Whole-school management issues concerning the PE department: ‘a natural division of labour?’

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Utilising the labour ideas of Adam Smith and Emile Durkheim as a theoretical basis, the main objective of this study was to investigate the perception that Heads of Physical Education (HoPE) face unique management and leadership challenges. Results showed that HoPE believe that they are overburdened with tasks primarily involving the delegation of finance and exam administration. Many felt that their efforts were undervalued by senior management teams (SMTs). However, HoPE themselves could work more closely with the latter and instead of developing a culture of antagonism and mistrust they should seek to partake more fully within whole-school initiatives to demonstrate capabilities and so increase the status of their department.

Keywords: division of labour; leader; manager; delegation; senior management team; school improvement

Introduction and theoretical basis

The rate and pace of educational change in the last 20 years has been significant; the introduction of a National Curriculum, inspections by the government-appointed Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) and changes to the administration of school budgets have resulted in the need for increased quality assurance and accountability. Within physical education (PE) the growth in examination and changes to extra-curricular programmes have left their mark (Green 2008). The research reported in this article started from the premise that school managers may have been struggling to cope with such demands (Brown, Rutherford, and Boyle 2000). The study based itself on the suggestion that the thoughts and opinions of middle managers are important in reflecting a role that is deemed to be assuming even greater importance within schools (Brown, Rutherford, and Boyle 2000). Research began from an initial standpoint that PE is a special case compared to other foundation subjects on the school curriculum primarily due to its traditional commitment towards extra-curricular activities.

Part of the study investigated whether Heads of Physical Education (HoPE) described themselves as managers or leaders and the characteristics of both terms. To make such a distinction was necessary because it was important to see whether fulfilling both roles has led to the creation of extra tasks and whether or not these could be devolved within the department. Historically, an emphasis focusing on leadership was confirmed by the end of the 1990s, particularly within the need to act as a ‘change agent’ (Glover and Miller 1999). Trying to differentiate the two...
managers is essentially about ensuring the school runs smoothly, while leadership is about ensuring the school runs somewhere’ (Southworth 2009, 101). Both terms can be viewed as contested concepts and, although they are used interchangeably (Coleman 2005), there is a symbiotic relationship between the two.

The term, ‘a natural division of labour’, comes from the writings of the economist, Adam Smith (1776). He argued that for nations to build a strong economy there should be a specialisation of labour leading to the breaking down of large jobs into tiny components. However, while Smith suggested that the division of labour and the hierarchical structure within the workplace that came with it were both necessary and proper for an industrialised economy, he had some reservations concerning the possible dehumanising effects on the individual. It was feared that the drudgery involved with repetitive mechanical tasks could lead to a deterioration of mental faculties with a subsequent fall in morale, causing a lack of support for collectively agreed objectives formulated by employers. Some of these fears were also shared by the French sociologist, Emile Durkheim, who was particularly concerned that an increased role played by the state would stifle the individual. However, he did see the potential for a collectivisation within the workplace that would lead to greater social cohesion. Interestingly, Durkheim viewed education as one way of achieving this.

The ideas of both Smith and Durkheim, and more recently, Sennett (2006), have some relevance towards school teaching teams. By encouraging delegation and the empowerment that can come with it, colleagues could avoid mental stagnation and achieve the social cohesion that Durkheim desired.

Managers as leaders? A history

The need for knowledge

Some commentators suggest that the qualities required for these key roles changed from a 1980s reliance on ‘innate personality gifts’ (Field, Holden, and Lawlor 2000, 14) to authority achieved through a ‘combination of position, personality and knowledge’ (14). Just what has caused this change and in particular the perceived need for extra knowledge?

A key factor has been the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) – legislation strongly influenced by a reaction against a perceived lowering of standards in British education and also discourses surrounding New Right ideology. In particular the introduction of a statutory National Curriculum called for more subject specialism and the need for further knowledge about how to manage it. Hence the need for Head of Departments (HoDs) to share some increased responsibility. This perhaps mirrored Smith’s observation in 1776 that a specialisation of labour is necessary in order to improve output and efficiency. ERA also introduced a change in budget allocation and finance management within schools which further impacted on the job role of the HoD (Williams 2002). The need to both balance accounts and bid for finance resulted in HoDs again assuming even more responsibility. Writing development plans and conducting financial audits became commonplace, with the subsequent need to look carefully at time allocated for such duties (Glover and Miller 1999). Brown, Rutherford, and Boyle (2000) revealed similar concerns
expressed by the 56 HoDs in their study. Here, the management of time focused on the lack of opportunities to plan and engage in strategic thinking, skills which were assuming greater importance and significance. The delegation of more menial management tasks to other staff then became imperative to manage the constraints of this workload.

Indeed, it is the need for middle managers to delegate which has repeatedly emerged as an important issue. For example, Torrington and Weightman (1989) conducted a number of case studies within school subject departments around the country and, despite the fact that the full impact of ERA was yet to be felt, the authors found that HoDs were anxious to delegate appropriate roles and responsibilities to other members of teaching teams. In many cases this attempt at creating cohesion and collegiality was not really happening. HoDs were often finding themselves with increased workloads instead, creating parallels with Durkheim’s observation that organisations where individuals pursue their own interests will lack a civic morality, leading to alienation and ineffectiveness. This led Torrington and Weightman (1989) to conclude that subject departments were not a ‘natural division of labour’ (1989, 162). Furthermore, Brown, Rutherford, and Boyle (2000) suggested that senior management teams (SMTs) have delegated responsibilities increasingly towards middle management; discipline and finance being appropriate examples. Many HoDs, however, felt that such moves have not been matched by the necessary time and authority to implement these issues effectively. So, if SMTs have no compulsion in delegating tasks why do middle managers find it so difficult to do the same within departmental teaching teams?

The 1980s was also a period during the course of which the management of public sector services and schools was characterised by greater engagement with private services outside of the education sector. The call from Charles Handy (1989) in particular pointed towards a culture change for school leaders to work towards innovative, creative styles of management. This increased the pressure on HoDs to embrace new concepts and ideas, supporting Adair’s (cited in Field, Holden, and Lawlor 2000, 14) earlier assertion that leaders now had to develop new skills in addition to a job role hitherto based on ‘innate personality gifts’. The emphasis on a need for teams to work together more efficiently meant that delegation as a ‘process by which managers get things done through other people’ (Macfadyen and Bailey 2002, 168) became a necessity. The 1980s, then, were crucial in creating a sea change for schools whereby effectiveness and improvement became the central tenets for their very existence (Davies 2009) – important components in Adam Smith’s (1776) vision for a ‘natural division of labour’.

**Performance matters**

By the late 1990s it appeared as though the government wanted to officially recognise the growing importance of middle management in schools. Hence the publication of the ‘National Standards for Subject Leaders’ (TTA 1998). This was a document which Field, Holden, and Lawlor (2000) suggest marked a new concept of subject leadership by emphasising the link between knowledge and understanding as a means of improving performance. The National Standards were followed by the Green Paper ‘Teachers: Meeting the challenge of change’ (DfEE 1998). Here, legislature once again put the focus on HoDs to implement change and work towards
the government’s goal of improving standards in education (Williams 2002). A
cultural change was implied by a shift in emphasis within the appraisal system from
professional development needs towards performance targets. It is HoDs who are
pivotal in this whole process, steering their colleagues towards targets that are both
challenging and attainable. The personal and professional responsibilities are
immense, but are there enough resources (defined in this instance as help from
colleagues) in place for this to happen?

**PE: a special case?**

The management skills and responsibilities required from a HoPE have developed in
their complexity and the evidence to support this perception will be historical. A case
will be presented to suggest that over a 20-year period PE has undergone many
different changes which have had a significant impact on the job specification of a
subject leader. Much of this will be based upon the fall and rise of extra-curricular
school sport, which Underwood (1983) had found to be the most significant aspect
of a PE department’s profile.

By the end of the 1980s PE was starting to recover from a teacher’s dispute with the
government over pay and conditions which had taken place in the earlier part of the
decade. This had resulted in a withdrawal of goodwill which particularly affected
extra-curricular activities. After a relative decline in the number of activities offered,
and in the numbers of teachers and pupils taking part, a slow recovery had begun
(Green 2008). This has now reached a peak where the statistics suggest that more
school sport is taking place outside the curriculum than ever before (Green 2008). Part
of this process has led to a greater involvement with external agencies; coaches and
community clubs in particular. Partnerships between schools and clubs can be exciting
and extremely beneficial for both parties but can also present problems. There is a need
to establish clear aims and objectives otherwise this could lead to later difficulties; a
skilful process involving vision and delicate negotiating skills. Once again the onus is
on the HoD to take responsibility. In fact the confusing ideology which was perhaps
the driving force behind government-backed initiatives to promote physical activity
such as the PE, School Sports and Club Links Strategy (PESSCL) suggested that
school PE departments should do everything and anything for everybody. The HoPE
then may feel that he or she has an impossible task in trying to satisfy too many
requirements, thus making the effective delegation of tasks even more of a necessity.
The need to liaise with a local Sports College as part of the government’s ‘Specialist
Schools Programme’ placed greater emphasis on a certain type of management skills
as schools not only had to satisfy statutory requirements but also had to endeavour to
seek extra funding. This often involved the acceptance of a School Sports Coordinator
(SSCo) within the department, yet another teacher to manage. The former School
Sports Partnerships (SSPs) programme that resulted also provided a form of
networking that Hadfield and Jopling (2012) uphold as opportunities for leaders to
emerge, develop and ultimately flourish. However, for HoDs this may have created
extra issues regarding the delegation of tasks within teaching teams.

The growth of examinable PE has had an impact on the work-load of a subject
leader. The key point to remember here is that whilst the numbers involved are now
not that different from any other core subject the rate of increase over the said 20-year
period for PE is significant (Green 2005), creating tasks that may well need to be
devolved to other personnel. The management of facilities and the resources that go with exam PE also become increasingly important. Developments have meant that the teachers involved invariably use more teaching areas than any other subject; indoor sport, outdoor sport and classroom. The plethora of brand new sports facilities that have appeared in recent years on school premises are most welcome but create extra management issues. This is particularly true if they have a community responsibility attached to them. On a more finite scale the equipment associated with such facilities needs to be monitored and maintained; just how many PE departments have a technician specifically allocated to do this?

Previous research concerning roles and responsibilities for Heads of PE is hardly prolific. Bell’s study of two different schools (1986) found that HoDs developed ‘coping strategies’ to deal with tensions created when managing individual team members who were trying to develop careers both within and without of PE. Armour (1996) investigated perceptions held by SMTs concerning the value and worth of PE. In particular she looked at SMT views regarding the effectiveness of PE departments. Her conclusions outlining that HoDs could align philosophies and attitudes with those held by their respective SMTs will be returned to. Apart from these two studies research related to the role of a HoPE is scarce.

The need for delegation

The theory behind a HoD choosing to delegate tasks and roles is that this will be essential for the efficient, smooth running of a department (Busher and Harris 2000; Williams 2002). It should also lead to cohesion within a teaching team (Brown, Rutherford, and Boyle 2000). However, the reality is that HoDs are often reluctant to do so, either because they don’t want to further impose upon a colleague’s work-load or because they question the ability of other departmental members (Earley and Fletcher-Campbell 1989). So what are the perceived benefits of delegation?

OFSTED (2009) have found in practice that a PE department which has clearly defined roles and responsibilities, resulting from delegation, is likely to function in an efficient and capable manner. Further benefits include the notion that by providing opportunities for team members HoDs will notice an improvement in colleagues’ performance: ‘This means relinquishing the idea of structure as control and viewing structure as the vehicle for empowering others’ (Busher and Harris 2000, 185). It is a rigid hierarchy of power in schools that often stifles such innovative management and perhaps creates the culture whereby subject leaders do not risk delegation. Yet asserting power through people can be very liberating for all concerned and if it leads to improved efficiency then managers should not be so reluctant to devolve responsibility. A good example of how empowering departmental colleagues can have its benefits concerns the training of future subject leaders (Earley and Jones 2009). In particular Earley and Fletcher-Campbell (1989) found that many new HoDs felt unprepared for their new responsibilities. However, those who adjusted quickly to the new challenge had often worked alongside existing HoDs and cited experience gained from assuming devolved tasks as invaluable. Examples of roles passed on included opportunities to bid for finance and chances to chair departmental meetings. Generally, the delegating of tasks has been found to create a collegiality within subject teams based on an increased sense of working together to achieve pre-agreed goals and aspirations (Busher and Harris 2000). Leadership
becomes a shared process (Southworth 2009). This then allows the individual to
manouvre and explore; to become a self-determining, independent thinker (Sennett
2006). Moreover, a sense of belonging is then achieved which both Sennett (2006)
and Durkheim (1933) see as part of a human quest to categorise oneself. The need
to develop teams and identities becomes important in a pluralistic society, an
observation relevant to schools where roles and responsibilities abound.

What about the unintended outcomes which may come from delegation? Handy
(1989) emphasises that it is the manner in which responsibilities are passed on that is
important. Trust and support are crucial for colleagues to achieve success alongside a
need for middle managers to be sensitive towards staff capabilities and workloads.
Consequently, a strict, mechanical rotation of tasks within departmental teams has been
cited as an example of how not to proceed (Earley and Fletcher-Campbell 1989). There is
even the assumption that the devolvement of tasks is now more relevant than ever to
counteract ‘the strong managerialist culture’ (Bush and Harris 2000, 184) prevalent in
schools today. The suggestion here is that an ever-increasing gap between ‘leaders’ and
‘followers’ is perhaps stifling individual development although Durkheim argued that
individual talent could still be developed within structures based on a collective need.
Again, this reiterates Durkheim’s plea for a pluralistic society made at a time to avoid
increasing alienation between the individual and the state. Within this study such a
context can be applied to improving relationships between SMTs and teachers.

Methodology
In order to build upon previous research (Earley and Fletcher-Campbell 1989; Glover
and Miller 1999; Poultney 2007) this study aimed to record the thoughts and feelings
obtained from HoDs responsible for teaching and learning in PE. Consequently, a
qualitative approach was chosen to investigate a number of research questions rather
than to hypothesise a single theory. The emphasis has been on inductive reasoning
through description, understanding and meaning as the data began to unfold. In order
to obtain a wide range of views postal questionnaires were selected as a research
method. As the sample was relatively large (n =180), this represented the most
appropriate means of data collection for the study given the wide geographical spread
of the subject institutions. The subjects included were all HoDs within the field of PE,
Sport and Health in their relative institutions. As exact titles varied considerably, the
questionnaire was directed at the person with the key managerial responsibility for the
subject area. Contacts were made through the University Partnership List which
consisted of 180 secondary schools and Further Education Colleges throughout the
northwest of England. Careful consideration was made as to the composition of
questions which were a mixture of open and closed, structured and numerical formats
(Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2011) and covered a range of key themes identified by
the researchers as important: role development and role expectations, support and
delegation, and the relationship between middle and senior management.

Although a disadvantage of postal questionnaires can be a low return rate, 40
replies were recorded. These were then verified for completeness, accuracy and
uniformity. Fifty-eight per cent of respondents were male and 42% female. Sixty-two
per cent had less than 10 years of experience in subject management with 32% having
less than five years’ managerial experience. Eighteen per cent of respondents had
over 20 years of departmental management experience. The information collected
was then processed into a form of theme identification obtained from data reduction in the form of coding in accordance with the key themes. Data analysis was by manually sorting and categorising the responses. In addition a tabular analysis was undertaken using Microsoft Excel in order to provide percentage numerical data accordingly. However, the qualitative open responses given by participants provided much of the rich data which forms the basis of this study.

Theoretical perspectives have been based on a realisation that there are a number of cultural and historical factors underpinning the information collected. The interconnecting and weaving together of identified themes has necessitated an interpretivist approach to understand the conclusions reached. Furthermore, a stated aim of the research has been to provide challenges both for change in relevant settings and to stimulate further investigation. To enable this to happen critical inquiry (Crotty 1998) has been used primarily to inform the reader that research is not just a form of intellectual stimulation but could be used as an agent of change. Finally, the epistemological stance that underpins this study is based on constructionism which emphasises the development of meaning through a person’s cultural engagement with the world. This is particularly relevant for experienced HoDs whose viewpoints may have changed and developed throughout their teaching career.

Ethical considerations within this research have respected a need for anonymity and non-traceability of respondents (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2011). Each questionnaire was prefaced by a letter which clearly stated the aims and objectives of this investigation. Interestingly, some replies made a personal request for a copy of the findings, suggesting potential impact for this research.

Results and findings

Role development and expectations

One of the key sections of the research enquired about the levels of support available to HoDs in carrying out their wide variety of expected roles. The investigation aimed to find out which duties were most commonly delegated to others within the department and those that were least likely to be delegated. The areas that HoDs had least assistance with were Departmental finance; 80% dealt with this personally. This perhaps reflected the levels of accountability associated with finance; a way of personally ensuring alignment of departmental learning objectives with the available expenditure in order to ensure ‘value for money’. This notion of ‘quality assurance’ also transfers to examination administration tasks within the department with 62% of HoDs surveyed dealing with this important aspect of the role themselves. The ever-increasing importance placed on target-setting and comparisons between groups of pupils, classes, departments and schools in general invariably means that HoDs need to monitor the performance data which underpin department reviews and public perceptions:

Yes increased paperwork, more pressure for results and for students to achieve predicted grades . . . continuous changes to exam content and curriculum.

With regards to recording pupil assessment, there was a greater proportion of the work spread amongst all members of the department in this category (65%) with 29% of HoDs having responsibility or at least overseeing the process. Departmental
Documentation tended to be delegated more, with 35% of department heads expressing that this was exclusively their responsibility.

Since the introduction of the former Physical Education, School Sport and Club Links (PESSCL) and Physical Education and Sport Strategy for Young People (PESSYP) strategies, liaison with Community organisations and Clubs in many cases (62%) had been devolved to SSCo’s/FESCo’s (Further Education Sports Co-ordinators), with only 17% of HODs still stating that they were responsible for this role. The introduction of the SSCo/FESCo has in many cases seen other work previously undertaken by the HoD devolved to them. In one case the HoD was also the SSCo. When asked if the introduction of SSPs and SSCo’s had impacted on their role, 51% identified that this had helped their role, 10% considered that it had somewhat hindered their role and only 3% suggested that the SSCo position actually created a strain on staffing:

It has helped in receiving funding and support for specialist staff and equipment but has put a strain on staffing – we have a male [teacher] covering for a female SSCo.

Invariably, HoDs would sometimes ‘lose’ a valued member of the department to the role which could create an added burden in terms of continuity of teaching over the two days the SSCo was out of school. The momentum of introducing such initiatives also created issues for heads of departments:

...[with] the increase in information and initiatives [it is] sometimes hard to keep abreast of all that’s going on.

Additional outcomes also identified by respondents included:

Helped by extending different sports to pupils but hindered by making matches more difficult.

Helped with KS2–3 transition and data on entry.

With the recent reduction in state provision for SSPs, will much of the work invariably fall upon the Heads of PE once again? Delegation could then become even more vital if a department is to continue with many initiatives under threat. Sixty-six per cent of respondents had been a HoD for at least five years and of those, 79% agreed that the role had become more intense than when they first took up the position. Some of the key areas identified as contributing factors included, that the role was more ‘diverse’ (8%), more targets being set (23%), more paperwork (26%), increased extra-curricular work (5%), more meetings (5%) and as previously discussed, more pressure to obtain good results/exam accountability (26%). Other key expectations which illustrated increasingly diverse requirements were reflected in this individual comment:

Yes, more accountable for results, standards of staff and students and even now whether staff receive a pay rise.

Sources of support and issues within delegation

HoDs outlined that they received help from a variety of sources including other departmental members (with or without paid delegated responsibility), second in
departments/assistant heads of departments, occasional secretarial support (e.g. administration of assessment/examination work), technicians and SSCo's (e.g. community links/competition entries/organisation of sports days). The division of labour within the PE department identified varied patterns amongst the responding institutions. Examples of roles adopted by departmental staff included ‘health coordinator’, ‘fixtures secretary’, ‘specific activity leader’, individual teams, dance, sports leadership and Key Stage coordinators, along with second in department/Assistant HoD. Twenty-one per cent of HoDs outlined that their management structure included a ‘second in department’, a further 60% agreeing that the possibility of having a second in department would certainly help in the devolvement of tasks. Thirty-five per cent suggested that the department should work as a team in dividing up responsibilities between them. Three per cent identified that having a technician in the department would certainly help, 23% of HoDs said that they already had one in place anyway, 10% have at least one teaching assistant and 5% administrative support staff.

Interestingly, and a point of contention with some HoDs, there were numerous roles adopted by PE teachers beyond the department in other areas of the school including Head of Year (22%), Head of House (15%), Head of Achievement (2%), Progress Managers (5%), Curriculum Coordinators (2%), Key Stage Managers (7%), Aim Higher Coordinator (2%), D of E (2%), and Deputy Head (2%). Surprisingly few HoDs identified that they themselves had an additional role within the school. One HoD, however, was also the SSCo, stating that ‘in some ways [it] helped as the two days gives me time to develop the department’, whilst another identified that they had ‘another pastoral role to fulfil also’.

In losing PE staff to other roles, HoDs were asked if this caused conflict in terms of the time other staff could devote to PE and therefore the division of labour within the department. There was a mixed response to this question with 38% saying that this did cause conflict, 36% who thought that it did not and 12% who stated ‘occasionally’. Nine per cent specified that because of their obvious workload, these staff showed a reluctance to take on extra work in PE when requested and 6% identified that being late for meetings was often a concern. Comments included:

You can't be a good HOY and a good PE teacher.

No conflict, but can be frustrating. Patience is a necessity!

Huge amount [of conflict]. Too often late to lessons. PE not [their] main priority, lack of help for extra-curricular. Out of 9 [staff] only 5 do clubs.

PE departments should have a clear structure/management structure. Once all roles and positions are filled, then if room, teachers can adopt positions outside PE. At present the reverse is apparent.

It is clear that having staff involved in additional areas of responsibility can be challenging for a HoD to manage. Quite often, this is as a result of individual teachers seeking promotion that is not available within the PE department. So how does this and other such whole-school issues affect the relationship between the HoPE and the Senior Management of the School?
**Relationships between middle and senior management**

One of the questions which received most written comment referred to how HoDs felt their position was perceived by both the SMTs and HoDs in other subject areas. Forty-one per cent stated that they felt that SMTs viewed them with parity in relation to other HoDs, 28% suggested SMTs’ ‘indifference’ towards them and 15% suggested that other HoDs perceive them as holding a lower status within the school. This can have obvious implications for the structuring of the department. It may also reflect why teachers are ‘forced’ to seek promotional opportunities beyond their department. The kudos and public recognition via awards, reputation and press coverage offered to the school by a successful PE department was mentioned as being important to SMTs. Some of the varied responses included:

- **Given quite high status within school. PE and Sport seen as an important aspect of school life.**

- **SMT love us when winning national competitions.**

- **Generally not as important as the core subjects but we are the best organisers of whole school events. Recognised by SMT for this.**

Interestingly, the introduction of examination PE into a department has raised the profile in terms of the academic contributions the subject can make to school league tables:

- **Much more respect since introducing GCSE and A-Level.**

However, there were some HoDs who revealed negative perceptions concerning SMTs:

- **SMT do not value this role or appreciate the workload.**

- **Pupil target setting without consultation, lack of feedback, lack of praise for department’s successes, constant reporting, new initiatives all the time.**

- **Pupil misbehaviour not being dealt with significantly enough at SMT level.**

Some HoDs outlined some of the key issues that often existed in their relationship with SMTs which directly impacted upon their running of the department:

- **Perceived well…but that doesn’t stop them taking over areas when they want and interrupting the curriculum.**

- **However, with regard to the need for a structured PE department, several HoDs provided some pointed observations towards their SMTs:**

- **If SMT were interested there would be another post in the department.**

Furthermore, when asked how PE departments could better manage their workload, the awarding of incentive points for responsibilities or time allowances are potential
ways forward suggested by HoDs, but there are issues in obtaining these and often this is dictated by the size of the school and department. Some were quick to make direct comparisons towards other departments with comparable staffing ratios:

I do believe that TLR’s are given to other subjects much more easily. I am the only one with a TLR for PE.

In other large departments in this school, there is a HOD, second in department and an I/C Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. PE does not have this luxury.

**Conclusion**

This study has resulted in a focus on the concept of delegation as a means of improving efficiency and effectiveness; key outcomes in Adam Smith’s (1776) vision for a successful economy. The stated epistemological approach has been to engage in research as an agent of change and so it is only pertinent that some recommendations be made. Having found that delegation is both difficult, and in some departments almost non-existent, we would like to bring to the fore a need for the HoPE to work more closely with SMTs. If there is effective communication between the two then the former will stand a better chance of obtaining improved resources, defined in this instance as the receiving of extra salaried Teaching and Learning Responsibilities (TLRs) for the department. Conversely, if relationships between a HoD and SMT are poor then this can affect the whole department, as Bell (1986) found when team members perceived a lowering of their status as a consequence of such a breakdown. The benefits of improved links cannot be underestimated as shown by OFSTED’s (2009) findings that strong leadership of PE in primary schools is often as a result of support from SMTs. If this can happen at primary level then why not at secondary level?

Within some of the schools researched there did appear to be a number of grievances held by HoDs against SMTs. These included the taking over of PE facilities for exam use, pupil target-setting without consultation, failure to deal with disruptive pupils and a general lack of praise for departmental successes. Interestingly, these were comments made by schools which lacked a definite staffing structure within PE departments and were not made by those where appropriate remuneration is given for roles and responsibilities. Could it be that grievances against SMTs stem from negativity influenced by the lack of structure within PE departments? Moreover, a glance sideways can be equally frustrating: ‘I do believe that TLRs are given to other subjects much more easily’ (Teacher X). Once teachers are rewarded for their achievements within PE then the temptation to look for career development elsewhere might be reduced: ‘Once all roles and positions are filled, then if room, teachers can adopt positions outside PE. At present the reverse is apparent’ (Teacher Y). So, how then are subject teams going to achieve the structured, rewards-based department which so many Heads of PE desire?

If the latter are to be valued and the work of their departments truly accepted then recognition by a school’s SMT is crucial. To do this HoDs could follow the advice of Armour (1996) and align their own personal philosophies concerning PE with those held by the SMT. However, such a move may perhaps stifle the creativity and originality required for leadership which Busher and Harris (2000) suggest may be disappearing within schools. Therefore, perhaps the onus should be on the HoD
to make clearer philosophies and ideologies which underpin the PE curriculum. Dialogue concerning such issues as inclusion and teaching styles can present SMTs with a different approach to PE than they may have experienced themselves as pupils. By doing this SMT can be made aware and keep abreast of recent changes. So, instead of the HoD using SMT philosophies to shape the PE curriculum the whole process is reversed to allow the subject leader to influence the SMT. To achieve this, PE departments need to maximise all the opportunities available to them. They need to make full and regular contributions towards school websites and newsletters; notice boards need to be updated. PE teams then should not be reticent in putting themselves forward as one of the most visual and active subjects on the school curriculum. Even the annual appraisal meeting held between SMT and HoDs to discuss exam performance could be used as an opportunity to both celebrate achievement and stake a legitimate claim for extra resources. Open communication such as this should create a unity of purpose which both Durkheim and Smith saw as essential to avoid a dehumanisation of the labour process. Again, this sense of belonging becomes just as important as the function and responsibilities of one’s role (Sennett 2006).

Emile Durkheim would probably have viewed roles within the PE Department as a means of developing individual talents and abilities. Ideally a consensual process based on socialisation would lead to cohesion and integration. The delegation of tasks could then be part of a binding process and SMTs should fully recognise this potential. Durkheim also states that groupings should have a high degree of internal autonomy creating both power and liberty to resolve conflicts. Our focus on delegation would suggest a favouring towards a distributed form of leadership. However, as many of the schools researched would appear to conform towards a hierarchical model, the findings draw hope from those of Leithwood et al. (2007) who suggested that both forms of leadership are not incompatible. So, although PE departments within this study would perhaps desire a distributed form of leadership, the hierarchical nature of the institutions that they find themselves in may mean that management styles at all levels need to become flexible.

There is a real need for PE departmental teams to work more closely with SMTs. Decisions made on a partnership basis (Williams 2002) will help to strengthen the need for the devolvement of tasks which in turn could empower and develop future leaders (Busher and Harris 2000; Mennon and Athanasouls-Reppa 2011). The apparent inconsistency which SMTs place on the worth and value of PE must also be addressed in order to create parity and equality both within and between schools. Only then will all PE departments have a true ‘natural division of labour’.

Future research

A request for HoDs to divulge just how much non-contact time they receive could be most useful to compare within and between schools. Earley and Fletcher-Campbell (1989) found that many HoDs complained of not having enough free periods, particularly those which should be protected and set aside for the vital job of observing other colleagues teach. Ten years later a similar study by Glover and Miller (1999) found that little had changed. A more up-to-date investigation would be pertinent, focusing in particular upon the impact of teaching assistants and cover supervisors and how their relatively recent appointments have freed up extra time for
teachers (Webster, Blatchford, and Russell 2013). Future research could also investigate specific training needs required by HoDs and more information could be gained on external roles and responsibilities held by all members of the department. How many HoDs are also form teachers? It would also be interesting to find out more on why a HoPE may take on extra roles coordinating new initiatives such as Gifted and Talented. These are all additional responsibilities which by creating extra work outside of PE may have an impact on workloads within the department.

Earley and Fletcher-Campbell’s (1989) research appears to be one of the few texts looking at how to actually manage people within school departments. In particular they attempt to address the issue of dealing with awkward team members who potentially can have a negative impact upon a department (Coleman 2005). This also could be a future research direction with the intended outcome of helping aspiring HoDs manage what can be perceived as one of the more difficult aspects of the job. Ultimately such an understanding could then ease the process by which departmental tasks are delegated.

Generally, there is a need for more empirical research on the roles and responsibilities for a HoPE. A project similar to that conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) in 1989 would be welcome which could also take the form of a comparison with heads in other subjects.

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