

The social inclusion of immigrant girls in and through physical education. Perceptions and decisions of physical education teachers.

The current educational context in many European countries is characterised by a student population showing great cultural diversity due to the increased immigration of the last few decades. The goal of this study is to analyse the perceptions and decisions of physical education teachers in relation to improving the social inclusion of immigrant girls. The theoretical underpinning of this study is the concept of intersectionality as developed within third wave feminism. The methodological framework for this study is its focus on teacher thinking, with special attention paid to the concept of implicit theories. Two qualitative research techniques are used, the interview and the focus group, and participants were 19 physical education teachers from state primary schools in the Baix Llobregat region of Catalonia, Spain. The resulting data reveal these teachers' beliefs regarding a) their training in interculturality and gender, which they regard as very limited; b) the engagement of immigrant girls in physical education activities, initially high but diminishing as they get older; c) the involvement of girls' families in their schooling, which may condition their degree of participation; d) the various strategies and decisions that teachers must make about organisation and intervention, some of which concern whether and how to form mixed-gender groups for specific activities; and e) the responsibility they feel for motivating immigrant girls to participate in physical education. Analysis of the results through the lens of intersectionality suggests that teacher education would be enhanced by a) greater training in cultural diversity from the perspective of gender, with a view to foster the inclusion of all students; b) training in intercultural communication competence skills; c) greater sensitisation to how language use and other classroom behaviours may unwittingly reinforce male dominance; and d) the promotion of reflection in the context of situated practices.

Keywords: Physical education; Immigration; Gender; Intersectionality; Inclusion

Introduction

Maintaining social cohesion in the face of large-scale immigration from countries of widely differing cultures is one of the fundamental challenges facing Europe in the 21st

century. Education systems are often assigned a key function in maintaining or creating such cohesion. Thus, key values present and promoted in the educational environment must include respect, equal opportunity and social inclusion (UNESCO, 2009). Physical education classes and teachers can play a role in this. However, any attempt to facilitate the inclusion of immigrant girls in particular in the context of physical education classes inevitably seems to run up against the complicated convergence of gender and cultural diversity.

The goal of the present study is to analyse—within the context of that convergence—the perceptions and decision-making of Spanish primary physical education teachers in relation to improving the social inclusion of immigrant girls through fostering their degree of engagement in physical education activities and taking into account the intercultural relationships that exist in the educational environment. We focus on primary education, first, because this level is less well represented in the literature on social integration in education than the secondary level and, second, because it is hoped that the data we obtain will be useful to address gaps that are perceived to exist in teacher education in this area.

Compared with many other European countries, immigration is a relatively recent phenomenon in Spain, having occurred on a large scale only over the last two decades. This means that what was only 20 years ago a relatively homogeneous student population is now characterised by the heavy presence of ethnic minorities consisting of first- and increasingly second-generation immigrant children. These immigrant communities have a wide variety of geographic origins, with Morocco, Rumania, Ecuador, Pakistan and China among those most heavily represented in the case of Catalonia, the area in which data for the present study took place (Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya, 2016). This implies that pupil realities differ in terms of not only whether

they are immigrants or not but also factors such as gender, religion, ethnicity, home culture, social class, years of schooling in the country of origin, whether they are first- or second-generation immigrants and so on. The specific context for this study was the region of Catalonia known as the Baix Llobregat, and here in particular a very high proportion of primary school students are Muslim Moroccan immigrants or the children of such immigrants. Given the multifaceted challenge involved in this sort of analysis, it is the perspective of intersectionality that would seem the best path to understanding.

Intersectionality as a principle of third wave feminism. Physical education research in this context.

The history of feminism can be broken down into three different phases or waves. The third wave of feminism came about, according to Zack (2005), as a result of the collapse of the second wave in the 1980s. While still demanding legal and political emancipation, second wave feminism prioritized issues that have a direct impact on women's lives such as reproduction, sexual violence, the expression of sexuality and housework. Nonetheless, the fragility and vagueness of what is meant by the word 'woman' raised questions about the nature of identity, unity and collectivity (Gillis, Howie, & Minford, 2007). As a result, without renouncing the demands of the second wave, third wave feminism has sought to move beyond the ideological inflexibility the discourse of the second wave seemed to embody (Snyder, 2008). Thus, third wave discourse is characterised by its multiple perspectives, embracing at one and the same time both individualism and diversity.

A key concept introduced by third wave feminism is the principle of intersectionality, essentially the notion that gender cannot be regarded as a category isolated from race, class or ethnicity. First introduced in the 1980s within the context of

Black feminism to explore the intersection between race and gender (Evans, 2016), intersectionality is intended to counter the ways in which single-axis thinking undermines struggles for social justice (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013). In research, intersectionality has had the effect of raising new methodological problems since analysis must now accommodate multiple categories and dimensions of social life (McCall, 2005).

More specifically in the context of physical education, Flintoff, Fitzgerald, & Scraton (2008) analysed the importance of bringing about more in-depth educational debates with an intersectional perspective, where categories such as culture, ethnicity, ability or gender are interrelated, and the union of these aspects allows us to address difference and diversity as one of the key challenges of education. Intersectionality is also present in the way that people perceive their bodies and how they understand physical culture (Dagkas & Hunter, 2015). The work of Walseth (2013) pursues this line to 'extend the analysis of gender issues to the intersection of gender, ethnicity and religion' (p. 310). Thorjussen & Sisjord (2017) explore the diversity of students' experiences in multi-ethnic, mixed-gender physical education contexts. These studies are largely based on the lived experiences of individuals. In the present case, on the other hand, we seek to explore the thinking of physical education teachers in a context where gender and cultural diversity intersect.

Gender and cultural diversity in physical education

Within the scope of physical education, authors like Benn, Dagkas, and Jawad (2011), Medina (2004), Soler, Ispizua, and Mendoza (2017) and Velázquez (2015) understand that the context of physical education activities at school can enhance interpersonal relations, social inclusion and respect among the different cultures that coexist in the educational setting. This is due to the fact that physical education is by nature an

experiential and ludic school subject, with a high motivational component, thus representing a perfect context for the transmission of attitudes such as collaboration, teamwork and equality among students. In contexts where cultural diversity is high, Leseth and Engelsrud (2017, p. 17) argue, skilled physical education teachers can use ‘the proximal and embodied situations inherent in physical education to draw on cultural diversity in a positive way’ and that physical education can in fact ‘accommodate cultural diversity by modifying bodily responses and experiences’. Corroborating these ideas, With-Nielsen and Pfister (2011, p. 646) claim on the basis of various studies that ‘sporting activities have positive effects not only on health, fitness and well-being but also on social relations and personal development’.

However, the experience of physical education is not always the same for girls as it is for boys. Many studies point to the lower engagement of girls in physical education and physical activity in general (Telford, Telford, Olive, Cochrane, & Davey, 2016; Sánchez-Hernández, Martos-García, Soler, & Flintoff, 2018; With-Nielsen & Pfister, 2011; and others). As regards the interface between physical activity and gender, many studies analysing power relations in the physical education context show that physical activity tends to be a social context that favours the dominance of a masculine culture (García Ferrando, Lagardera, & Puig 2017). Some of these studies make reference to organisational issues, such as the fact that the use of the space occupied by students during physical education classes is often differentiated by gender, which can be a factor in reproducing the dominant role of the male gender in society (Azzarito & Hill, 2013; Vilanova & Soler, 2008; Subirats & Tomé, 2007). By contrast, other studies describe physical activity practices that favour inclusion and engagement. MacDonald (2002), and Flintoff and Scraton (2001) point out that this type of

experience tends to happen more often in extracurricular activities than in physical education classes.

Expanding on the vision of physical activity as related to gender, interculturality and religion, numerous studies have looked at the engagement of immigrant girls and adolescent women in sports activities in diverse social contexts (Santos, Balibrea, Castro, López, & Arango, 2005; Santos, 2013; Soler, 2007; Vilanova & Soler, 2008). Adopting an intersectional approach, some of these studies have focused specifically on how to ensure the inclusion of Muslim students in physical education. In this regard, Abdul-Razak, Omar Fauzee, and Latif, (2010) argue that it is not so much religion as such that sets limitations on participation in physical activity as much as ethnicity and culture. For her part, Walseth (2013) attributes Muslim girls' objections to participating in mixed physical education class to male dominance rather than religion. While highlighting the importance of communication with students' families, Benn, Dagkas and Jawad (2011) adopt an intersectional stance to suggest that the frame of reference for such analyses must be expanded to include practices that are sensitive to cultural diversity. Along similar lines, Pfister (2004) argues that students must be offered options for physical education that can accommodate their own customs and traditions. She also regards it as essential that Muslim immigrant girls be encouraged to perform sport activities for various reasons, including good health and wellbeing, social acceptance in the broader host culture, social support, a positive self-image and self-confidence. Also linking physical activity and health, Dagkas and Benn (2006) emphasise that health policies and practices must be sensitive to the differences in the particular life experiences of individuals. Dagkas, Benn, & Jawad (2011) highlight the importance of communication with families.

Studies that focus on the role of teachers in helping students to feel included in situations of cultural and ethnicity diversity tend to note the silence surrounding these issues in teacher education (Flintoff, Dowling, & Fitzgerald, 2015) and the lack of reflection on them in the context of the teaching practicum (Owens & Tinning, 2009). However, among those studies that examine the experience of teachers in contexts of cultural diversity, Barker (2017) challenges the widespread belief that teachers lack cultural competence and possess little knowledge about the physical culture of their students. Along similar lines, Benn, Dagkas and Jawad (2011) argue that a clean line must be drawn between teachers' day to day experiences and the tensions between religious freedom and educational practices in physical education.

Materials and method

The present study is conceived within the qualitative approach to teacher thinking, which seeks to track the internal thought process of the teacher from the initial moment he/she acquires a pedagogical theory until he/she puts it into actual educational practice (Patton, 2005; Shalvelson & Stern, 1981). This approach affords three areas of focus: planning processes, interactional processes and implicit theories. The present study is situated in the last of these, implicit theories, which are made up of the teacher's set of values, beliefs and principles, all of which have an influence on his/her cognitive behaviours and daily decision-making (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Marrero, 1992).

Participants and settings

Nineteen physical education teachers from state primary schools in the Baix Llobregat region of Catalonia constituted the participants in this study. In Spain, physical education at the primary level is taught by generalist teachers who have received specific training in physical education. All participants were Spanish in background; as

we noted above, large-scale immigration is a relatively recent phenomenon in Spain and it is therefore unusual thus far for teachers within the public system to be of immigrant origin, whether first- or second-generation. The students at these schools tend to come from working class families with medium to medium-low income levels. The proportion of children from immigrant families was similar for all the schools represented in this study, between 30% and 50%, with the bulk of the children being second-generation immigrants, that is, born in Catalonia. The reason why the study was focused on state schools responded to the fact that public schools in this geographic area have a greater number of immigrant students compared to private or semi-private schools; according the Catalan government, 85.2% of all the foreign students enrolled in Catalan schools in the 2014-2015 academic year were attending state schools, not private ones (Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya, 2015).

Of the 19 participating teachers, 10 took part in oral interviews. These 10 were selected from the population of state primary school physical education teachers in the area in accordance with a purposive sampling approach which prioritised gender equity (five females; five males), diversity of work experience and geographic distribution among the various municipalities of the Baix Llobregat.

The remaining nine participating teachers (five females; four males) took part in two focus groups (five in one and four in the other), which took place after the interviews. In this case purposive sampling was based on a different set of selection criteria (Suárez, 2005), namely the number of participants (between four and seven), the make-up of the group (with homogeneity and heterogeneity both being considerations) and the need to have participants that had no prior acquaintance with each other.

Data collection

As we have noted, two techniques were used: the oral interview and the focus group. A first version of the interview questions was drawn up centred around a set of dimensions and variables which were felt to reflect the themes most often appearing in the literature on this area. The set questions was validated by 12 expert judges from the field of education who were asked to assess whether each question was framed in appropriate language and was relevant to our purposes.

Using the final validated script, the 10 interviews were then carried out by one of the authors and the resulting recordings were transcribed. Based on the original interview questions and issues that had arisen in interviewee responses, the two authors then prepared a list of topics to present for discussion in the subsequent focus groups. We felt it important to select a fresh set of participants for the focus groups rather than use the teachers who had been interviewed because we did not want prior exposure to the interview questions to prejudice the way the group discussions developed. However, the two sets of teachers came from very similar schools in terms of context and characteristics, which meant that the focus groups would give us further insights into points raised in the interviews. The two focus groups took place, with all discussions recorded for subsequent transcription and analysis.

Data analysis

A thematic analysis of the interview and focus group data was carried out. The first step in this process was to code the transcribed data with the assistance of NVivo (v10) software (QSR International 2012). We looked at the ordered output showing the most frequently occurring themes in order to establish the three definitive study dimensions and their variables (Table 1). These dimensions and variables facilitated the presentation of results and subsequent discussion thereof.

Table 1: Dimensions and variables analysed

The second step was analyse the results from the perspective of intersectionality, a challenging undertaking given intersectionality is challenging to use due to ‘the complexity that arises when the subject of analysis expands to include multiple dimensions of social life and categories of analysis’ (McCall, 2005, p. 1772). For this reason, we focused our attention on the six factors highlighted by Evans (2006), namely social inequality, power, relationality, social context, complexity and social justice.

Ethical considerations and scientific rigour

Participants were informed in advance of the goals and features of the study, and gave their prior consent for the dissemination of the results. In addition, the study was validated throughout the research process on the basis of several rigorously applied sets of criteria (Latorre, Del Rincón & Arnal, 2003), namely a) credibility criteria, based on strategies such as the triangulation of settings, analysing teacher data from different schools and collecting data systematically using different formats; b) transferability criteria, based on justifying the selection of the sample and carrying out a thorough description of the research process; c) dependence criteria, based on a dependency unit with external researchers; and d) confirmability criteria, based on describing clearly and precisely the objectives and dimensions of the research, and engaging in active reflection throughout the study.

Findings and discussion

Teacher knowledge

The teachers who participated in this study—identified in quotations below by participant (P) and focus group (G) or interviewee (E) number—all reported pre-service training of a broad nature focused on the area of physical education. However, though

they reported that some of their training covered the topic of 'inclusion', this had tended to refer to students with physical disabilities rather than immigrants and involved no discussion of the connections between inclusion, gender and cultural diversity.

'I think we're all learning on the fly and improvising.' [P3, G2, paragraph 31]

In fact, their limited training in interculturality and gender probably explains why these teachers seemed to be largely unaware of the link between gender, cultural diversity and inclusion (Matencio, Molina, & Miralles, 2015). From the perspective of intersectionality, this is reminiscent of what Flintoff, et al. (2015) refer to as 'colour blind' teacher education experiences.

With regard to the ongoing teacher education courses they had taken after becoming active teachers, none of the participating teachers reported having taken any courses that dealt with inclusion, gender or interculturality. The reasons offered to explain why they had chosen not to opt for training in inclusion and immigration were, first, that very little training, whether theoretical or practical, was offered on these topics and, second, that they perceived little need for such training.

'As immigration does not pose too many problems for me, I muddle through, although such training would be of interest.' [E3, paragraph 45]

'Because it was not a necessity for me at the time; I chose another one [training course] because I could immediately put it to use.' [E9, paragraph 16]

In general, these teachers reported feeling capable of resolving intercultural challenges on their own. This supports the theory put forth by Messina & Rodríguez (2006) and Oliver (2009) regarding the widespread conviction among teachers that they already possess full mastery of their educational context. Overcoming this attitudinal barrier requires that teachers are truly aware of what they know, what they feel and what drives them to act in particular ways and not others this way. More specifically, as pointed out

by Barker (2017, p. 10), recognising the ‘discourses of whiteness in which teachers live and work’ is essential if teachers are to think in broader terms and question the traditional ways of doing things.

One of the consequences of teachers not receiving training on topics such as social inclusion, interculturality or gender from an intersectional perspective is that they leave the transmission of implicit content related to these issues in everyday learning situations entirely up to chance. Magos (2007) shows the importance of adequate training to bring about changes in teachers’ perception and beliefs. Similarly, Leseth and Engelsrud (2017) suggest that such training must provide primary teachers with the resources they will need to know when it is necessary to tailor their approach to students in culturally diverse teaching contexts. According to Owens and Tinning (2009), if the goal is to move teachers beyond simple concerns about management and control towards an interest in social justice, this training must involve active reflection in different sittings.

Teacher expectations

The invisibility of girls can be perceived in teachers’ answers, as there is a tendency to talk about the immigrant student population in general terms, with no distinction made between girls and boys. In part, this is because, as Colom and Mayoral (2016) point out, languages continue to be predominantly masculine—in Spanish, for example, masculine pronouns are the generic form—which tends to mask the presence of the female figure. In addition, from the perspective of sports sociology, post-structuralist theories understand that language not only reflects the social context in which we live but also conditions the situations we share (García Ferrando, Lagardera, & Puig, 2017). Research on intercultural education from a gender perspective (Martínez-Ten, 2012;

Puleo, 2000) suggests that it is essential to address the gender of the immigrant student in the school, since it facilitates the construction of the identity of these girls.

When we factor in the issue of religion, the results of our study show that the inclusion of Muslim girls is felt to be more difficult compared to the other cultures that co-exist in the same classroom, thus revealing the cultural distance perceived by teachers between Muslim and Western cultures (Puig & Fullana, 2002).

‘What I see is that the Moroccan girls go with the Moroccan girls. Usually, if there are four Moroccan girls in a class, they always stick together. I really don’t know if this is because of a cultural issue (...) and it’s not because they don’t get along with the other girls, but they just tend to go together.’ [E1, paragraph 16]

‘As for Ramadan, when they were fasting, I had to talk to the management team since we were working on athletics. There were cases of sixth-grade girls that had already gone from girls to young women and had to fast.’ [P2, G2, paragraph 23]

As noted by Flintoff, et al. (2008), a whole set of categories are required to describe the complexity of student identities, such as gender, culture, religion, social class, the economic situation and so on. An analysis of the interaction among these categories might help physical education teachers understand the reality of each individual student in order to tailor physical activity experiences in a way that would favour their motivation, engagement and social inclusion (Soler, Ispizua, & Mendoza, 2017).

Teachers in this study reported that Muslim immigrant girls generally showed a rather high level of engagement, although this also depended on factors such as the particularities of the group of students in which they found themselves, the activity involved, the role of the teacher, their home culture, their country of origin, how long they had been enrolled at the school, etc.

‘Normally they get involved a lot because it’s an area where they feel comfortable, they feel one-on-one. And above all, the role of the teacher: if you are

close to them in a natural and affectionate way, the boys feel much better and the girls even more so.' [P1, G1, paragraph 165]

These comments surely reflect the fact that this study focused on primary school, given that studies set in the secondary context have tended to highlight the low level of participation by immigrant girls. Yet teachers in our study also reported that the willingness of these girls to participate in physical education activities diminished over time, particularly starting in the fourth grade of primary school, around age 9-10.

'As they grow up, they become a little more detached from sport and thus physical education class.' [P1, G2, paragraph 13]

In her intersectionally-informed study of Muslim girls in Norway, Walseth (2015) found that changing the curriculum for the upper grades (at secondary level) brought about changes in the older girls' attitudes to physical education. Along similar lines, many other studies have shown that a more cooperative and less competitive curriculum can enhance intercultural relations, camaraderie, collaboration, social cohesion and attitudes related to the acceptance of others (Velázquez, 2015). Critical reflection by the students themselves can also be effective: in their study, Sánchez-Hernández et al. (2018) found that having students reflect on the topic of gender after discussing critical incidents brought about an improvement in engagement and a more relaxed classroom climate overall.

With regard to cultural and family beliefs teachers felt that they sometimes deterred immigrant girls—especially if they were Muslim—from doing physical activity, whether during or after school hours. Participants also recognised that these difficulties tended to be smaller if the girl's family had come from a more urban community in their home country or was educated, or if the girl was a second-generation rather than a first-generation immigrant.

‘If the family is involved with the school, (...) the girl participates as just one more pupil and is not even perceived to be an immigrant; on the other hand, if they wear a headscarf and do not participate it is because the families do not get involved.’ [P3, G2, paragraph 258]

‘There were families who came from living in the mountains, without schooling, who did not know how to talk, who practically knew nothing (...) These families are not the same as others coming from Morocco, since we had children whose parents were physicists or chemists.’ [P5, G1, paragraph 87]

As pointed out by Pfister (2004) and Santos (2013), religious and cultural values can impede the practice of certain physical activities. However, other studies by MacDonald (2002) and Flintoff & Scraton (2001) report positive and influential experiences when girls participated in extracurricular physical activities that were more motivating and personalised than those offered in their regular physical education classes. Abdul-Razak et al. (2010), Dagkas, et al. (2011), and Pfister (2004) all argue that in fact Islam is in favour of women practising physical activity, since having a healthy physical condition is one of the moral obligations incumbent on the practising Muslim. The problem may be that there are different ways to understand physical activity and how to perform it (Dagkas & Benn, 2006). Precisely in the case of Muslim girls, they practise another type of physical activity in their country of origin, with a different outfit and/or in places separated from boys.

Finally, the teachers in this study study acknowledged the need to have more time to engage in dialogue and get to know immigrant families better. In addition, they agreed that the fact that some immigrant families had little knowledge of the vehicular language(s) used in the education system was a serious impediment to better collaboration with the school.

‘Something is being done, but there is a certain level of cautious distrust (...) because there is no direct relationship with parents and no chance to talk about

things, because we experience their parents just as they experience us, because we don't know what they think of the type of education their children are receiving. We only know that they bring their kids to school, drop them off and then leave.' [E10, paragraph 21]

This lack of communication between teachers and parents is a valid concern; research has shown that outcomes tend to be more positive when the benefits for their daughters of physical education and sport are explained to parents (Dagkas et al., 2011). Here it is worth noting, however, that just because parents have a command of the host country language does not necessarily guarantee that real communication will take place. For this reason, Kealey (2015) argues that one goal of teacher education must be the development of intercultural communication competence.

Organisational and intervention decisions

One issue about which the teachers who participated in this study expressed considerable concern was the creation of mixed-gender groups for physical education activities. In the Spanish public education system, though occasionally in some schools students may be separated by gender for particular physical education activities, in general physical education classes are fully coeducational at both primary and secondary levels. As the following comment illustrates, teachers in the study recognised the important social function of the groups they created in their classes.

'I am changing and the more I change, the more successful the sessions become because they offer the immigrant kids as well as all their classmates the chance to play with kids they have never played with previously.' [E1, paragraph 29]

Teachers reported employing a wide variety of strategies on a daily basis to organise students in their classes, with the configuration of groups depending on how members were chosen, the number of participants, how long the group would have to stay

together, whether it would involve mixed-gender pairs or not and so on. Teachers thus perceived themselves to be concerned with achieving communicative and diverse group dynamics.

‘When it comes to forming the groups, I try to make sure that if they are pairing up, they are mixed by gender, and if girls and boys don’t pair up spontaneously, I tell them that in each pair there has to be one boy and one girl.’ [P1, G1, paragraph 50]

The issue of cultural diversity is certainly pertinent here: the teachers in this sample felt a need for special intervention in the case of immigrant girls when it came to forming groups, since—they reported—under these circumstances these girls tended to isolate themselves from the rest of the students.

‘They always stick together and when it comes to forming groups, you always have to intervene in order to break them up; or also, when they are supposed to pair up, you always have to intervene and create the pairs yourself (...) I think it’s more a social issue than a sport or a motor performance issue, because many of them are actually very good [at sport].’ [E1, paragraph 26]

To avoid the risk of rejection by non-immigrant classmates, teachers reported tending to ask the immigrant girls to join up with the more open-minded students, thus fostering a climate of acceptance and motivation among the participants in that group. This is reminiscent of Barker’s (2017) study, which also describes teachers responding ‘by acting in “caring”, “protective” ways’ towards immigrant girls (p.10).

The literature on this particular issue is generally framed within the secondary school context, which may well explain the widely differing points of view expressed. In its 2007 report, the Muslim Council of Britain recommend forming groups separated by gender for physical activities involving contact. At the same time, research carried out by Hill, Hannon, & Knowles (2012) suggests that the separation of students by

gender in body contact activities like basketball and soccer creates a more relaxed and safer environment for both sexes. Again, Walseth (2015) reminds us of the need to analyse experiences in terms of intersectionality given that the refusal of some girls to take part in mixed groups is surely related to male dominance in physical education classes. This is consistent with Soler (2007), who points out that the mixed grouping strategy should be accompanied by other inclusive actions since proper learning is not always guaranteed in mixed-gender conditions.

Although teachers who participated in the present study felt that the grouping strategies they applied were favourable to the inclusion of these girls, they regarded the space and equipment employed in the activities as merely organisational issues. It was clear that this set of teachers did not perceive any link between the use of sports equipment and the distribution of space on the one hand and the inclusion of immigrant girls on the other. Nevertheless, these teachers did tend to intervene when it came to the allocation of either space or equipment, since they perceived that leaving these issues to improvisation could lead to situations of lack of control, hyperactivity, and tension within the class group.

“I like leading. I always do it myself, and I am the one who decides which child is going to distribute the sports equipment we are going to use, so that everyone can get a turn with the best spaces and the best equipment. If I don't do it that way, the first kid always gets the best stuff and the last ones always get the worst.” [E1, paragraph 2]

In reference to the use and distribution of space, studies conducted by Soler (2007) and Vilanova and Soler (2008) analysing how the two genders use space differently report that boys tend to use the centre of the space whereas girls tend to occupy the peripheries. According to Subirats and Tomé (2007), this distribution of space does not provoke any conflict because the underlying power relations regarding the distribution

of space are assumed in an unconscious and natural way. Moreover, as revealed by the results of Azzarito and Hill's (2013) study focused on ethnic minority girls, space is closely related to the degree to which girls feel the gaze of boys and other girls, and thus their management of their body. As for the equipment used in physical education classes, research carried out in intercultural contexts suggests that it is advisable, starting at early ages, to carry out diversified tasks since this allows children to become familiar with and internalise a wide range of sport equipment as elements not linked to a specific gender (Medina, 2004).

In general, the physical education teachers in this study reported that their decisions were always informed by a desire to promote the personal and emotional well-being of the immigrant girls in their classes. By way of this attention, the teachers hoped to foster the girls' intrinsic motivation to participate in physical activities, which in turn would favour their social inclusion and improve their interpersonal relations with the group and their immediate social environment.

‘I think they need you to listen to them.’ [P4, G2, paragraph 209]

‘They do much better when you speak to them individually (...) If you speak to them directly, it is positive reinforcement that helps them assimilate much more, and they remember it in future classes.’ [E1, paragraph 31]

‘... Then they see that they are also an active part of the class, and these relational issues make it more likely that there a good relationship will form among all the groups (...) so you need to create activities in which everyone can relate to each other.’ [E10, paragraph 30]

What these teachers say about motivation strategies coincides with the views of Robazza, Bortoli, Carraro, & Bertollo (2016), who draw direct links between the participation and involvement of children in physical activity and the enhancement of positive emotions like joy and happiness. Thus, the perceptions of the teachers in this study, like in Robazza et al. (2016), stress the importance of increasing the intrinsic

motivation of immigrant girls to favour an active and healthy lifestyle, both physically and emotionally.

As noted, the participants in this research describe a wide variety of organisational decisions and motivational strategies for the improvement of social inclusion and intercultural relations for these girls. However, this set of teaching proposals must be framed in a continuous and systematic educational process, where diversity is conceived as positive and enriching (Bartolomé, 2006; Medina, 2002, 2004). To address the challenges posed for intersectionality by the need to overcome social injustice and counteract male dominance, this process should encourage critically reflective activities that favour attitudes such as acceptance, trust, respect for others, responsibility and commitment (Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2018).

Conclusions

The findings from this study demonstrate the importance of adopting an intersectional perspective when analysing the perceptions of teachers who have received training that was relatively weak in areas related to social inclusion, interculturality or the gender perspective. Through interviews and focus group discussions, these teachers revealed the implicit theories that guided their decision-making as they endeavoured to social cohesion in the physical education context.

They describe a rather high level of engagement on the part of immigrant girls in a Spanish public education context, which decreases little by little from the fourth grade of primary school. They also note the various factors that can hinder engagement such as the type of activity, the characteristics of the group in which the girls are placed, their home culture, their country of origin, the time they have spent being schooled, etc.

Regarding the role of the family, the commitment of parents to improving the inclusion

of their daughters is felt by these teachers to be low, especially with regard to participating in physical activity outside school hours.

With regard to organisational and intervention decisions, these teachers show themselves to be aware of the role of grouping in bringing about an improvement in the inclusion of immigrant girls. On the other hand, decisions related to the distribution of equipment and space are regarded as merely organisational issues, in contradiction of the view of many authors that the use of equipment and space can reproduce gendered power relations.

In light of this study, several recommendations can be made regarding the training of physical education teachers. First, such teacher education must include an exploration of the meaning and impact of cultural diversity, now an inescapable part of the educational context which the new teacher will face, as well as its interface with gender. Second, in order that the teacher may engage meaningfully with that diversity, with the immediate goal of promoting inclusion in the classroom but on a broader plane promoting social justice, intercultural communication competence must form part of the skill set that pre-service teachers acquire before they become professionals.

Communicative competence also entails avoiding language that indirectly or directly embodies and reinforces male dominance—a special concern in the physical education context. Last but not least, it is clear from the examples of teacher thinking revealed in the excerpts from interviews and group discussions reproduced here that teachers are by nature reflective about their daily work. Training in the areas listed above will therefore be most effective if it is grounded in reflection within situated practices. Taken as a whole, these findings suggest that physical education teachers can indeed play a key role in motivating immigrant girls to participate, thereby fostering social cohesion at school and therefore in the broader community as well, provided that a culture of

inclusive physical activity and a sensitivity to the complexity of intersectional identity are both conscientiously present within their physical education classes.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Table 1: Dimensions and variables of the research

DIMENSIONS	VARIABLES
1. Teacher knowledge	1.1. Training background
	1.2. Reasons for teacher choices of training options
2. Teacher expectations	2.1. Characteristics of immigrant students
	2.2. Engagement of immigrant girls
	2.3. Collaboration of the girls' families
3. Organisational and intervention decisions	3.1 Grouping strategies
	3.2. Use of equipment and distribution of space
	3.3. Motivation strategies
