting culture of the country has meant that school communities accept coaches, largely without question. The principals who participated in this study were very positive towards the overall concept of the school coaching programme, although there was a growing awareness that the quality was also important. Maintaining a positive relationship with principal teachers was a priority of coaching personnel, because of their control over access to the schools.

The backgrounds of the coaches working for the GAA are varied. A cohort of professional coaches is supplemented by part-time and volunteer coaches who typically regard the school coaching programme as a short-term endeavour. As a result, coaching qualifications and expertise are inconsistent; while coaches are assumed to have comprehensive sports content knowledge, their pedagogical skills may be limited. Despite the GAA's insistence that all school coaches should have some coaching qualifications, it is unlikely that these qualifications will prepare coaches adequately to deliver an acceptable standard of PE. This is particularly true as the current minimum standard required is at Foundation Level¹⁷, the association's introductory coaching qualification. Blair and Capel (2013, p. 174) argue that the quality of PE and extra-curricular sport activities is likely to be compromised "if those delivering this provision do not have the necessary qualifications, knowledge, skill and understanding to undertake this role". Interview and observation evidence suggest that some coaches has difficulties managing large classes and struggled with the inclusion of children with special needs. Motivating the less-skilled children to participate was also cited as a

¹⁷ The GAA's Foundation level qualification confers "assistant coach" status on successful participants

problem, suggesting that these coaches lacked the pedagogical knowledge required to teach a class effectively. The apparent acceptance of these low levels of expertise, however, suggests that the GAA has focused achieving a coaching presence in as many schools as possible while neglecting the quality issues. Furthermore, it appears that school Boards of Managements have not yet taken an active role in monitoring the quality of PE and sport provision either.

The role of the coach: specialization in disguise?

Within the GAA, games development policy emphasises a co-operative relationship between teachers and coaches, but these views were less common among teachers, coaches and GAA officials not involved in games development activities. While a small number of initiatives have focused on the development of a co-operative relationship, there is little evidence to suggest that the interaction between teachers and coaching staff is in any way meaningful. In this section I propose that the (GAA) sports coach is becoming the *de facto* teacher of PE in Irish schools.

An unarticulated and, apparently, unintended consequence of the GAA's coaching programme has been the increased replacement of the teacher as the person who teaches PE. For significant portions of the school year, coaches with limited experience and qualifications are assuming the role of teacher during PE time, and teachers are willingly handing over their classes to coaches, either to ease their own burden of administrative work or due to the perception that these coaches are more expert than themselves. The powerful position of the GAA within the local community, and the unquestioned status attributed to Gaelic games coach, also facilitate the acceptance of the coaching service. This may have consequences for the status of primary PE, and may impact on children's experiences (Smith 2013). Griggs and Ward (2012, p. 218) argue that "the misplaced value placed upon sport-specific content knowledge and associated practices by primary school teachers leads to many sport coaches

being considered PE ‘specialists’”. Although this practice appears to be more formalized within the English context, the NGB coaching programmes serve a similar function in Irish primary schools. The apparent willingness of class teachers to cede responsibility to an external coach, who is perceived to be more expert, coupled with the dominant cultural position of Gaelic games within Irish society, has facilitated this narrow iteration of PE specialization. Comments by interviewees like Aidan certainly position the coach in that role, conferring a degree of professionalism that contrasts with a perceived lack of confidence and competence within the generalist teaching population.

If this is the case, then questions need to be asked about ability of all coaches to teach to a sufficiently high standard. Secondly, the potential impact of this mode of delivery must be examined in the context of the delivery of a “broad and balanced curriculum” (Government of Ireland 1999a, p. 8). Chen and Curtner-Smith (2013, p. 19) assert that both boys and girls can have a positive experience of PE when teachers possess “good curricular, pedagogical, content and pedagogical content knowledge, plus knowledge about their pupils”. While it would appear that some full-time personnel may have the capacity to deliver a programme of appropriate quality in one aspect of the games strand of the primary curriculum, it is doubtful if the volunteer or part-time person has the time and inclination to engage in the necessary levels professional development that would be required to do so. If that is the case, then “meaningful pedagogical relationships [that are] a cornerstone in youth development programs” (Walsh *et al.* 2010, p. 15) are unlikely to form.

Teachers in Irish primary schools do not appear to be overly concerned about issues of what Petrie and Lisahunter (2011, p. 335) describe as “curriculum ownership”, although there are discernible signs that the demands being placed on principals by the introduction of evaluation mechanisms may be raising awareness of the need to examine the role of external personnel more closely. The evidence of this research suggests that the guidelines in the

primary curriculum that point to the coach assisting the class teacher are largely ignored. Instead, the coach takes responsibility for the class while the teacher either supervises the activity from the periphery or engages in administrative work. Despite the reservations expressed about coaches' expertise in the previous section, teachers typically considered coaches to be experts. Writing about the theory of established-outsider relations, Liston (2005a, p. 69) describes how outsiders readily accept the authority of established groups "particularly when the balance of power is very unequal and the dominant position of established groups is not contested". In the context of the gender imbalance between the predominantly female teaching profession and the male-dominated coaching workforce, coaches can be considered to be in an established position, whereas female teachers as an outsider group have been subject to "blame gossip and stigma" (Velija 2011, p. 91) because of the prevalent view that they are unwilling, or unable, to promote Gaelic games effectively. In that environment, it is hardly surprising that teachers readily accept the input of coaches, thereby freeing up time to attend to administrative and other tasks.

Some policymakers who participated in this research believed that a replacement model of school coaching, where the teacher is not involved in delivery, is not sustainable in the context of financial cutbacks. Instead they argued that the coach should work with the teacher, possibly providing the latter with CPD in the process. There is evidence to suggest that this type of collaborative work may be the best way to ensure that students receive the most benefit (Blair and Capel 2013; Sloan 2010). While this format has been tried on a limited basis in some pilot programmes, its potential success is dependent of the skill level of the coach to manage this interaction. In that regard, it has been suggested that any tutors involved in the delivery of teacher CPD require a comprehensive level of training themselves in order to provide high-quality support (Frances Murphy and O'Leary 2012). Consequently, it is questionable if many GAA coaches have the necessary expertise to impact positively on

teacher CPD. Furthermore, other research has found that the provision of CPD opportunities for teachers by different NGBs can potentially hinder the delivery of the type of generic games modules recommended in PE curricula (Gavin Ward 2012).

Keay (2006b, p. 380) has argued that it is important for teachers to be “able to articulate a coherent purpose for the subject [PE] that should not be delivered by sports coaches or exercise professionals”. The teachers in this study displayed strong support for the dominance of Gaelic games within primary schools and their articulation of the nature and purpose of PE is characterised by an acceptance of the centrality of Gaelic games within the subject. In that context, they appeared to be willing to accept coaches as an integral part of the process. Sloan (2010) suggests that teachers in England will resist being pushed to the periphery if PE is delivered by specialists. The teachers and coaches who participated in my research did not convey a sense of similar resistance in Ireland.

Summary

This chapter has examined the key themes that were identified during the course of this research. Gaelic games have become deeply embedded in the culture of primary schools due to the efforts of very committed teachers and GAA personnel over many decades. While originally justified on grounds of national and local identities, these factors have become less influential in recent years. In that context, adapting to challenges posed by urbanization, for example, has proven difficult for the GAA. Implementation of national policy is dependent on the interaction of a number of different groups, resulting in outcomes that are frequently different from what had been planned originally. Sports policy initiatives are typically designed by professionals and implemented by volunteers (Skille 2008). This can present problems for NGBs like the GAA because their control over policy implementation decreases as chains of interdependency lengthen (Bloyce and Smith 2010; Dunning and Hughes 2013). GAA Go Games policy has not gained traction in primary schools due to groups of teachers

who value formal interscholastic competition very highly. The GAA's action in modifying the original rules to allow some flexibility for Cumann na mBunscol competitions demonstrate the "relative power of practitioners at 'grass roots' level to amend policy in its implementation" (Ken Green 2008, p. 26). Similarly, DES policy on the role of the class teacher in the delivery of the PE curriculum is complicated by the widespread presence of NGB coaches. This latter situation is compounded by a lack of clarity about what constitutes PE and school sport. As a consequence, PE can be a narrow, sport-based experience for many children, and school sport activities are increasingly encroaching on curricular time. Moreover, this research has raised questions about the competency of NGB coaches to make a contribution of sufficient quality to PE.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

Revisiting the aims of this study

This study has examined how PE and sport activities are organised in Irish primary schools. Penney and Evans (2005, p. 22) consider policy to be “a complex, ongoing, always contested process”. The process of policy formation and implementation occurs within dynamic interdependent networks (Patrick Murphy 1998b) that feature “asymmetrical balances of power which favour some more than others” (Ken Green 2008, p. 27). Gaelic games occupy a dominant position within Irish schools (Fahey *et al.* 2005; Houlihan 1997; Woods *et al.* 2010). This thesis sought to increase our understanding of why this has occurred, and how this dominance impacts on physical education and school sport. By constructing a theoretical framework based on tenets of figural sociology, it was possible to adopt a long-term, relational perspective on the position of Gaelic games in primary schools.

Summary of the main findings

Elias (1978) argued against the presentation of research findings that were ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. Instead, he advocated for movement towards a position “where theoretical and empirical knowledge becomes *more extensive, more correct, and more adequate*” [italics in the original] (1978, p. 53). Consequently, my intention is to present the main findings of this study in a way that deepens our understanding of the role played by Gaelic games activities in Irish primary schools.

The conflation of PE and sport

Ken Green (2006a, p. 653) argues that PE is “nothing more than the (recurring) *practices* of physical education teachers” [italics in original]. As Kirk (2010) points out, popular conceptualizations of PE have shifted over time, and a variety of activities such as gymnastics and physical training have been regarded as central at different times in the past.

He proposes “physical education-as-sport-techniques” as the most accurate description of contemporary PE practice (2010, p. 41). The data generated in this study suggest that, despite PE curriculum guidelines to the contrary, PE and sport are commonly believed to be synonymous. NGB documentation is concerned primarily with the promotion of sport activities, while government bodies including the ISC and the DES inspectorate fail to distinguish between sport and PE in a consistent manner. Many factors contribute to this “privileged position of sport within PE” (Ken Green 2005, p. 104). Teachers’ promotion of a narrow range of invasion games in schools copperfastens the centrality of sport within curricular PE. The GAA’s strength as a community-based organisation has been particularly influential, while government commitment to school physical education prior to 1971 was weak. More recently, changes to teachers’ general working conditions and broader societal issues related to school transportation systems have contributed to the arrangement of interscholastic competitions within the school day rather than after school. Consequently, school sport activities have encroached upon and, in many cases, replaced formal PE classes in ways that were “unplanned and unforeseen” (Dopson and Waddington 1996).

The role of the teacher in promoting Gaelic games

Many of the teachers who participated in this study demonstrated a very strong allegiance to Gaelic games, and typically volunteered with their local GAA club as well. They played a significant part in the promotion of Gaelic games in primary schools, and fostered links with the local community. Their biographical details suggest that their early experiences of sport have been significant in their habitus formation. In addition, a strong sense of we-identity was evident in their commitment to Cumann na mBunscol, and this was associated with notions of national identity expressed through the promotion of Gaelic games. This identity served to justify their promotion of Gaelic games in school contexts, and enabled them to rank these activities ahead of other sport and, frequently, educational priorities. Ken Green (2003, p.

119) suggests that “a self-selecting and self-replicating process” was evident in the way that PE teachers adhere to traditional models of the subject. In a similar way, the teachers in my study, through their involvement in Cumann na mBunscol, worked to conserve a particular form of school sport practice in their schools. Additionally, they expressed frustration at attempts by organisations such as the GAA and DES to reduce their autonomy at local level. This aligned with what Meg Maguire (2002, p. 273) described as “local resistance to managerialism and marketisation in education”, and might be interpreted as a reaction against the process of centralization discussed in Chapter 8.

The role of the coach in primary schools

The presence of sports coaches in the primary schools is not unique to Ireland, and the trend of using coaches in schools is “due to a combination of complex and inter-related constituent elements” (Griggs 2012a, p. 266). In that context, Smith (2013, p. 14) concludes that “it is only possible to adequately understand the trend towards using sports coaches and other non-specialists in PE by locating them within the context of broader social processes”. This study examined a number of these interrelated processes. Firstly, DES policy as expressed in the PE curriculum documents is largely ignored, and the inspectorate has little comment to make on the situation. In essence, responsibility for monitoring the work of coaches has been passed to school boards of management at a local level. There is evidence to suggest that some school principals are beginning to adopt a more critical stance regarding the activities of coaches, prompted in an indirect way by WSE and, particularly, SSE guidelines. It is noteworthy that this has come about due to constraints set by general education policy, rather than in a planned way through NGB or specific government PE policy. Consequently, the implementation of educational policy initiatives may have unforeseen implications for NGB practice in primary schools. Secondly, the GAA’s coaching structure developed in an *ad hoc* manner and originally served, among other things, to provide employment for elite players.

More recently, a perception within the organisation that the gender imbalance in primary teaching impacts negatively on Gaelic games promotion has proven to be an important stimulus. Furthermore, the organisation has committed a significant level of resources to ensure that coaching is provided in over 90% of schools, dwarfing the presence of even the other large NGBs in terms of coverage. These factors, coupled with expectations at club level that primary schools should support player recruitment and development, underpin the GAA's approach to school coaching programmes. In addition, the evidence presented in this study suggests teachers have welcomed the presence of coaches in their schools. Coaches were viewed as experts, suggesting that teachers' own lack of confidence to teach PE may be a contributory factor (Joint Committee on Education and Science 2005). Furthermore, increased planning and preparation requirements associated with the implementation of the 1999 primary curriculum has contributed to curriculum overload in "hurried schools and classrooms" (National Council on Curriculum and Assessment 2010, p. 8). In that context, it is not surprising that coaches were considered to provide a welcome respite, in a way that was similar to findings in Britain (Griggs 2010). An unplanned outcome of this process, however, has been the displacement of the class teacher, with the coach now being responsible for the delivery of extensive portions of the PE curriculum. Coaches, in effect, have become PE specialists by default, although their training is minimal and sport-specific.

Models of school sport: balancing participation and competition

Both the DES and GAA have sought to deemphasize formal competition for primary school-aged children. Instead, models that maximize participation have been advocated. There has been resistance to these policies in primary schools, in particular. The findings of this study suggest that participation in interscholastic competition is motivated by a number of factors, not all of which are related to sport. Competitions provided opportunities for the development of social cohesion within schools, and they were valued for the positive public relations

messages about schools that could be transmitted to parents and the wider community. Teachers were also motivated by tradition to maintain exclusive competitions rather than adopting the Go Games model that was based on more inclusive principles. They also valued competition for what they perceived as an opportunity to identify and develop elite players. Nevertheless, there was also evidence to suggest that groups of teachers responded to new policy initiatives in different ways. Teachers who were more closely affiliated to the GAA, for example, appeared more likely to promote policies that focused on maximizing children's participation. This differentiation of groups within Cumann na mBunscol was a cause of internal tension that mitigated against policy implementation. It also caused tension externally with the GAA, leading to some marginalization of Cumann na mBunscol from the policymaking process. Conversely, the relative strength of Cumann na mBunscol in each county has ensured that structure of its competitions has remained largely unchanged despite efforts to move towards more inclusive models. In examining policy change following the London Olympics in 2012, Bloyce and Lovett (2012, p. 372) highlight the notion of "continuity alongside change" and note that significant change is unlikely due to the complexity of the networks of people involved in making and implementing policy. In a similar way, the implementation of Go Games policy in primary schools has been slower than intended due to the complex web of interrelated groups involved in the implementation process. In essence, as the interdependent networks of teachers and other organisations increased in complexity, it was harder for the GAA as policy instigator to control implementation, and it became more difficult to predict the outcomes of these processes (Bloyce and Smith 2010).

A rationale for Gaelic games: beyond nationalism?

Participants in this study justified the prominence of Gaelic games in primary schools through expressions of nationalism. This justification has featured strongly in GAA rhetoric

since the foundation of the state as participation in these games was inextricably bound up in conceptions of national identity. This research uncovered some subtle changes to the arguments that underpin this perspective. Teachers, for example, continued to adhere strongly to views that equate Gaelic games participation with being Irish, and sought to maximize links with the Irish language, music and culture. For them, these were ways to integrate children from different ethnic backgrounds, so that they ‘fitted in’ to the life of the school. There was evidence of a “group habitus” (Ken Green 2003, p. 136) linked to their childhood experiences and the socialization process that took place during the early part of their careers. An adherence to “yesterday’s social reality” was apparent (Keay 2009, p. 231). Groups within Cumann na mBunscol, for example, adhered strongly to competitive formats, despite education and sport policy that advocated more inclusive models. Some groups within the GAA, in contrast, were shifting to a rationale for Gaelic games based on contemporary educational concepts such as physical activity promotion or FMS development. This change was influenced by funding criteria laid down by external groups such as the ISC and by player recruitment pressures associated with urbanization. Furthermore, the growth of soccer and rugby provided alternative opportunities to represent Irish identity to an international audience (Houlihan 1997), necessitating the change of focus that was clearly apparent within GAA groups but less so among teachers.

Policy Recommendations

There are a number of recommendations that arise from the main findings outlined already in this chapter. These are presented with the caveat that, from a figurational perspective, “the *normal* result of complex processes...includes outcomes which no one has chosen and no one has designed” [italics in the original] Bloyce *et al.* (2008, p. 377).

School sport: displacing or complementing PE?

This research suggests that PE has been displaced by sport in many Irish primary school contexts. While acknowledging that definitions of physical education are subject to change over time, greater clarity is required on the relationship between the two. In particular, teachers and coaches need to develop a deeper awareness of the issue. Pope (2011, pp. 274-75) argues for the positioning of “sport and physical education as mutually educational vehicles that promote access and opportunity”. A discussion on how sport and physical education can provide children with a wide range of appropriate learning opportunities might serve as a useful starting point for discussion among interested stakeholders such as the DES, ISC and the NGBs. Part of this discussion should centre on the purposes of PE so that it can be connected to the wider social context in meaningful ways (Penney *et al.* 2002).

Implementing policy: clarity and guidance

An absence of government policy guidelines and a weakness in implementation procedures for PE and school sport has enabled powerful groups such as NGBs to lead policy implementation. Clear policy guidelines on the deployment of coaches, similar to those that exist in other countries (e.g. Sports Coach UK 2013; Youth Sport Trust 2013), are largely absent in an Irish context. The provision of guidelines by the DES, for example, could prompt school Boards of management to critically evaluate schemes operating within their schools.

Dopson (2001) argues that a recognition of the influence of emotion is typically absent from explanations of how large and complex organisations change. This absence is important in the context of the networks of human relationships that characterize these organisations.

During the implementation of Go Games, the GAA failed to acknowledge the strong emotional ties binding teachers to traditional competition formats. Developing an understanding of why competitions were so popular may have prompted the adoption of more effective strategies to negotiate change.

To date, the GAA has typically characterized the gender imbalance in primary teaching as a problem. Trends identified in this study show that the number of female teachers occupying leadership roles in primary schools is increasing steadily. As a consequence, the GAA will need to engage proactively with female principals if it wishes to maintain its presence within the primary school system. Bloyce and Murphy (2008, p. 24) note that “even the most powerful groups are constrained by the nature and complexity of the human figurations in which they are located and their aspirations and their strategies are more or less continuously mediated and even thwarted by other groups with more, similar or less power”. Principal teachers hold considerable power in deciding what activities take place in their school. As the stereotypical male Cumann na mBunscol principal becomes less prevalent, the GAA will need to adopt different strategies in its dealings with school authorities. In particular,

Issues of quality: who teaches PE, and how do they teach it?

The issue of primary physical education specialists has not been seriously considered in Ireland (Fletcher and Mandigo 2012) At the same time, the DES has failed to provide a sustained programme of teacher professional development around PE. It appears this vacuum has been filled with coaches from the GAA and other NGBs in a way that is mirrored in New Zealand (Petrie and lisahunter 2011). A key issue for the DES in this regard is the question of who is best placed to teach PE. The current ambiguity over the relationship between the coach and teacher needs to be addressed so that the programme provided is reflective of curricular objectives. An alternative model could involve the employment of generalist primary teachers with a PE specialism, as has been recommended in other countries (DeCorby *et al.* 2005; Timothy Lynch 2013).

The prevalence of NGB coaches during PE curricular time has implications for the quality of the programme being delivered, and for the integrity of the curriculum being experienced. The GAA needs to put a comprehensive programme in place so that coaches have appropriate

pedagogical skills and are sufficiently prepared to provide coaching inputs that align with the aims and objectives of the physical education curriculum. Furthermore, a clear policy statement is required from the GAA outlining a rationale for the school coaching programme and the role of the teacher therein. In conjunction with this, strategies to provide coaches with a range of appropriate skills, along with an increased awareness of policy guidelines (Bolton and Smith 2013).

Griggs and Wheeler (2007, p. 279) propose teachers and external personnel should be “working not only side by side in the same space but with a shared interest in maximizing the potential of the young people with whom they interact”. This approach has potential to embed the coaches’ input more effectively within the curriculum, and may also serve to provide teachers with skills that can be applied if coaching programmes are discontinued.

Potential for further research

This study did not focus on social class or educational disadvantage as a factor in children’s participation in Gaelic games. In the context of the Ireland’s increasing urbanization, this is an issue that requires further research, as a number of studies identify social disadvantage as a significant barrier to children’s participation in sport (Lunn *et al.* 2013; Woods *et al.* 2010). Furthermore, this poses challenges for the GAA’s recruitment model that has, to date, been very successful in rural areas but has not had similar levels of success in socially disadvantaged urban areas. Consequently, there is potential to examine the efficacy of this model in terms of children’s experiences and the development of school-community links. Issues regarding PE and school sport provision have been explored in some detail within this study. Further research is required into models of teacher and coach professional development. In particular, *ad hoc* mentoring programmes organised by the GAA where coaches and teachers work together have not been the subject of any academic study.

Examining these initiatives in the context of communities of practice may be fruitful in terms of the content knowledge that may be gained by the teacher, and the pedagogical skills that may be acquired by the coach. (Harris 2010; Wenger 1998)

Finally, some research has focused on the impact of primary ITE programmes in Ireland on teachers' confidence to teach PE (e.g. Frances Murphy and Cosgrave 2010). GAA policy statements indicate that engaging with student teachers during ITE is an important part of its recruitment strategy. In that context, further research into this sector could examine the relationship between ITE and student teachers' prior experiences and explore how the ITE process impacts on their attitudes towards PE and school sport, with a particular focus on Gaelic games.

Concluding observations

Gaelic games are deeply embedded in Irish primary schools. Participation in these games has a cultural significance that goes beyond the confines of the PE class, and the GAA's strong position in Irish society is reflected in the acceptance of its presence within the school system. I believe that this study has added to our understanding of how the centrality of Gaelic games has come to be established in primary schools, and it has identified areas where policy initiatives have been interpreted in unforeseen and unplanned ways. Bloyce and Smith (2010, p. 15) point out that "those involved in the planning and implementation of policy...rarely reflect upon the possible side-effects". Government departments and NGBs invest a considerable amount of resources into the development of policies relating to PE and youth sport. Frequently, however, the outcomes do not match the original policy objectives. In that regard, it would be beneficial for these groups to seek the development a more adequate understanding of the processes underpinning their policy initiatives. Elias (1978, p. 96) argues that "chances to control the game may increase again as people become more and

more distanced from their own intertwining network”. By ‘stepping back’ policymakers may gain greater control of their ‘game’ and achieve their policy goals.

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Appendix A: General information for participants



UNIVERSITY *of* LIMERICK

OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Project Title: “From Policy to Practice - The Delivery of Gaelic Games in Irish Primary Schools”

What is the study about?

The coaching and playing of Gaelic Games is considered to be an important part of primary school physical education and sport. This study aims to examine the implementation of Gaelic games in primary schools in the context of policies developed by the GAA and by the educational authorities.

What will I have to do?

Participants in this study will take part in an initial interview lasting approximately 45 minutes. In some cases a shorter follow-up interview may be necessary to clarify issues raised. Each interview will be recorded. On completion of the interview process, participants will be offered the opportunity to read the transcripts to ensure that their views have been represented accurately.

General Information

It is hoped that this study will help to inform future policy directions on the role of sport in primary PE and extra-curricular activities.

There are no foreseeable risks involved in this study.

Participation in the study is voluntary. Participants are also free to withdraw from the study at any time.

The information gathered during the course of this study will be analysed and may be used in the writing of academic papers. The anonymity of each participant will be protected at all times and views expressed in the interview will be treated in strictest confidence.

Other participants include primary teachers, coaches and personnel involved in the formulation and implementation of national policies for PE and school sport.

Interview recordings and transcripts will be stored carefully to ensure that they are accessible only to the project investigators.

For further information, please contact the project investigators as listed below:

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If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact: The Chairman of the University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee

c/o Anne O'Dwyer
Graduate School
University of Limerick
Limerick
Tel: (061) 202672

Appendix B: Informed consent form



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OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

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What is the study about?

The coaching and playing of Gaelic Games is considered to be an important part of primary school physical education and sport. This study aims to examine the implementation of Gaelic games in primary schools in the context of policies developed by the GAA and by the educational authorities.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. People invited to participate are free to accept or decline this invitation. Furthermore, participants are entirely free to withdraw from the study at any time.

I confirm that I have read and understand the subject information page for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions which have been answered fully

I am fully aware of all of the procedures involving myself, and of any risks and benefits associated with the study

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason

I am aware that all details regarding my participation will be kept confidential.

I agree to take part in this study

Name of Participant: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name of Project Investigator: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C: Sample interview guides

Topic Guide *and* Sample Interview Questions

Interviews with National Cumann na mBunscol officers

Examples of additional Generic (Probing) Questions:

Can you give me an example of...?

Why do you think it is important to...?

How did you approach change when...?

Could you explain what you mean by...?

How did you react when...?

Adapted from Legard et al (2003)

Format

Introduction

Nature and Purpose of Research

Confidentiality

Permission to Record

Description of your position within Cumann na mBunscol (and duration, background)

Can you describe for me your involvement...

How did you get involved?

How has that involvement changed over the years?

Role of female teachers within C na mB?

Role of Cumann na mBunscol

Main objectives

What would you consider to be...

Strengths

Challenges

Locally / Nationally

Position within the Gaelic games “family”: how relevant is C na mB?

Why do some units seem to find it so hard to recruit personnel?

Where does C na mB “fit” within the Gaelic games “family”

Position of Gaelic Games within the Primary School

PE Curriculum Statement

Practical implementation in schools: In your experience, how is this achieved?

Contribution to PE

Impact on PE...Some people would say that the curriculum is dominated by games – how do you react to that?

What about the DES?

and the Inspectorate?

Contribution to school community

Why do schools get involved?

What contribution do Gaelic games make?

Why are competitions popular? (Impact of Go Games...?)

Extra-curricular Activities

Policy statements

Increasing participation

Inclusion

“School time or after school”: Which is preferable?

Why have many counties moved to “during school time”?

Gender imbalance in primary teaching

Recruitment of teachers into the organisation

Recruitment of teachers to coaching

Role of Cumann na mBunscol

Nationally

Locally

Competition v Participation

Objective of exhibition games

A teacher-only organisation: Describe the Kilkenny situation

School Coaching Programme

How has it developed over the past 15 years?

Why is it necessary

Role of Cumann na mBunscol: Is C na mB involved / consulted?

Liaison with county board / development officers: how are full-time officers of assistance?

Heads of Agreement Document

Why was it developed?

What impact does it have in your school?

Role of the Coach

What does the coach do?

How does that work for your school?

When does coaching take place?

What does “quality” look like?

Role of the Teacher

CPD

Role of the coach

Who is best placed to deliver the Gaelic games programme?

Relationship with Camogie / Ladies Football

Contacts with Camogie / Ladies Gaelic NGBs

Inclusion of camogie / ladies football in school coaching programmes

Historical background

Limited capacities?

Way(s) forward?

Position in 2015

Strategic Plan (2007-2012)

What are the main strengths of the organisation in helping to achieve the targets?

What are the barriers to implementation?

What systems are in place to evaluate policy implementation?

How is Cumann na mBunscol likely to evolve during the timeframe of the plan?

Interviews with GAA Administrators: Alternative Questions

GAA Policy: Grassroots to National Programme

Increase Participation

Ways to do this?

Support Healthy and Active Communities

Volunteerism

Practical implications

How is Cumann na mBunscol supported?

How are schools supported?

Interviews with Coaches: Alternative Questions

School Coaching Programme

The Structure in your County

Role of the Coach

What should the coach do? How would you describe...?

Sustainability

Qualifications Key competencies

Coach Education

Volunteer or salaried: Career path?

Evaluation

Role of the Teacher

CPD

Role of the coach

Gender imbalance in primary teaching

Go Games in Primary Schools

Competition: How do you envisage official policy being implemented?

Should coaching be provided for club members only?

Primary School competition

Interviews with Teachers: Alternative Questions

Background

Interest in Gaelic games

Influences

Description of your involvement in coaching football in school (and duration, background)

Can you describe for me your involvement...

Where did this interest in coaching come from?

Position of Gaelic Games within the Primary School

Describe the Gaelic games activities in this school

Contribution to school community

Why do schools get involved?

What contribution do Gaelic games make?

PE Curriculum Statement

Practical implementation in schools: In your experience, how is this achieved?

Contribution to PE

Impact on PE: Some people would say that the curriculum is dominated by games – how do you react to that?

Extra-curricular Activities

Policy statements

Increasing participation

Inclusion

“School time or after school”: Which is preferable?

What impact have the Croke Park Planning Hours had in your school?

Appendix D: Observation template

Date and Time				
Venue				
Coach Pseudonym				
Describe beginning and end of lesson				
Teacher Action	Yes	No	Not Sure	Comment
Teacher not present				
Teacher Present, but not engaged				
Teacher Observing				
Teacher Assisting				
Teacher Co-teaching				
Teacher Leading				
Coach Action				
Inclusive: SEN				
Inclusive: Gender				
Inclusive: Skill levels				
Building Rapport				
Positive				
Coach Style				
Direct				

Guided Discovery				
Problem-solving				
Groupwork				
Focus of Activity				
Skill-based				
Game-based				
Small-sided				
Gaelic games specific				
FMS				
Generic				
Curriculum alignment				

Appendix E: Developing a theme: Justifying Gaelic games – Ethos and Identity

Ethos and Identity	GAA & national identity	"National" games	Importance of recruitment
		PA promotion; ISC influence	Healthy
Teacher habitus		Early career socialization	Belonging •School pride •apprenticeship
		Background	Parental, community influence
		Tradition	Better in the past
Crisis & Blame		Hegemonic masculinity	Male teacher; religious orders "Female teachers are great, but..."
		Threat; fear of change	Other sports