'It's about portraying that we are organised …' A case study looking at identity changes within one Free school's Physical Education and School Sport (PESS) programme.

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ABSTRACT

This research looked at changes made towards PESS at one of the first Free schools in England. Opened by parents as a new institution within an unfamiliar setting, the school had to contend with limited resources for an ambitious programme based upon a full complement of examination courses and an emphasis on prestigious team sports. A single case study methodology revealed that subsequent changes in identity stemmed from staffing changes, alongside a shift in personal philosophies towards a more inclusive ideology. Research participants agreed that 'too much' had been attempted 'too soon.' Using Goffman's concept of 'impression management', changes are explained by the analysis of a team 'performance' communication to parents, identified by interviewees as key policy actors in the life of the school. This approach has been successful in justifying change, a finding that will help to understand the extent to which parental expectations are managed at Free schools.

Introduction

There are currently many different types of schools within England; local authority comprehensives, academies, grammar schools, studio schools – the list can go on. This can present problems for parents who must adapt to this ever-changing landscape by researching the options that are available for their children and comparisons between types of school become inevitable (Morris & Perry, 2019). Each school will promote themselves in a manner whereby 'identity' becomes important to attract pupils in order to maintain their very survival. One such type of school where the discourses of marketization are of paramount importance is in the Free school context. Established in 2010 as part of Coalition government education policy, these schools are self-governing, autonomous, often brand-new institutions starting out in unfamiliar buildings and settings. Therefore this study will provide a new insight towards an area of educational concern, in this case the issues created by notions of identity within one well established Free school.

The original government rationale for Free schools was to provide new schools in areas where existing provision is weak, to challenge other local underperforming institutions (Gove, 2011), and cater for an expanding population. The rhetoric of achieving increased social mobility was presented as another justification. However, research by Williams, Burrows, & Williams (2018) found that the Free schools in their study differed markedly with faith schools, alternative provision and even some former private schools coming together within this new category. All six schools researched in that study appeared to operate and exist outside of stated government rhetoric (ibid). Moreover, Morris & Perry

(2019) have suggested that there are tensions between the original government policy aims for Free schools and parental preferences.

So, what is happening to these schools, especially those who have been in existence the longest? Have identities changed and if so, why? How are they being marketed? (ibid). Physical Education and School Sport (PESS) has in many ways had to change identities to gain status and acceptance (Williams & Williams, 2013). The academicization of the subject coupled with a more inclusive ethos (Williams et al, 2010) has resulted in a need for the subject to be adaptable, to react positively towards government policy in order to maintain credibility and survive as a curriculum subject. As a result, the subject's identity has come under constant scrutiny. This then makes for an interesting study, PESS within Free schools, contexts and settings both reliant upon the need to build, maintain and even change identities.

Research within and on Free schools is rare (Walford, 2014). Early studies tended to focus upon the ideological issues that have arisen from discourses involving community and choice (Higham, 2014; Walford, 2014; West & Bailey, 2013). Now, to steer away from policy concerns is both timely and necessary as the very first Free schools are more than established, containing pupil cohorts that have worked their way through from the very start of a school's existence. Green, Allen & Jenkins (2015) suggest that an aggregate picture is required in order to fully understand the varied Free school context. However, following inconclusive findings based on six schools by Williams, Burrows, & Williams (2018) it is time to narrow the focus. Consequently, a single case study approach was selected as a means of obtaining rich data that will help to understand how a Free school has evolved, 'survived' and even flourished within the competitive English schools' landscape. This study then will be useful

for consumers (parents), practitioners (teachers) and theorists (academics) to use in their respective fields, with a focus on the part that PESS plays within this process.

What is identity?

This research will emphasise the concept of institutional identity although to fully understand its impact there needs to be an understanding of an interrelationship with the concept of personal identity, the two are linked (Wardekker & Miedema, 2001). Schools should be places where pupils can develop individual identity whereby knowledge and skills are the building blocks to do so (ibid). Identity becomes an iterative process involving a process of reflexive construction where the process of exposure to different contexts, settings and forms of knowledge during a child's time in school can result in personal change.

Whole school identity is manifest within the goals, values and beliefs of the people who work there. It is a fusion of ideas, aims and purpose ultimately held together by the Head teacher who assumes an important role within this process (Fitz, Halpin, & Power 1997; Thompson, Gereluk, & Kowch, 2016; Morris & Perry, 2019). Identity is expressed through dress codes, disciplinary systems, facilities, curriculum and corporate signs and symbols – these factors formed the basis for many of the interview questions in this piece of research. Interestingly, Fitz, Halpin, & Power (1997) highlight how important the curriculum is for school identity, particularly attitudes towards 'minority' subjects. It will be interesting to see the role of PESS within this study, remembering its status in the National Curriculum as a foundation subject.

School identities inevitably invoke a series of judgements, often made by prospective parents. Although national performance norms are there to be used it is the local 'market' that is of

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paramount importance. Parents in Free schools are particularly aware of this varying from knowledge of examination results to an appreciation of the symbolic identities created by uniforms (Morris & Perry, 2019). Nevertheless, the place of cultural capital within this process should not be dismissed; the parental voice has always been an aspect of Free school rhetoric (Gove, 2011) and it could be of importance within this study which looked at a school founded by the local community. What is clear though is that school identity is an eclectic mix of historical, geographical and cultural contexts and so needs to be viewed from more than one vantage point (Thompson, Gereluk, & Kowch 2016). This study did this by focussing on the place and value of Physical Education and School Sport.

PE and changing identities.

There have been many different subject names and 'versions' of Physical Education. From the late 19th century through to the millennium titles have included 'Games', 'Drill' and 'Physical Training', often dependent upon the social class of the participants and the types of school attended. It was only really after World War II with the advent of state schooling for all that the subject settled upon the term 'Physical Education'. Even then there was a divide between female teachers who emphasised poise and grace through aesthetic activities and their male counterparts who were keen to promote the acquisition of skills through sport. It was the latter ideology that eventually prevailed with an identity for PE that appeared to portray an elite based subject involving the mastery of skills as a key outcome. However, by the 1980s and with a National Curriculum looming, the subject had to become aware of its potential to address national health concerns by realising that a broader, inclusive outlook was necessary to ensure the subject's survival (Kirk, 1992).

By the end of the 20th century an opportunity to gain increased funding and status had arisen by working with New Labour government ideals of improving health and education outcomes through physical activity as part of localised community objectives. This led to a more inclusive ethos based upon pupil leadership activities and the targeting of specific groups to improve participation – the subject became known as 'Physical Education and School Sport.' 'High quality' PESS with holistic outcomes was the rhetoric from both government and the teachers themselves (Jung, Pope, & Kirk, 2016).

Ironically, the ending of funding for many of these initiatives coincided with the introduction of Free schools in 2011. A change of government resulted in the removal of ring fenced budgets for PESS which led to a fragmented landscape for the subject where some schools had access to community programmes and some didn't. The new Coalition government provided increased funding for primary school PESS through the Physical Education and Sport Premium (PESP). Concentrating on younger age groups within a context where the quality of teaching had hitherto been variable (Sloan, 2010) is logical, however, it could be argued that the subject's identity and status has been threatened by an outsourcing of provision to external providers, in this case the use of coaching companies to teach PE lessons (Smith, 2015). PE once again, has had to 'reinvent itself' (Williams et al, 2010).

The use of social theory. Many theorists have commented upon identity, whether that be applicable to the individual or at an institutional level. Foucault talks about personal identity as being shaped by prevalent discourses within societies and communities, a process in a state of constant change. These views would connect with Giddens (1990) who writes about the disappearance of 'ontological security' in a world where the sureties of class, occupation and gender are fast disappearing. This would require a 'reflexive' approach, an appreciation for

the present and not necessarily the future. Similarly, a link can be made with the thoughts of Hall (1997 cited in Rojek, 2003) who commented upon the dissolution of fixed identities whether they be institutional or not, leading towards the promotion of the self where adaptability is key. This could challenge the manner in which a school builds, nurtures and maintains an identity; time scales could be important here. In fact Hall (1989) has written about the notion of the 'hybrid character' of identity, an interesting concept to apply towards educational settings, in this case Free schools, where institutional identity may never be fixed. If PESS too can be portrayed as malleable then the notion of two changeable settings and contexts, as previously mentioned, could make for an intriguing study.

However, this study predominantly focused upon the thoughts of Goffman (1959) for an applied interpretation of identity, particularly the use of dramaturgical analogies leading towards the concept of 'impression management.' Goffman's work likens the social world to a theatrical performance; human attributes and activities are 'managed' to provide information for others. In the highly competitive context within which a Free school is positioned, the metaphors that come with this may help to provide understanding and meaning. The roles undertaken by both the individual and the team were of relevance to explore Goffman's notion of 'institutionalisation' in the work place.

Models for identity?

Trying to find out, let alone understand, how to create a school identity is problematic. In another era of significant educational change, the 1990s, (which led to a possibility that there could be many types of schools) the influence of 'tradition' became apparent. At that time 'Grant Maintained' (GM) schools in England signified the start of increased autonomy by

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removing the role of the Local Authority and enabling schools to receive funding directly from central government. This would suggest opportunities for innovation and freedom but Fitz, Halpin, & Power (1997) found that schools merely used the past to consolidate their identity. This is interesting because Free schools as new institutions won't have a significant history. However, in contrast, Thompson, Gereluk, & Kowch (2016) found in their study of Alberta's Charter schools that increased self-governance does help a school to develop its own identity through its philosophy, purpose and goals. The level of increased risk taking that came with these new freedoms meant that trust and authenticity within the school's leadership became important. In fact for schools who acquire new forms of autonomy the role of the Head teacher is important in securing identity, as was found to be the case in the 1990s with GM schools (Fitz, Halpin, & Power,1997). More recently, and in a similar vein, Morris & Perry (2019) found that prospective Free school parents looked to the presence of a strong Head teacher as an important prerequisite in the selection of a school for their children.

It is interesting that the Coalition government used the term 'Free' to label these new schools, schools which are essentially Academy Schools starting afresh within unfamiliar buildings. Devolved budgetary powers and newly acquired curriculum freedoms would suggest opportunities for 'innovative education' leading towards fresh identities. Moreover, innovation has been proposed as a characteristic that would set Free schools apart from other types of school (Gove, 2011; Miller, Taylor, Craven, & Tooley, 2014). However, Wiborg et al (2018) present a compelling argument that this is not the case, analysing factors that collectively can contribute towards a school's identity. Part of the issue here starts with what is exactly meant by innovation in this context. For educationalists including Wiborg et al (2018) pedagogical change would be important, leading towards opportunities to introduce new teaching strategies. The former also identify a fresh new approach towards pupil

admission policies as being of importance. This contrasts markedly with the DfE who define innovation in a more procedural manner focussing upon how Free schools could change the length of the school day, employ unqualified teachers, use parental feedback and utilise performance related pay. In addition, and pertinent to the role of PESS, extracurricular and enrichment opportunities for pupils are seen to be important. As a result of these differing interpretations the article concludes that Free schools are not necessarily innovative, in fact they may actually be regressive in their identities (in the sense that tradition holds sway). A House of Commons Report in 2015 (http://www.parliament.uk/) makes a more judgemental comment by suggesting that the 'limited use of freedoms' by academies (which includes Free schools) is an issue that needs to be acted upon. The call here is for Ofsted to look for evidence of 'effective innovation'. Clearly, there is an expectation for the new types of schools to be different, to pursue the new opportunities available to them.

Wiborg et al (2018) also highlighted how a Head teacher in one Free school said that English private education was one role model to follow while in contrast, other heads admitted looking at 'practices' within the state sector. This latter finding corresponds with research from Morris (2016) who proposed that Free schools have admissions policies that are in line with local authority strategies. Schools in Wiborg et al's (2018) study used uniform as a form of 'symbolic identity' to distinguish themselves from competitors; it will be interesting to see in this case study if this is extended towards the use of PE kits. Perhaps the most significant finding for Wiborg et al (2018) has been an acknowledgement that the parental voice is important in Free schools. The authors suggest that this influence can inhibit change although an assertion that full parental impact is unknown is something that this study will remain cognisant of.

Methodology

The fact that Free schools appear to differ so much in terms of character and nature (Williams, Burrows, & Williams 2018) and perhaps 'stray' from government rhetoric, would support a study based on the notion of constructivism. Here, the suggestion that reality is socially constructed is relevant due to a government policy that has been adapted by the policy actors involved in its implementation. Both researcher and participant need to be reflexive as views are shaped by experiences; knowledge can be linked to theory (Smith & McGannon, 2018). This would require an interpretivist perspective based upon the need to ascertain the thoughts and feelings of participants in the field.

Research Design

In order to fully understand the research phenomena, 'how' and 'why' questions are important. This can be applied at a number of levels, principally in the form of research questions and interview questions. Using the 'how' and 'why' approach is a feature of the case study method (Yin, 2014) whereby the researcher has little control over behavioural events and the focus is contemporary rather than historical (ibid). This was certainly the case with the school selected, geographically located far from our research base and with a short, recent history. More importantly, each interviewee was unknown to the research team.

Case studies aim to provide a rich, deep investigation of the social phenomenon selected by the researcher. This can warrant the provision of a full variety of evidence whether that be documents, interviews, artefacts or observations (ibid). In this study Ofsted reports and the school's web site were sources of information in addition to interviews. Collecting data from

other organisations is also relevant (ibid) and in this instance interviewing a community sports coach provided an external view on the school's PESS programme.

The analysis of data section will show that a quest to develop theory is important (Smith & McGannon, 2018), again part of the rationale for adopting a case study approach (Yin, 2014). Theories need to evolve firstly from the literature review and then be reflected within the interview/research questions. This will lead to what Bassey (1999) refers to as an 'Evaluative Case Study' whereby an enquiry is set in place to focus on the 'worthwhileness' of an educational programme, in this case the place and value of PESS within a well-established Free school. One of the theories established so far is that identities are in a state of 'flux' (Hall, 1997) particularly in a postmodern world where adaptability leading to individualism is key. Therefore, a reflexive approach has been adopted on the part of both researcher and interviewee, particularly for the latter who were encouraged to 'look back' at how their relatively new school has evolved.

Procedure

This study has applied Tracy's (2010) criteria for qualitative research; worthy topic, rich rigour, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethical, meaningful coherence. Tracy (2010) provides guidance for application within each criteria and this has been used as a 'checklist' in the quest to achieve excellent research. The latter study also proposed the notion of 'member reflections' as opposed to 'member checking', an approach put into context by Smith & McGannon (2018). This has been applied by the initial return of transcripts to interviewees for reflection - an iterative process. Each participant was asked to comment on how their answers match up to the research questions and encouraged to reply regarding how to proceed for any further research. Finally, the notion of reliability was

rejected as difficult to achieve within a single case study using semi structured interview questions; seeking 'critical friends' (Smith & McGannon, 2018) was adopted instead.

The analysis of data

As previously mentioned this study aimed to use findings in order to develop theory. It is this notion that has developed lines of enquiry from the beginning, from the literature review through to the research questions. It was therefore logical to analyse the data using these theoretical propositions (Yin, 2012).

A preliminary interpretation of data began with a content analysis of the interview transcripts. Annotations within the text led towards an initial search for patterns, insights and concepts and the formation of categories from the respondents answers; a form of 'pattern matching' (Gray, 2018). These patterns would emerge from the reappearance of similar responses across the interviews some of which were known in advance from the research questions while others were unexpected (Stake, 1995). Occasionally we found 'single meaning in a single instance' (Stake, 1995; 78). Good research is an iterative process and to achieve this some initial themes emerged from the preliminary interpretation of data. This formed the basis of discussions within the research team before re-approaching the interviewees to engage in the member reflection process (Tracy, 2010). Finally, after a process of creative and reflective thinking 'analytical statements' (Massey, 1999) have been proposed to summarise this evaluative report.

Ethics

Ethical approval was granted from the university's ethics committee five months before the first interview. An initial letter of introduction and request for access to the school was followed by informed consent forms, risk assessments and a protection of data report. In addition the award of a small internal grant covered both travel and transcript costs.

The school selected for this single case study is one of the first ever Free schools in England, a desirable factor for the aim of this research to look at identity within an established institution. The school has attracted a degree of media attention since its opening and understandably is keen to retain anonymity with regard to this study. As a result the use of pseudonyms for the interviewees and referring vaguely to the school as 'located in the south east of England' has been key to gaining trust and respect. In order to protect and honour this agreement some of the finer details within the results and findings will again be deliberately kept vague.

The school is located in a culturally mixed urban area. It opened as part of a parental response towards a perceived lack of local educational options, keen to take advantage of the recent government Free schools initiative. The school is part of a small multi-academy trust and has received 'good' Ofsted reports. The on-site facilities for PESS are very limited and as a result both curricular and extra-curricular activities take place in local public parks and privately owned sports grounds, often involving the bussing of pupils back and fore. This can be both costly and time consuming although these issues are perhaps not too dissimilar from problems faced by other state schools within the locality.

The research aimed to interview a cross section of those who were responsible for the founding of the school, those currently involved in its management and an external view from

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a sports coach involved with teaching and learning. We were fortunate then to be able to interview parent governors, the Head teacher, the head of department, subject teachers and as mentioned, a sports coach. Interviews took place over a period of three days mainly on the school site and usually lasted for 40 minutes.

Research Questions

1. How do teachers'/managers believe the school should be represented through PE and School Sport?

2. How are identities learned?

3. What is the perception regarding how the Free school concept has allowed PE and School Sport to develop identity within the school?

Findings and Discussion

The Free school chosen for this study will be referred to as 'Riverside'. The interviewees have been given the following pseudonyms:

Jane – SENCO and PE teacher

Alan – Director of Sport

Helen – PE teacher

Marie – Community Sports Coach

Karen – Chair of Governors

Catherine – Head teacher

Katrina – Vice Chair of Governors with responsibility for PE

Each participant agreed to be interviewed initially for 40 minutes. The original transcripts were returned for member reflections requesting comments regarding authenticity and also

for personal thoughts on how the data reflected the original research questions. Only one interviewee replied to this message. As a result the research team decided that any further requests to conduct a second set of interviews would be inappropriate.

The findings have been analysed into five different thematic headings based upon patterns and categories of answers across all seven respondents.

1. *The importance of PESS in constructing a whole school identity.*

All of the research participants at Riverside were in agreement that PESS is important, a major contributor in reflecting the original principles which underpinned the founding of the school. It was this aspect of the discussions which respondents referred towards more so than any other issue within the interview questions:

> It's absolutely essential, really, and it is at the heart of the school and the identity of the school, that the sport is strong and the sport is good. (Catherine)

> The founders were very interested in that we wanted to have sport which was open to everybody, that was competitive …. (Karen)

Catherine as a relatively new Head teacher was keen to advocate sport as a means of personal challenge for the pupils. She has introduced 'lunchtime clubs for PE' and promoted extra-curricular sport heavily within the school's 'co-curricular' programme, a new term designed to emphasise that learning can also take place away from, and therefore coexist with, scheduled teaching hours. The teachers' interviewed also valued the importance of PESS,

unsurprisingly, with Jane noting that 'through sport is how we become well-known in terms of around the area.'

The desires and wishes of parents are a constant feature within these findings and it would appear that from the outset in a school founded upon such expectations, sport was an important feature. Catherine stated that there are parents in the school who could opt for private education but choose otherwise in sending their children to Riverside 'but they really want the sport.' Katrina reflected upon what these expectations might be in her declaration that 'achievements … are important to the school's identity.'

However, some teachers while acknowledging that Riverside does value its PESS programme, did suggest that there are other priorities in the school. Music was suggested by some respondents to be of greater importance, leading towards tensions regarding pupil availability for co-curricular activities, although the newly appointed Head of Sport was regarded by all to be addressing these issues in a professional, diplomatic manner. Within a school which emphasises the acquisition of knowledge throughout the curriculum one of the teachers was unsure where PESS may contribute, making the comment 'PE is PE' (Jane). The two governors interviewed believed that PE could make a contribution towards this expectation and one teacher acknowledged that such an ethos could be used to good effect particularly in GCSE lessons where she found the pupils to be 'inquisitive' when researching new topics.

Any tensions between how importantly PE teachers regard their subject and the value placed upon it by management are perhaps no different to those found in other schools (Williams & Williams, 2013). In Riverside any disparities are relatively minor, what is clear is that PESS

is perceived to be held in high regard by all. Management have even changed the timetable so that PE takes place in the morning, so allowing the children to arrive at school already changed in their kits before using transport to get to offsite facilities. At Riverside PESS is an important part of the whole school identity, very pleasing for a subject often perceived as having 'minority' status (Fitz, Halpin, & Power, 1997).

However, in a school which places such a strong emphasis upon its knowledge rich ethos perhaps more could be done to promote the value of PESS for those who won't achieve academically, a point made by Jane in her role as SENCO. A setting where this claim could be emphasised was perceived to be at Open days where Jane revealed a sense of discomfort in promoting support for SEND pupils within a school which promotes a high degree of academic achievement.

The marketization and promotion of schools is a fascinating context for revealing the character and nature of an institution. Finding the true value and worth of a subject within the curriculum and beyond is a subtle process perhaps best surmised by Goffman's concept of a 'front' (1959). In most schools this can be achieved initially in a number of settings, principally through a web site and an 'Open day.' At Riverside there is a perception that the web site (out of date at the time of asking according to the interviewees) conveys the strong message that sport is important and that certain activities traditionally associated with private schools feature more prominently than others. As a result there are powerful images of happy, smiling pupils in very smart PE kits. Goffman (ibid) would suggest that a 'front' such as this has been 'selected according to rank', possibly in this case by management who are happy to continue with this message. This contrasts with a perception given by teachers that on an Open day PESS is not presented as strongly as other aspects of the school in terms of room

allocation and opportunities for promotion. However, a counter argument to this, acknowledged by all respondents, is that it is very difficult to advertise a practical subject in a setting where the on-site facilities for sport are so limited.

2. *The importance of being a Free school.*

The notion that having increased autonomy and a greater sense of self-governance would lead towards more independence was the second most prevalent topic to emerge from the interviews. While it is apparent that such freedoms are valued by all and that the Head teacher is keen to develop a sense of trust with teachers there are 'checks and measures' in place to ensure accountability:

> ….. but it has to chime with what the governors and the trustees want.   (Catherine referring to changes in the school curriculum).

The much vaunted removal of local authority influence within the Free school context still, in this particular school, necessitates a level of control and scrutiny. The management team at Riverside would probably argue, quite legitimately, that they are still left with a process where they are able to enact change quickly and therefore more efficiently. Perhaps the best example of change within the PESS programme at Riverside is the initiative to introduce the teaching of First Aid within lessons, a finding that would counteract the conclusions of Wiborg et al (2018) who doubt whether Free schools do offer curriculum innovation.

It could be that the notion of 'freedom' within this context is a personal and subjective interpretation. Catherine as Head teacher is adamant that the school has 'autonomy' while

Katrina in her role as an experienced school governor at both Riverside and in other state schools stated:

So I don't feel we do have a lot more freedoms.

One of the key differences between Academies, Free schools and local authority schools is that the former type of school do not have to follow the national curriculum. At Riverside both the Head teacher and the Chair of Governors openly admitted that they lacked knowledge in this area while Katrina was able to declare that in PESS the intention was, '…. building on the national curriculum and taking the best of it.'

3. *Symbolic identities leading towards 'Impression Management.'*

The use of PE uniforms, web sites and e mails to parents in order to promote PESS was seen to be of greater importance for the teachers than for the management at Riverside. This included the provision of staff sports kit, an issue of importance for Alan who detected a lack of management support within this area.

Pupil PE kits at Riverside are undeniably smart, the school web site uses this in a prominent manner to portray images of happy, active children. The PE teachers acknowledge this as part of the school identity and believe that it can transfer to other aspects of the school as well:

…. then that's going to have an impact on uniform around the school. (Helen)

Again, meeting parental expectations was cited as being one of the reasons for this; smart uniforms are a prerequisite for many prospective Free school parents, 'embedding an

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impression of quality' (Morris, 2016; p.141). Enforcing high standards of appearance and full participation within PESS was given high priority through a 'fit for school, fit for PE' policy whereby any notes handed in claiming a reason to be excused were often discarded - a spare set of kit was always available.

Alan as a recently appointed Director of Sport was keen to promote what was happening in both curricular and co-curricular activities. Keeping parents informed in particular was seen to be key:

It's about portraying that we are organised and we're taking it seriously. (Alan)

This is manifest in newly constructed television monitors located around the school which the Director of Sport has control over, providing updates on club activities and inter school sports results. Regular e mails in the form of news bulletins are sent to parents, a positive move acknowledged by both the latter and management.

The use of such symbolic identities as PE uniforms (pupil and staff) and monitors around the school is crucial in understanding the impression that is trying to be made. The concept of 'impression management' is relevant and is explained by Bolino et al (2008) as how an actor tries to create, maintain or otherwise alter an image held by a target audience. It is applicable in this instance in that the 'target audience' could be interpreted as the parents, prominent actors within the life of the school. Alan in his Director of Sport role feels the need to convey the impression that his department use external sporting facilities as a result of limited opportunities on the school site:

…. showing potential and current parents that we're taking sport seriously, and we are going offsite and using all these facilities that are available locally.

When asked why and how creating this impression is so important Alan stated that the recent 'reputation' of the department had not been good and part of his role was to show parents how PESS was changing, often through events such as Sports Day and Sports Presentation Evenings. One of the reasons for engaging in this form of impression management was due to a poor set of GCSE PE results. It is almost as if an identity has been learned through 'failure' or, more appropriately, 'previous shortcomings.'

Goffman's notion of an 'idealised impression' has some relevance here. A 'front' has been created in the form of web site images, smart kits and news updates that could conceal what was really happening, certain facts are accentuated while others are concealed. However, when asked whether there was a discrepancy between image and reality the teachers, unsurprisingly said that this was not the case. Furthermore, is this form of promotion for PESS really anything different from that used in similar contexts by other institutions as part of the marketisation of schools?

4. *The importance of the market in creating identity.*

Helen encapsulated the importance of this particular responsibility for teachers by describing it as an 'expected expectation.' All interviewees perceived the 'market' to be defined as firstly, attracting parents to send their children to the school and secondly, satisfying them while their children are at the school. In a context where the school was founded by the local community the role of the parents is key:

... So the parental influence is really strong and hugely positive …

(Catherine)

They quite like knowing what's going on. (Helen)

The perceived need to inform the parents regarding PESS activities at Riverside has already been documented. Perhaps the best example of a parental 'desire' (Karen felt that using the term 'influence' was inappropriate) is the request made to offer swimming as part of the PESS programme. This has been acted upon by approaching a local private school who have graciously allowed Riverside to use their pool for free once a week within a designated lunchtime slot.

Some teachers were a little wary of both parental expectations and parental involvement:

This school is run by parents. If the parents want something they'll make it known and it will happen ….. who are very well connected … (Alan)

However, Helen was keen to emphasise the role played by the Parent Teacher Association in supporting PESS particularly key events such as Sports Day and Presentation Evenings.

The Head teacher and governors interviewed in this study revealed the pressures they felt when looking at what parents wanted from the school's PESS programme:

…. I don't think we've fulfilled parents expectations …. parental expectations are quite, very unrealistic, based on how much money it costs to run a PE department. (Karen)

…. I wonder if there's a kind of a mild aura of disappointment that we would love to be providing what the independent schools are providing for their kids, facilities wise…. and I think that we haven't won very much which sounds awful. (Catherine)

Perhaps the basis of these parental expectations go back to when the school was founded and promoted, using Karen's descriptor, as a 'pseudo-independent school.' In those early days the school's PESS programme focused on one sport in particular, an activity associated with private schools leading to the employment of specialists in that area of expertise. The Riverside teams were very successful often competing with and beating independent schools but to the detriment of other sports. After the key staff responsible had left the school it became apparent that a more inclusive approach was necessary and all interview respondents appear to be comfortable with the present situation where more sports are on offer both within and beyond the curriculum.

One of the concerns with the early emphasis on one sport which had private school connotations, was the fact that it may exclude on the basis of social class. The middle class children were already felt to be catered for by their out of school involvement in this particular sport and that playing the same at school was already replicating what they were getting elsewhere. Another issue was the potential exclusion of other pupils from a programme where too much of the teachers' time was devoted to the one activity. These findings reinforce in part similar suggestions put forward by other Free schools research

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which purports a 'middle class curriculum', sometimes in the form of teaching Latin (Green, Allen, & Jenkins, 2015). However, it is important to emphasise how the PESS programme at Riverside has changed from a narrow focus on prestigious team sports to a broader range of activities that endeavour to appeal to all children regardless of their background. Teachers and management appear to be happy with these changes.

Changes in PESS identity at Riverside have happened over a short period of time and confirm previous research undertaken regarding the importance of marketisation in Free schools (Lunnebland, Odenbring, & Hellman, 2017). The changes tended to coincide with the appointment of a new Director of Sport, often reflecting not only the sporting interest of the new incumbent but also personal philosophies. However, parental expectations constantly appear as an underlying issue. Using evidence provided by Karen in the form of a parental survey it is possible to suggest that parents in this instance have changed their views in line with teachers and management in working towards a more inclusive PESS programme.

Remembering that the school was founded by parents, the whole notion of parental expectations is an interesting influence at Riverside. Previous comments from interviewees would suggest that management really value parental support (parents contribute financially to the co-curricular programme) and in return they perhaps consciously or sub consciously recognise that expectations then become an accepted part of the provider – consumer relationship. In contrast teachers appear to be a little wary of this context although these concerns may not be different to those felt by teachers in other institutions. Understanding how parents have accepted PESS changes from an early emphasis on a narrow, elite based programme to a more inclusive approach could be explained by Goffman's dramaturgical analogies. The 'performance' by the school in terms of web sites, open evenings, bulletins

and events has led to an interaction with the 'audience' (parents). Following parental feedback PESS identity has changed albeit after the appointment of a new Director of Sport. The influence of the 'props' (newsletters and so on) to change the 'performance' has been successful.

5. *Drivers for change.*

This particular theme was the least prevalent within interviewee discussions. All respondents perceived that any changes to Riverside's identity were often a product of the time factors involved in opening a new school. Starting a school with a PESS programme based on a prestigious team sport alongside the introduction of both GCSE and A level exam courses was described by Karen as,

…. too much too soon. Absolutely. Not a shadow of doubt.

Goffman refers to a 'service' being judged by its 'speed and quality' and how through impression management, the latter can be concealed but not the former. The parallels here are that the initial PESS programme had perhaps been implemented too hastily leading to concerns over quality, eventually revealed (and judged) by some disappointing exam results.

Another driver for change identified by interviewees was the notion of 'seeking help' from appropriate sources, again a time resource implication. Examples included waiting for an opportune moment to ask a local private school if Riverside could use their swimming pool, a move which Catherine felt was justified due to the latter's charitable status. Allowing the Rugby Football Union's Community Programme to become involved with extra-curricular activities was also seen by all to be a successful move;

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They're like coaching us how to coach rugby. (Helen)

Katrina in her role as Governor responsible for PESS was keen to direct the newly appointed Director of Sport towards the Youth Sport Trust (YST) for help although the early experiences of the school had left her wary of, '… not trying to do too much.' These are interesting findings which confirm research undertaken by Wiborg et al (2018) who found that Free schools were not only dependent upon seeking help but believed that it was almost their right to receive it.

Conclusions

These are best expressed most vividly and succinctly within the following three quotes taken from the responses of three interviewees.

1. *'It's changed a lot [at Riverside] and I think they're trying to find the best way of doing it.'*

This observation made by Marie in her role as a community sports coach employed by the school captures not only the rate of change within the PESS programme at Riverside but also the reasons for it. Offering both GCSE and A level PE alongside an emphasis upon prestigious team sports led to both success and failure (some of the exam courses were eventually ended), leaving an overall feeling that a more inclusive programme was the answer. A high turnover of PE staff did not help. However, this has been replaced with a programme offering more activities at both curriculum and co-curricular level, overseen by a relatively new Director of Sport whose sporting philosophy resonates with management and

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parents. In terms of identity, PESS has changed from a 'pseudo-independent school' (Karen) approach based upon elite competition to one more akin with the aims and values of a typical state school.

These changes concur with the notion that in a post-modern society identities change due to a fast changing world (Giddens, 1990; Hall, 1989) particularly in education where the performative demands placed upon schools need to be met in order to ensure survival. However, it is possible to suggest that at Riverside there are still elements of 'traditionalism' (Fitz, Halpin, & Power, 1997) in terms of uniforms (PE kits) and the emphasis upon a 'knowledge rich' curriculum which would support Hall's notion of the 'hybrid' character of identity. It's as though the reflexive approach adopted by the school has worked in terms of taking the best from past and present coupled with good practice from all types of schools. The evidence for this could lie within some outstanding GCSE results achieved later in the year that the research was undertaken. To what extent the ideology of Free school governance has contributed towards these successes remains unknown although it is apparent that respondents are appreciative of the freedoms granted within this status.

2. *'It's about portraying that we are organised and we're taking it seriously'. (Alan)*

Goffman's concept of impression management is applicable to the development of the PESS programme at Riverside. Any shortcomings in the relatively recent past (disappointing exam results in particular) have had to be managed by a process of improved communication and the staging of events. Sending regularly updated e mails to parents, placing TV monitors around the school and highlighting sports days and presentation evenings, are part of a product designed to create an impression that PESS at Riverside is improving. This would appear to be a process that is more design than default and new appointments at middle

management and senior management level have worked well together to achieve this. Goffman's dramaturgical metaphors emphasise the notion of a 'performance' and in this instance working together as a team comes to the fore. The performance has been 'idealised' and is compatible with the norms and values of the school's culture (Manning, 1992); a 'knowledge rich' setting enhanced by the 'symbolic identity' of a smart PE kit, upheld by a robust uniform policy.

3. 'They quite like knowing what's going on.' (Helen)

Goffman's suggestion that some aspects of a performance are concealed so that an 'audience' is kept at a distance does not appear to apply to the PESS programme at Riverside. The 'audience' in the form of the parents are regularly informed regarding co-curricular activities, inter school sports results and upcoming events. Riverside could well be unique in that it is a new school founded by parents who are asked to make a regular financial contribution towards extra-curricular activities, therefore there is an expectation that they should be told what's going on.

Forging new identities for the PESS programme at Riverside are important. In the Free school context many new schools opening in unfamiliar surroundings rely upon impressions created by smart kits and uniforms to compensate for limited facilities and limited reputations (Morris, 2016). At Riverside there appears to be a recognition that parents would like more, particularly in the form of new onsite sports facilities. Consequently, the school manage this by listening carefully, as shown by the introduction of swimming to the PESS programme. This finding appears to be an answer to Wiborg et al's (2018) contention that the full extent and impact of parental expectations in Free schools may be unknown; at Riverside parental requests are acted upon, with positive outcomes when realistically possible.

Final thoughts. Any shortcomings within this research are acknowledged by the recognition that a second set of interviews would have been necessary to complete the reflexive, iterative process. A good example of this was the initial finding that Riverside opened, by the admittance of one of the governors, based upon the independent school model, illustrated within PESS by an emphasis upon prestigious team based activities. As Free schools were introduced with the rhetoric of improving social mobility (Gove, 2011), it would have been pertinent to ask participants their thoughts, particularly whether sporting fixtures against independent schools were designed as part of that process.

It is apparent, however, that conducting a single case study within a Free school such as Riverside has revealed the struggles and difficulties in starting a PESS programme with limited resources in a new school. All of the research participants were able to identify that providing a full complement of exam courses alongside an ambitious extra-curricular programme was attempting too much. Any disappointments, particularly in the former context, led to periods of instability not helped by changes in staffing.

Identities, although hardly innovative (Wiborg et al, 2018), have been learned at Riverside Free school although who has learned from who, whether that be teachers, parents or management, is difficult to conclude. Changing towards a more inclusive PESS programme with the gradual reintroduction of exam courses, has been addressed to create the impression to parents that the department is organised and efficient. As Goffman would state, an 'idealised performance' has led to the successful management of the 'audience'.

Disclosure statement

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No potential conflict of interest.

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