**Title**: Physical Literacy and the development of Girls’ Leadership: An Evaluation of the English Football Association’s Active Literacy Through Storytelling Programme

**Abstract:**

The English Football Association (FA) has established a number of programmes to encourage girls’ participation in physical activity but has raised concerns that these may be limited in accessibility to target groups. Developing physical literacy is one way in which girls may be supported in building social confidence to access opportunities. This study evaluated the efficacy of the FA’s ‘Active Literacy through Storytelling’ designed to develop young girls’ physical literacy.

Participants were girls aged 5-12 yrs (n=25) and programme leaders (n=2) from two case study schools. Research with the girls involved 3 stages: the first, drawing pictures of engagement in the project (‘before’ and ‘after’), the second, individual interviews utilising the drawings. Leaders were subsequently interviewed based on data generated here. Thematic analysis of qualitative data, sensitised by physical literacy concepts was conducted.

Results demonstrated the programme developed girls’ social interaction, teamwork and leadership skills.

**Key Words**: Physical Literacy, Girls’ Leadership, Physical Activity, Active Storytelling

**Introduction**

The English Football Association’s Active Literacy Through Storytelling Programme is designed to support girls in developing the physical literacy that can enable them to take part in sporting opportunities. This study is a funded investigation evaluating the efficacy of the programme with a specific focus on the development of social domain of learning (Keegan et al., 2019; Svender, Larsson, & Redelius, 2012). This focus was selected as it can be considered central to children’s ability to access group activity opportunities (Everley & Everley, 2018). The main aims of the study were to understand how girls engaged with the programme with an emphasis on the extent to which the approach facilitated accessing physical activity; engagement with others and the confidence to explore movement possibilities as a result of social interaction through stories. The investigation incorporated the evaluation of those delivering the programme in school and, more specifically, explored the perspectives of the girls involved in order to understand and centralise their subjective experiences.

The engagement of girls in physical activity and sport in particular has long been a concern for governments and providers of opportunities (Everley and Macfadyen, 2015). The problem is particularly acute in the UK as children generally are becoming less and less active at a younger age (Farooq et al., 2017). This also coincides with an increase in sedentary behaviours in the West which presents an additional health threat (Adele Kentel & Dobson, 2007). In order to support girls’ engagement in sporting opportunities and physical activities that may serve to address these issues, a range of initiatives have been developed by both governments and sport organisations who construct particular discourses associated with what it ‘is’ to be a girl participant (Svender et al., 2012). Many such programmes problematise the ‘teenage girl’ as a target for intervention. This, however, is potentially problematic as potentially, it is the nature of engagement that precedes adolescence which determines how girls interact with physical activity opportunities. Earlier intervention, could, therefore, lead to improved engagement, self -esteem and confidence associated with successful adherence to participation.

Improving girls’ engagement in sporting opportunities is arguably of benefit to the individual and wider society as well as the particular sports concerned. The English Football Association (FA) has experienced a particular gender imbalance in participation in its sport and now has a focus on improving participation levels for girls. Apropos this intention, the organisation has developed a number of programmes designed to encourage younger girls’ participation. However, the FA has also raised concerns that these opportunities may be limited in their accessibility, meaning that participant groups are often those who already have the competencies associated with successful participation in sport. It has therefore identified that in order to truly widen participation and broaden access to opportunities, consideration of the initial development of girls’ psychological, social and physical confidence in movement activities needs to be developed in some so that they might be enbabled to attend and confidently join sports programmes.

To this end, the FA, in collaboration with the National Literacy Trust, developed an initiative targeting girls aged 5-8 years: the school based ‘Active Literacy Through Storytelling’ programme. This utilises a series of specifically designed texts which encourage girls to become increasingly active, socially engaged, confident and motivated . Girls are invited to respond to scenarios through engaging their sensory imaginations as they enact stories using prompts and anticipate action An example of one aspect of this is shown in table 1 which illustrates the support materials of the text of ‘The Monkey Quest’. This particular book invites girls to begin trekking through the jungle and look for the animals that will become the central characters of the story that follows:

*Insert table 1 here*

At the end of each chapter of the story, the girls are left with a ‘cliffhanger’ and asked to think at home about what might happen next:

Oh no! The monkeys are playing catch with their shiny red object and they have dropped it into the river…I wonder where it will go?...think about where the ruby could be going next.

This then provides an introduction to the next phase of the story. Thus, girls are invited to enact a combination of provided and imagined scenarios adopting roles assisting characters and determining storylines. This is consistent with the ethos of physical literacy as it facilitates pupil movement that is within the scope of what they are ‘endowed’ (M. Whitehead, 2010). The girls invited to join the programme are those that are considered less active by their schools and, or have had, or taken fewer opportunities to become active within a school context.

The programme is brought into the school by staff, named as ‘activators’ who ordinarily fulfil a support role working with children in play environments. The Youth Sport Trust (a UK charity working to ensure all children enjoy the benefits of play and sport) trains these ‘activators’ in the use of what will be school based texts (‘Activator Guides’) and home use resources (‘Adventure Passports’) provided by the FA and National Literacy Trust, in terms of essential principles of physical literacy. As identified above, although training is consistent, schools are free to deliver the programme to girls as appropriate to them.

**Background literature**

Physical literacy utilises the concept of monism in approaching the learning of physical skills and takes an existentialist orientation towards developing competencies that can enable individuals to take control and determine their own participation in movement activities for life. Monist philosophy contests mind and matter exist as a single entity (Nagasawa & Alter, 2015). Within the context of physical literacy here, this means that children’s bodies are considered to be vehicles for experience (McCaffery & Singleton, 2013). Therefore, if movement potential is explored in accordance with natural capacities, sensations associated with the joy of movement can be experienced and confidence built. As a result, this creates possibilities for children to take responsibility for their continued engagement in activity in line with existential principles.

Physical literacy is, in itself, a contested construct (Cairney, Kiez, Roetert, & Kriellaars, 2019; Shearer et al., 2018). This is in terms of its specific meaning with competing narratives attending to the interpretation and application of the term (Harvey et.al., 2018 Lynch and Soukup, 2016(Harvey & Pill, 2018; Pot, Whitehead, & Durden-Myers, 2018). However, as a philosophical approach to learning it is utilised in a range of professional contexts concerned with embodied learning (Dudley, Cairney, Wainwright, Kriellaars, & Mitchell, 2017; Robinson, Randall, & Barrett, 2018; M. E. Whitehead, Durden-Myers, & Pot, 2018). Indeed, in recent years it has come to feature more significantly in the development of engagement in sport and health lifestyles (Roberts, Newcombe, & Davids, 2019). Although relatively new, there are a range of research perspectives that are beginning to endeavour to understand its nature (Longmuir & Tremblay, 2016; Wainwright et al., 2020).

Physical Literacy is considered to emanate from discourses of physical education in the UK and in particular, the work of Whitehead who is attributed with its conceptualisation in contemporary contexts (Gu, Chen, & Zhang, 2019). Defined by the International Physical Literacy Association as ‘the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge, and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life’(Robinson et al., 2018), there is a broad desire that teachers appreciate the potential of physical literacy in education (Flemons, Diffey, & Cunliffe, 2018; Wainwright, Goodway, Whitehead, Williams, & Kirk, 2018). There is therefore a wide acceptance that such an approach is appropriate to education programmes such as that being considered here.

Focussing on holistic learning, physical literacy can be interpreted in culturally specific contexts (Cairney et al., 2019; Keegan et al., 2019). Therefore, teaching associated with it need not be overly restricted by prescribed frameworks (Durden-Myers, Green, & Whitehead, 2018). With this in mind, the design of the Active Literacy Through Storytelling programme facilitates the invocation of participant driven engagement through freedoms of interpretation and presentation. Schools are encouraged to ‘deliver’ the programme in ways that best suit their immediate environments. This ensures meaning is derived from a localised context (Barnett et al., 2019). Therefore, the programme can be used to frame experience that encourages girls to learn in, and about, activity.

**Materials and Methods**

The purpose of the research was to undertake an evaluation of the social learning that takes place through the FA’s 's Active Literacy Through Storytelling Programme designed to support ‘beginner girls’ in becoming physically literate prior to being encouraged into sport.

Significantly, in the 30th anniversary year of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which includes the right to be heard in research (Cremin, Mason, & Busher, 2011; Everley, 2018) and continued calls for research to actively involve children where topics concern them, this evaluation endeavoured to ensure that all parties involved in the Active Literacy Through Storytelling had the opportunity to express their voices, with particular emphasis on that of the girls involved.

In order to establish a comprehensive overview of the programme in practice, a case study approach was taken to this work (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013; Simons, 2009). The principal researcher attended a training event delivered by the Youth Sport Trust in the Mid Sussex area of England in order to comprehend this process and meet the individuals involved, thus establishing key relationships and understanding to inform the research process.

As part of the training programme, participants completed a questionnaire evaluating the sessions and indicating their intentions for the delivery. Based in this, schools were invited to become involved in the evaluation. Two schools, ‘Meadowfield School’ and ‘Forest School’ were selected to form the cases for this research based on their intended approach and support from their Head Teachers. As outlined in table 2 below, although trained at the same event, each took a slightly different approach to the delivery of the programme in line with encouraged environmentally relevant designs to develop physical literacy (Barnett et al., 2019):

***Insert table 2 here***

In light of this delivery variance the research participants at Meadowfield School were the Activator, girl participants (Year 1, aged 5/6 yrs, n=8). At Forest School, they were the Activator, girl participants (Year R, aged 5yrs, n=4, Year 1, aged 5/6yrs, n=4, Year 2, aged 6/7yrs, n=3) and girl leaders (Year 6, aged 10/11yrs, n=6).

In accordance with previous research conducted using creative approaches to understanding children’s experiences, all girls (leaders and participants) engaged with in-depth investigations intended to empower them in the evaluation process (Everley & Macfadyen, 2015). This and involved 3 stages:

* Drawing a picture of their engagement in the project (‘before’ and ‘after’)
* Individual interviews utilizing the drawings as an initial conduit for girls to share their experiences of the programme and the impact this has had on them
* Group interviews to convey shared experiences

In order to ensure the girls were familiar with the researcher and felt comfortable communicating with her, she visited the school before the programme began, meeting with the girls in groups to introduce herself, offering the opportunity to answer any questions the girls may have had regarding the research. This process assisted in the reduction of power differentials between researcher and participant, adult and child (Everley, In Press).

Group interviews with the girls were facilitated by photographs, taken by the Activators, of participants during the Active Literacy sessions, This enabled the researcher to understand the context of their discussion and utilize the images as a catalyst for conversation. All interviews with girls took place in a quiet open space within the school environment that was familiar to the participants and were conducted by the same researcher. Activators were individually interviewed about their experiences of the programme in a private space of their choice within the same context.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis, sensitised by physical literacy concepts, followed Braun and Clark’s (Braun & Clarke, 2006) model wherein data is revisited to refine and define themes. This was used to understand the learning processes and outcomes that were facilitated by the programme design and delivery.

Ethical approval for the project was awarded by the lead researcher’s host institution following guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018). Informed consent was provided by adults involved and the parents of all girls included (none were ‘looked after’ children) and each girl gave assent to her own engagement in the research.

**Results**

In terms of the social domain of learning, the development of learning centred on three key themes that can be considered scaffolded:

* Engagement
* Teamwork
* Leadership

**Social Engagement**

A significant feature facilitated by the combination of storytelling and movement contexts provided by the programme was the social interaction that emanated from being involved. Indeed, social relationships provided an initial basis for some of the girls to be engaged in the first instance. Figure 1 shows Carrie’s pictures of how she felt as she anticipated joining the programme and how she felt as a result of having been involved in it:

***Insert figure 1 here***

When discussing the reasons why, Carrie explained:

*Carrie: It was a bit nervous when we started to do the things and stuff I got a bit, very nervous*

*Interviewer: And then did it get better?..*

*Carrie: (nods)*

*Interviewer: What made it better do you think?*

*Carrie: Being with my friends*

(Carrie, Individual interview, Meadowfields School)

Both schools had ensured that the girls knew at least one other person who was taking part in the programme and this supported their initial participation. The development of levels of interaction clearly contributed to the growth of confidence in being active and developing movement skills:

*A lot of this is very difficult to tell – I’ve seen the girls change – I think they’re more likely to interact more on the playground and I think they’ll integrate with perhaps a wider group of people than they would do otherwise, because from what I can see in those 5/6/7 weeks they’re happier in each other’s company, they’re more content to be active in those sessions and make up their own movements.*

(Mr Davidson, individual interview, Activator, Meadowfield School)

Developing this was something the year 6 leaders had anticipated being part of what they did and, indeed, formed the motivation for them in the first instance, as in Fenella’s case which she has wanted when first getting involved as a playground leader:

*…to get them (the younger girls) to play with friends and to get them to play more and stuff like that and so I was really excited to be able to help them to be able to play more because when I was a young one I really enjoyed playing around and running about and playing with my friends and then seeing the others not really playing you want them to be able to play with others but they’re not, so it’s nice to help them*

(Fenella, Individual interview, Leader, Forest School)

This intention was borne out by the actions of the older girls as they worked to ensure that the participants benefitted from being part of the programme:

*...and they would then pick up the ones who were struggling not to hear and helping them – it was nice that the social side was really pushed on helping the little ones as well as them thinking of the whole group setting*

(Miss Shepherd, individual interview, Forest School)

Thus, through the approach, the older girls had to socially engage in order for this to be successful. As a result, the relationships established were reciprocated and extended:

*Interviewer: So, with the little ones then, taking part, in terms of their social engagement, did you see any change there?*

*Miss Shepherd: I did, because they see those girls on a Friday, they were actually going up to them sometimes on other days when they were on the playground and talking to them… Well for them to go up and speak to the year 6s they’d never have the confidence to go up to them before, not to the older ones…*

(Miss Shepherd, individual interview, Forest School)

The older girls did not allow this to affect the hierarchies that existed within the relationships and the roles that exist with schools; when speaking about Ellie, Sam suggested that when she wanted to be part of the leaders group following a perceived invitation, she endeavoured to give an alternative means of her supporting them:

*Sam: Yeah she forgot it (her Adventure Passport) so we went back to get it and she was like, carry my book so I was like, ok...and she like got it into her head that she was like going to do all the games with us...so we were like, ‘Ok, you can help us by joining in with everyone else*

(Betsie, Fenella, Sam and Hannah, group interview, leaders, Forest School)

In this situation, by carrying the book that Sam was using to run the session, Ellie was indicating an attempt to identify with, and become part of, the older group of girls in their position as leaders. Dissatisfied with this, Sam manages this potential challenge to the way that the girl’s hierarchies were ordered, with the older leaders ‘in charge’ by redirecting Ellie and reinforcing her status as a ‘participant’.

Thus, there was evidence that an element of social skills developed by the older girls was to manage social relationships positively and appropriately. Therefore, as with previous benefits of the programme that targeted younger girls, leaders taking part also developed their own social skills. Significantly, these could be seen to be enduring, extending beyond the school context. When speaking about her experiences here, having identified that she had initially been ‘like really nervous’ because she did notknow the younger girls. However, considering the most valuable outcome of having taken part in the programme was that:

 *I think it’s…helped me with my social skills alot*

(Savannah, individual interview, leader Forest School)

Considering whether this was just within the context of the programme she was asked if that applied outside of school as well. Having answered positively she expanded on her point:

*When I have my mum’s friends round and their children… I usually just hide upstairs with my little sister, but now I’m downstairs talking to them …*

(Savannah, individual interview, leader Forest School)

Thus, the girls all had the opportunity to develop their social skills. Framing this was the way in which the programme was structured to ensure girls needed to work with others in this process. As a result, , further key themes in the responses of participants in their evaluation of the programme were those of ‘teamwork’ and ‘leadership’. The following section discusses how these operated for the girls.

**Teamwork**

The nature of the tasks set within the Active Literacy programme required girls to work together in order to be successful and on a basic level, the girls very much valued this element of the programme.

When asked what they enjoyed, many answered, as one group did with:

*Being a team!*

(Emily, Carrie, Bella and Dolly, Group interview, Meadowfield school)

The framing of this was established in the approach, as Dolly continues in her individual interview:

*We like builded a river with like blue items and all put them down on the floor – that‘s what we did and we put a red thing in the middle for like the ruby sinking in the river and you have to build the thing like all together not like one river each…like from the first side of the hall, not the second side*

(Dolly, Individual interview, participant, Meadowfield School)

The leaders saw this as a crucial part of what their girls developed:

*…also like their teamwork skills ‘cos we usually get them to talk about it in partners and we get them to like…a few weeks ago there was a river and we um gave them lily pads, we gave each of them a lily pad and we made them work together to like get across the river*

(Sam, individual interview, leader, Forest School)

Perhaps a key indicator of the value of this within the programme was the relaying of the transistion from unsuccessful to successful teamwork; having started with some behavioural issues one group at Meadowfield school made particular progress. Using the positive responses of some girls, Mr Davison explained the following:

*…the others are now realising that actually they all need to do their bit, so throwing the cones around might be fun but if I were to say have we built that river yet? And they’ll think oh no and they’ll look around at what others have done and they’ll think does it look like a river? Does it look like a river – stand back- with all those cones all over the floor?*

(Mr Davidson, individual interview, Activator, Meadowfield School)

Of interest here in relation to the programme is that the girls had been given clear visual evidence of their not having worked as a team. The physical manifestation of a lack of focus and co-operation made evident the need to change behaviour in order to achieve success. This, the girls recognised, Lucy explains how she liked working with others:

*Lucy: Because um … because it…we all went in a group to each other so that we can work together and I like how we worked together*

*Interviewer: What did you like about working together?*

*Lucy: Because it makes more fun if you work together*

*Interviewer: And when you work together, what things do you have to think about to do that well?*

*Lucy: We have to try to behave*

*Interviewer: What does it mean to behave*

*Lucy: That means we have to be good*

(Lucy, individual interview, Meadowfield School)

Emerging here, was the need for the girls to authentically work as a group rather than simply be working in a group. This would inevitably involve positive behaviours, a further outcome of the programme and, also, a need for all individuals to contribute.

With respect to the girl leaders, some of the ways in which they worked as a team are evident in the sections above as they recognised the need to develop what they were doing as a group in order to make the experience more positive for the younger participants. Recalling the need to be active and give examples of how to engage productively, in her group interview Betsie identified that in order to get the girls motivated they had to work collectively:

*Betsie:…but like when we all like do it together, we all do it at the same time and stuff, it works*

(Sam, Fenella, Fiona and Betsie, group interview, Forest School)

Closely related to this was the need to anticipate and resolve potential conflict. Managing as a group it is perhaps inevitable that there are variations in influence and power within it. The girls described having dealt with some challenges along such lines:

*Because in the middle it was kind of going wrong but then we like fixed it and made it more fun and enjoyable again…It was kind of like, some people were just taking charge and kind of not letting others join in and then we kind of just like sat down and just chatted about it, and figured out like how to make it more enjoyable so everyone can be included, and everyone can join in more*

(Betsie, individual interview, leader, Forest School)

This inevitably leads to consideration as to how the groups, or ‘teams’ operate in terms of relative roles and concepts of leadership.

**Leadership**

Considering the nature of the Active Literacy programme, where girls are required to work together, there is the potential for the emergence of particular ‘leaders’. Although reluctant to necessarily define the girls as leaders within his participant group due to their age (5-6yrs), Mr Davison did suggest there were seminal indications that leadership potential became evident through the work:

*Well more of them are there are one or two of them…I don’t know if you want to call it leadership at that age but they just know what to do – the just think about what to do so having given them the basic instructions they come up …they know they’ve got to make something that looks a little bit like a river for instance and they’re thinking about what would that river look like… Bella– she processes things –I think she just thinks about things and what’s the right thing to do – so she’d probably be the leader of that group..*

(Mr Davidson, individual interview, Activator, Meadowfield School)

Therefore, reflecting on the ways in which communication skills are being developed, for all the girls, understanding and interpreting instruction (as described in the literacy section of this report), along with associated behaviours, could contribute to the basis of the development of what is perceived to be leadership.

For the Activator in Forest School, there was evidence that for the girl leaders, there was significant progress for some:

*…I saw some of them that were quite quiet, shine – becoming a bit more authoritative – there was that sort of step up a notch and it was amazing to see the shy quiet ones just stood there normally and then they went above and beyond and they were able to engage everybody whereas normally, they were very timid*

(Miss Shepherd, individual interview, Activator, Forest School)

And, as Sam identified, it was not an easy path to find a way to be the leaders that they did:

*So, how it was a great opportunity to like to be part of it and how it was like the same how we were allowed to be leaders and draw them out…it was…they weren’t exactly listening the most so we did have to like maybe shout a bit and you know, it was almost like the only way to like control them and it would be difficult if everyone was just running around with chalk*

(Sam, individual interview, leader, Forest School)

A contestable concept, the idea of leadership is a complex phenomenon; when evaluating what she felt she had learnt from the programme Savannah essentially identified that it is made up of multiple factors:

*Confidence, imagination, kind of like leadership*

(Savannah, individual interview, leader, Forest School)

Working on this theme, there were a number of key features evident in the data collection here that contributed to the concept of successful democratic leadership. As identified above, when leadership was not democratic, the group temporarily broke down and ceased to operate effectively. From their own conversations regarding where their leadership had been successful, the girls identified three essential features within their own group, and of the younger group. These were:

* Planning and Organisation
* Listening
* Negotiation

***Planning and organisation to lead***

The process of identifying the need to utilise the strengths of the cohort in order to lead as a group, the girls began to introduce an element of planning to their approach. This as an organising principle appeared in itself to provide a sense of ownership that was motivational to the girls:

*Savannah: Yeah a bit because after the first one I was just ‘every Friday I’ve got to do this’ and then after a few weeks I was really excited to do it and I was coming home and writing down the things which we had done in that session so we could plan for next time*

(Savannah, individual interview, leader, Forest School)

Although as described above, the girls sought to use strengths, they also remained flexible and planned each week to work together:

*We tried to make it so we each had a job so each week we decided like who did what and so two people would be reading and another would be like sitting with the little ones and other people would be like acting out the stories as they read it and trying to make it more fun and enjoyable so they like don’t get bored*

(Fenella, individual interview, leader, Forest School)

One of the questions that arises from this is the extent to which the development of such skills and qualities are transferable and enduring. The following section addresses the possibility of a leadership ‘legacy’ resulting from the programme.

***Listening to Lead***

Approaches to planning and organisation were inevitably dependent on understanding what was trying to be achieved. The concept of listening in order to lead featured on three levels; the first in terms of awareness to support, the second in terms of making individuals feel valued and the third in terms of gaining feedback to evaluate effectiveness. With respect to the first, Savannah identified that leading meant you needed to ensure you were:

*Listening to people um...knowing what’s going on cos if you’re just going this this this and this and go do that and then you’ve got no clue what they’re doing, if they ask for help or something you’ll be like, ‘I don’t really know what to do’...kind of*

(Savannah, individual interview, leader, Forest School)

Regarding listening to value individuals, Fenella suggested:

*We had a few chats with them and we got them into pairs and then like here give one minute to think by themselves, one minute to talk to their partner and we like moved around and crouched down so that we could like give them ideas then we shared all of the ideas*

(Fenella, individual interview, leader, Forest School)

The girls also recognised that respecting group opinion also led to more successful development:

*Well, at the end we would be like what do you want to do next? And they would say where they wanted to go next and stuff and so we would try to include that into our next kind of adventure kind of thing to make everyone feel like they’ve been included more.*

 (Sam, individual interview, leader, Forest School)

This they achieved by identifying that they needed to support individuals in expressing their thoughts:

*Yes because at first Abbie was really the only one putting her hand up and getting involved but afterwards we went around and went over each person individually and asking like, so do you want to get involved? What do you like to do? Um so that we can like try and get them involved with their interests and if they don’t like to speak aloud someone will like talk to them and help share their ideas*

(Betsie, Fenella, Sam and Hannah, group interview, leaders, Forest School)

‘Listening’ with respect to the evaluation of what the girls were doing in their leadership roles involved reflecting on the group’s response. As Fenella explains:

*… before the acting they were just like getting bored and they weren’t really listening so when we like added in the acting it really like helped them get more involved in the story so maybe we could have like little things saying oh they could do this and they could do that and they could turn around and say like what are you doing here? You need to come with me – I need to show you something…*

(Fenella, individual interview, leader, Forest School)

In this sense, the girl leaders were using their observations to ‘listen’ to the needs of the younger girls and then gave a practical response that re-engaged them. Here, there is an indication that there is recognition of the need to reflect and rethink on occasion – this was something that the girls were able to develop over time and included consideration of how they interacted with one another and negotiated their positions as discussed in the following section.

***Leadership Negotiation***

The need to listen in order to lead within the programme was also evident in terms of the way the girl leaders were required to engage productively with one another to function in their role as a group. In this instance, it took the form of negotiation followed by collaboration; Betsie showed me the drawings of herself at the beginning and end of the programme; they each showed her as being ‘happy’. This initially indicated that she had remained relatively unchanged because of the experience, however, utilising the images, Betsie was able to explain that there had been a journey in this process:

*Because in the middle it was kind of going wrong but then we like fixed it and made it more fun and enjoyable again*

(Bestie, individual interview, leader, Forest School)

At one point, the group came to be dominated by particular individuals:

*Betsie: And I was gonna quit cos me and Becca …some people take charge like Angie (since left the group because of school work commitments ) and Fenella were like reading all of it and I wasn’t like getting involved*

(Betsie, Fenella, Sam and Hannah, group interview, leaders, Forest School)

Realising that the dominance of a small number of individuals was leading to the dissatisfaction of others, the girls decided to meet and decide what to do next; to negotiate a solution to their problem.

*…we kind of just like sat down and just chatted about it, and figured out like how to make it more enjoyable so everyone can be included and everyone can join in more*

(Betsie, individual interview, leader, Forest School)

As an antecedent to this discussion, Fenella identified that she might need to change:

*Fenella…and I stopped reading cos like Betsie was gonna quit and I was like, I’m not gonna do that as much cos I don’t want Betsie to quit*

(Betsie, Fenella, Sam and Hannah, group interview, leaders, Forest School)

However, the girls identified that it was not necessarily her role that the others wanted; they just needed to have a specific function within the group:

*Sam: And we thought like well, Beth doesn’t really want to read so why don’t we get her to like do some acting ‘cos like when you’re at school when you’re like in front of people you’re not very confident, you’re like quite quiet but then like …in lessons…*

*Bestie: I’ll like put my hand up*

*Sam: Yeah…*

(Betsie, Fenella, Sam and Hannah, group interview, leaders, Forest School)

So ultimately the girls established a basis on which to move forward and continuously reflect:

*You get to like make more choices about what you get to do and you like get to look and like see what’s wrong and see how to fix it*

(Betsie, individual interview, leader, Forest School)

This illustrates a clear degree of sophistication to the girls’ ability to negotiate; it would have been very simple for them to either collapse the group or, if they wanted to continue, for one child to take turns in the single leadership role. However, as an alternative, they decided to identify one another’s strengths and utilise them to the most effective end. Approaching the problem in this way then clearly formed the basis of their continued democratic basis for group leadership. This is significant as it is ultimately indicative of the applied use of literacy skills of being able to ‘consider and evaluate different viewpoints, attending to and building on the contribution of others’ as identified in the learning objectives of the programme.

***Leadership ‘Legacy’***

The concept of learning to lead through the programme was identified as of value not only for immediate benefit, but potentially beyond it both for the sake of the individual and the anticipated continuation of Active Literacy Through Storytelling within the schools. The girl leaders felt that those they had worked with would one day take on the leadership roles that they had fulfilled within the programme:

*I think it’s a very good idea for more people to keep going with it when we leave because then they keep getting involved* … *they keep getting the younger ones doing it and the people that have been doing it with us, once they get up to year 6 and 5 they will start doing it because they know how to do it because they did it themselves and they kind of know the dynamics of it*

(Fenella, individual interview, leader, Forest School)

Thus, there is a belief that as effective role models, they might have a longer-term impact on the younger participants; this was something that the activator also saw as the potential of where she said the older girls were:

*… positive role models…it was a positive role model for the younger girls and having the girls being their leaders – it was a positive role model for them*

(Miss Shepherd, individual interview, Activator, Forest School)

Very specifically, for themselves, the girl leaders anticipated building on the skills and characteristics they had utilised within the programme. When asked why she felt the leadership she had been able to exercise to date might help her in the future, Sam explained:

*Well because, we’re leaving and going into secondary it will help a lot more because there’s a lot more things that you can be like head of. This year there’s like school council I think and autism ambassadors – so there’s a like set amount of people that can do things so there’s like a 20% chance it could be you. But there there’s a lot more things that you can be like head of, like you can be head girl, head boy of your year, you can...there’s like a lot more things and I think like this will help.*

(Sam, individual interview, leader, Forest School)

Clearly Sam was looking far ahead considering her age, but within the programme, she had experience of a particular transformation; when asked where she may have seen particular progress in leadership, Miss Shepherd identified her very specifically:

*Sam- I know she comes across as quite confident but she never used to be …*

(Miss Shepherd, individual interview, Activator, Forest School)

Thus, it would seem that, the change in girls on a number of levels has been significant, and, certainly in the context as the programme’s initial delivery is completed that the value is considered to be potentially long-term.

**Discussion**

What was seen within this programme was the building of opportunities to interact as a significant factor affecting learning. Many of the girls conceived coming into the programme as a challenge in itself but were subsequently able, through initial individual response and then group response, co-operate towards achieving a common outcome in storytelling. The pathway towards this success was not linear but for all girls appeared to involve some kind of redefinition and renegotiation of what was desirable and possible.

Ultimately, this followed a process of the developing of social capital which has been identified as a significant factor in successful participation in sport (Everley & Everley, 2018). Through the building of relationships and development of capital, the girls could influence others and demonstrate a willingness to be influenced by others in order to achieve a shared goal.

For the girls involved in this study, it is particularly notable that discourses provided evidence of personal and social behaviours associated with respecting self and others, as essential characteristics of those who are physically literate (Mandigo, Lodewyk, & Tredway, 2019). Here, the participants illustrate how they have developed their physical literacy as a combination of both process and state (Choi & Pak, 2006).

The development of leadership skills, particularly for playground leaders at Forest School went significantly beyond that of simply being assigned a particular role. Many definitions of leadership for children identify how particular ‘titles’ in leadership are assigned through which children necessarily gain authority status (Arnott, 2013). However, in this case, it was not holding a position that made the difference to the children, but the need of the younger children for the older girls to make their experiences meaningful that led to the demonstration of good leadership behaviours.

Effective leadership here emanated from a series of strategic discourses associated with the exercise of ‘power’ (Pringle & Markula, 2005) that was based on implied democratic principles through which the older girls wanted to support the younger girls’ progress. In order to achieve successful leadership, participants appeared to employ socially motivated orientations, equivalent to other learning contexts as epistemic positions of ‘knowing’ and ‘unkowing’ (Barker, Quennerstedt, & Annerstedt, 2015). These were ‘designed’ to share power, creating parallel ownership of leadership roles (Arnott, 2013) and acknowledging the place of others rather than organising themselves in a hierarchical sense . The discourse engaged in by the girls was one of identification of one another’s strengths creating a collaborative nexus of leadership potential; a process of relinquishing some aspects of capital in order to achieve others (Arnott, 2013).

This is arguably the strength of female leadership that challenges literature which suggests that younger children (around the age of 10yrs) will tend to use aggressive strategies to influence others (Rivizzigno, Brendgen, Vitaro, Dionne, & Boivin, 2018). With traditional definitions of leadership being associated with masculine characteristics there have been calls to redefine such conceptualisations that have more collaborative and co-operative interpretations (Voelker, 2016). The girls in this study appeared to be demonstrating the ability to exercise influence in such a way that was likely to engage others in sport and encourage future leadership behaviours that are not in contradiction to feminine identities. Indeed, their success was arguably an embodiment and celebration of the potential for girls’ leadership consistent with ideas of being both female and physically literate.

Of particular value here was the way in which the Active Literacy Through Storytelling programme enabled girls in navigating their own ways to refine their approach to leading. This creates an arguably more meaningful and lasting approach to supporting others in their engagement in activity, particularly as leadership programmes that simply ‘tell’ girls what to do ‘robs them of the opportunity to exercise true leadership skills and communicates doubt in their ability to do so effectively’(Voelker, 2016). Unlike many programmes designed to develop leadership the leadership here as a means of influencing others socially (Rivizzigno et al., 2018; Taylor, 2016) is much more profound in nature.

**Conclusion**

This study focussed on the social domain of development within individuals engaging in an Active Literacy Through Storytelling Programme designed to support physical literacy of girls. The outcomes indicate that the FA and National Literacy Foundation have developed the possibilities for girls to engage socially, work as a team lead others effectively in their participation in physical activity. This arrives at a point from which children may take responsibility for their own physical activity. Participation as process meant that learning was meaningful and transferable, potentially providing sustainable skills that support engagement in sporting opportunities. The nature of leadership demonstrated is indicative that the girls may have developed the confidence and competence to intercept the ‘maladaptive’ outcomes associated with adolescence such as poor body image and low social self-esteem (Voelker, 2016). A particular recommendation for the FA would be to maintain the programme content and design but additionally explore ways of supporting schools in the use of playground leaders within the programme. This would maximise the value through extending its impact in terms of the numbers of girls involved and their roles and in terms of longevity as children can progress from being participant to leader through the use of older girls to deliver activities. As Pot et.al (2018) identify, human embodiment significantly determines how individuals come to know themselves and relate to the world; learning how to develop that embodiment to construct a positive social self that can also affect others has significant potential for the development of girls’ capabilities to engage in sport.

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