TEACHERS’ ATTITUDES TOWARDS TEACHING OF
PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN THE JUNIOR YEARS OF
PRIMARY EDUCATION

BY

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ABSTRACT

The following research study focuses on Primary class teachers’ attitudes towards teaching of Physical Education. The purpose is to compare and contrast findings with other related literature. The aim of the study is to identify aspects which might be affecting class teachers’ attitudes towards conducting Physical Education. Data was gathered through interviews with Primary class teachers teaching Years 4, 5 and 6. Finding from this study will be analysed and discussed as well as compared and contrasted with findings of a published study carried out by the National Audit Office (NAO, 2010). Findings show that respondents who consider themselves as physically active persons seem to be more dedicated and motivated to carry out Physical Education lessons. However, it was also concluded that the time in which students are physically active during school hours is much less than that recommended by the Department for Curriculum Management and eLearning. Reasons given by class teachers included that they are pressured to prioritise other academic material first. In addition, class teachers feel uncomfortable and insecure about teaching Physical Education.

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PHYSICAL EDUCATION, JUNIOR YEARS, ATTITUDES, TEACHING OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION, TIME MANAGEMENT
TEACHERS’ ATTITUDES TOWARDS TEACHING OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN THE JUNIOR YEARS OF PRIMARY EDUCATION

September 2013

I declare that this dissertation is my own authentic work

____________________________
Alison Schembri
Dedications

I dedicate this dissertation to my beloved father, Leonard Schembri, who always worked hard throughout his life, to make mine a success.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my mother Alessia and my brother Jason who always made sure to spice up my days while working on this dissertation.
I would like to express my deepest appreciation towards my supervisor, Mr. Andrew Darmanin, for being patient, supportive and understanding. I am very grateful for his encouragement and advice provided.

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<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NAO</td>
<td>National Audit Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMeLD</td>
<td>Curriculum Management and eLearning Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NVPIE</td>
<td>Nevada Partnership for Inclusive Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organisation</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>IOM</td>
<td>Institute of Medicine</td>
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<tr>
<td>DfE</td>
<td>Department of Education</td>
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<td>DCMS</td>
<td>Department of Culture, Media and Sport</td>
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION
1.1 Introduction

During my Primary schooling I remember that we rarely had any Physical Education lessons and when we did have, students chosen to take part in the sports day were always given first preference to participate during the lesson. When I was in Secondary school I finally started experiencing constant Physical Education lessons. Thanks to physical activities organised during breaks, I got myself involved in various sports especially gymnastics. Over time, since I was always guiding younger peers to improve their gymnastics skills at school, I got interested in teaching and coaching students. This directed me to complete a coaching course and work with the Maltese Sport Council which in turn directed me to read a Bachelor of Education with Primary Education course at the University of Malta. Through this personal experience I can say that sports can really shape both your body and your mind.

From my personal experience of coaching and teaching I very often meet students who clearly show that they require more development in their motor skills. This guided me to read reports and studies published such as the Performance Audit published by the National Audit Office (NAO) in 2010, which states that “56 per cent of interviewed parents who have children in Primary Schools and 44 per cent of those with children in Secondary Schools reported that their children were not involved in physical activities or sport outside school hours” (p. 11). Therefore I questioned myself about Physical Education during school hours which in turn resulted in the carrying out of this study.

The International Charter of Physical Education and Sport states that physical and intellectual skills should be developed through Physical Education provided by the educational system as well as through social life (UNESCO, 1978). This puts responsibility on educators' shoulders. Similarly, the National Curriculum Framework published in 2011 states that its “underlying philosophy has been the holistic development of all learners, by encouraging and supporting the professional decisions of educators in schools and thus providing quality education with a long-term vision” (p. 14). Therefore Physical Education needs
to be considered as important as other subjects by teachers and likewise needs time for preparation and lesson planning.

The proposed study is divided in five chapters.

Chapter 2 highlights literature found to be related to diverse areas related to the research question. The focus was mainly on:

- The Maltese educational system
- Inclusion and holistic development
- Sport and values
- Play and physical activity
- Physical Education as part of the Curriculum
- The class teacher and Physical Education

The third chapter explains methodology used for the process of data collection.

Chapter 4, Findings and Analysis, binds data gathered from this study to related researched literature as findings are discussed and analysed.

Following is the fifth chapter which provides recommendations and conclusions drawn from this study.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1 The Educational System in Malta

In Malta, school is obligatory from the age of five up to sixteen. There are ten State colleges in Malta, one of which is in Gozo. In Malta all children have the right for education and State schools are free of charge as well as inclusive. Gender, beliefs, ethnicity, social and financial differences should in no way interfere with education. A clear example of this is the State Primary school of St. Paul’s Bay where, as listed on the school website (n.d.), from a total population of around eight hundred students, eighty are spread across twenty different nationalities, mostly European and North African.

The recent Educational System Reform brought about a change in assessment methods which aims at a smoother transition from Primary to Secondary schooling. The main focus of the Junior Lyceum Examination was more on filtering the ‘failing’ students out of the system. The last Junior Lyceum Examination was held in 2010, ending the previous system. It was replaced by a National Test which introduced oral exams amongst other forms of assessment. Whereas, in the previous system, students were labelled and exiled to particular schools, students are now supposedly facing a more lenient situation as they are placed in mixed ability classes.

The Maltese Educational System strives to achieve holistic development by linking and connecting learning experiences. As suggested by the Curriculum Management and eLearning Department (CMeLD) in the PE Curriculum (2013), “each of the areas in the PE curriculum needs to enrich the experience of each student as a multilateral education is presented” (p.2).

Teachers need to know their students and understand their students’ knowledge and ways of learning so that they can plan and structure their teaching and learning experiences in a beneficial way for each and every child.
Students already have a baggage of knowledge and experiences which the teacher should take advantage of and use to further help the students construct new knowledge.

2.2 Inclusion and Holistic Development

A few years back students’ achievements were the main focus when speaking of education. ‘Active participation’, ‘inclusion’, and ‘holistic development’ were terms to be used verbally or on paper but unfortunately were rarely applied and put into practice.

The recent change in method of assessment puts further light on the wide spectrum of students’ diverse educational needs and therefore puts more responsibility on teachers who need to cater for this diversity to ensure holistic development. Assessment of actively participating students is one way of catering for inclusion and holistic development.

Black and Wiliam (1998, p. 2) explain that “assessment refers to all those activities undertaken by teachers and by their students in assessing themselves, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged”.

By modifying teaching and learning experiences all students can progress their learning at their own pace and in their own way of understanding. “Activities with multiple entry points that are open to varying interests and backgrounds-and that are worth revisiting or exploring from various angles-facilitate children’s finding their own “way in” and learning from others’ interests and knowledge” (Rogoff, Turkanis and Barlett, 2001, p. 45)
Formative Assessment which is also referred to as Assessment for Learning “is the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there” (Assessment Reform Group, 2002).

Therefore, assessment and feedback is just the initial stage of the process of improving both teaching and learning. Assessment provides the means for both teachers and learners to utilize the most appropriate approach to advance to the next level of knowledge and education. From there, the teacher and the student need to formulate the learning intentions and success criteria so as to advance to the next level of learning.

Considering inclusion as a ‘one size fits all’ scenario, it is now-a-days considered as an assurance of failure. The policy ‘For All Children to Succeed’ seeks to integrate all the students into the mainstream and this will “further consolidate the principle of inclusion” (Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment, 2005, p.44).

In a more plausible light, the Nevada Partnership for Inclusive Education (NVPIE, n.d.) defines Inclusive Education as “an effort to make sure that diverse learners – those with disabilities, different languages and cultures, different homes and family lives, different interests and ways of learning – are exposed to teaching strategies that reach them as individual learners”

This definition implies that teachers are to seek variation in their teaching styles, expose students to different teaching and learning strategies, and hence facilitate students’ development to their full potential. Such development can be achieved through active participation and learning through different domains.
2.3 Sport and Values

Sport is a potential tool to the child’s development and learning. It entails values such as respect and cooperation, improves health and is significant for development of local contribution. Sport has that cohesive effect of bringing communities together and putting aside cultural or ethnic differences.

Being physically active noticeably has physical benefits, providing active participants with the ability of living healthy lives, improving life expectancy and reducing the probabilities of major and common diseases such as those of heart and lungs. Other advantages are psychosocial benefits such as social integration and interaction, learning coping mechanisms, improving concentration, as well as diminishing the risks of psychological problems such as depression. In abstract, sport is a means of developing purposeful skills and maintaining good health.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion describes health as “a resource for everyday life...a positive concept emphasising social and personal resources, as well as physical capacities” (WHO, 1986). Sport and Physical Education should not only be seen as a discipline or an academic subject – it is a whole baggage of knowledge and experience which will have an impact on the individual for life.

The report of the United Nations (UN) Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace 2003 states that, “Outside the classroom, sport is a “school for life”, teaching basic values and life skills important for holistic development” (UN Inter-Agency Task Force, 2003, p. 8). Skills learnt through play, sport and Physical Education are essential for holistic development and social interaction – evidently, such experiences equip the child for future life experiences which may not always be related to sport or physical activity. The UN Inter-Agency Task Force lists the following as skills and values learnt through sport: cooperation communication; respect for the rules; problem-
solving; understanding; connection with others; leadership; respect for others; value of effort; how to win; how to lose; how to manage competition; fair play; sharing; self-esteem; trust; honesty; self-respect; tolerance; resilience; teamwork; discipline; confidence (UN Inter-Agency Task Force, 2003, p. 8).

Whereas games have rules and need to be followed, the above mentioned values are not seen written anywhere as a list – they automatically arise when individuals practise sport and eventually these values will become intrinsically instilled in the active participants. This process initially starts at a very early age in an individual through play.

2.4 Play, physical activity and child development

Play is a child’s means of living and understanding life. It is often described as a child’s work which is not obligatory and it might not always be enjoyable. It is important as it engages the child in planning and thinking, hence making decisions and maybe even alterations if struck by a stimulus.

According to Bruce (2001), play has twelve features which are beneficial to the child’s growth and development. These are using first-hand experiences, making up rules, making props, choosing to play, rehearsing the future, pretending, playing alone, playing together, having a personal agenda, being deeply involved, trying out recent learning, co-ordinating ideas, feeling and relationships for free flow play.

Even if at a very young age, from the above mentioned list of features, one can see that play has a very integral part in child development and growth. Play contributes in a beneficial way on diverse grounds as regards to children’s development, such as, personal health and psychological well-being, physical,
social and emotional development, intellectual and cognitive development, language development. Over all it contributes to the process of becoming adults.

Eventually as the child grows and starts school, the child experiences a different kind of play, that is guided, structured and/or semi-structured games with rules and which may also target communication skills and emotional and social interactions. Play is now being taken advantage of to also serve as an educational tool. Hence the importance of having a sustainable, planned framework with adequate equipment, environment and manpower to make use of the full potential of such mean.

In a school scenario, Physical Education is the subject which mostly assimilates with play. “Increased participation in sport and other forms of physical activity are also thought to lead to enhancement of cognitive functioning (information processing), memory, concentration, behaviour and academic achievement for children” (Martin, 2010, p. 2).

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) Consultation Documents published by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment (2011) proclaim that Physical Education and sports help develop social and emotional intelligences while at the same time learning skills and working in teams, where students experience leadership and competitiveness. All of this helps the children to value more the importance of physical well-being which leads to an optimistic and active approach to life (Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment, 2011).

This puts a load of responsibilities on teachers’ shoulders as, if they choose to diminish or refrain from teaching Physical Education they are not only hindering students’ development of motor skills but also disregarding
emotional maturity and social interaction. This further stresses the need for the school curriculum to emphasise the importance of Physical Education.

### 2.5 Physical Education as part of the School Curriculum

According to the Institute of Medicine (IOM), “basic cognitive functions related to attention and memory facilitate learning and these functions are enhanced by physical activity and higher aerobic fitness” (IOM, 2013, p. 129). As further reported by the UN Inter-Agency Task Force (2003), when providing opportunities of recreation, play and sport, the attendance and overall achievement of students actually increases.

Physical Education provides awareness of the body, healthy living and prevention of diseases as well as awareness of and respect for the environment and other people. It helps building bonds and relations with individuals and their experiences, and eventually leads to social capital. An example of this would be the organisation of traditional games/sport which very often requires low cost implements and facilities. The Maltese Sport Council in collaboration with the Sport Promotion Unit also thought of developing a programme called ‘Artisport’ which is implemented during school hours in Government schools. This programme involves the playing of traditional games and maintaining a live Maltese culture and tradition. Such games have rich historical and social aspects which help students relate to past times and welcome other children coming from different cultures more easily. Over time, quite a number of bodies emphasised the importance of promoting sport and Physical Education – hoping that this will eventually lead to having a society with a healthier, more active and sociable lifestyle.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which entered into force in 1990 represents sport as a human right. A child’s right to play is endorsed in article
of the Convention which identifies “the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child”. Furthermore, this article continues to state that States need to “encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic recreational and leisure activity” (UNICEF, 1990).

In the local setting, the Maltese Physical Education Curriculum for the Primary Years, as updated in April 2013 aims to enhance physical literacy, by engaging students in physical activity and encourage them to implement it as part of their lifestyle while also. Moreover it suggests that educators should aim to get students aware of how to improve their performance. In order to become more proficient in knowledge, skills and attitudes, the Physical Education curriculum suggests that students should be engaged in a unit for at least four weeks. Whereas in the early years the curriculum suggests that students should experience games and fun activities, in the junior years it is highlighted that it is more prominent to learn how to perform specific movement skills since this is the most apt opportunity to acquire skills.

In 2010, NAO published a study stating that while the CMELD recommends that children should at least have four thirty-minute weekly sessions of Physical Education, it was found out that there is a high risk that children are not actually having these sessions.

In an unpublished dissertation at the University of Malta, Curmi (1999) carried out a study similar to this one named ‘The Attitudes of Teachers and Parents towards the Teaching of Physical Education at Primary Level’ it was concluded that “although both teachers and parents consider Physical Education as important as the core subjects, they still are happy with a twice weekly lesson” (Curmi, 1999, p. 31). Furthermore, she had also revealed that “when asked who should teach Physical Education in the Primary schools, all teachers and parents
in different sectors approved a specialised Physical Education teacher attached to the school” (Curmi, 1999, p. 34).

The study (NAO, 2010) reveals that there is a significant amount of pressure on children, teachers, parents and school management to give precedence to examined subjects. Furthermore, as regards to facilities and equipment the study showed that investment in proper equipment, indoor and outdoor facilities is needed so that apposite Physical Education sessions can be carried out.

The NCF (2011) also refers to the NAO (2010) study and speaks of aiming to develop the full potential of learners as life-long learners by developing personal and social skills. When further commenting on this aim, the NCF (2011) uses phrases such as, ‘become risk takers’; ‘cope with new challenges’; ‘develop respect and value for each other’; ‘developing a sense of community and resolving conflict’ – all of which can be achieved through sport. Physical Education goes far more in depth then teaching games with sets of rules. It is also about developing fine and gross motor skills while also nourishing the social development of the child.

The NCF (2011) does actually refer specifically to Health Education where it is said that learners should acquire knowledge, attitudes and skills which encourage and improve physical, emotional, psychological and social aspects, not only in schools but for everyday life.

2.6 The Class Teacher and Physical Education

The Bachelor of Education (Honours) with Primary Education course which I read during the years 2008 till 2012 included only two study-units concerning Physical Education. One of the study-units consisted mainly in preparing and
conducting Physical Education lessons while in the other we were expected to prepare and organise a sports day in a school. In both study-units we had hands-on experiences which provided us with teaching-learning experiences, as well as facing difficulties encountered when conducting Physical Education lessons. Taken from a potential future Primary class teacher’s point of view, it would have been much appreciated if more study-units related to Physical Education were part of the course.

2.6.1 Class Teachers’ Attitudes

According to Bryant, Lance, Curtner-Smith and Matthew (2009) students’ learning is influenced, to a certain degree, by the teacher’s self-presentation and perceived competence in the subject. If the teacher makes the lesson enjoyable and shows self-motivation and determination it is more likely that the students will feel more motivated and find the lesson more enjoyable.

Lavin’s (2007) notion of ‘Teaching for Creativity’ which “focuses on the children’s creative powers” (Lavin, 2007, p. 20) encourages students to be more involved to solve game situations instead of having the teacher giving answers or presenting the students with repetitive situations. The stimulation of student participation is important, as when teaching for creativity, game situations are an opportunity to also develop the creative potential of students.

However, as suggested by Mawer (1995, p. 110), teachers should focus on the importance of “having positive and realistic expectations of pupils and setting clear and realistic targets”. Students are more willing to participate when they have clear goals and know that they have the teacher’s belief of their success. Martinek’s study (as cited in Mawer, 1995) demonstrates that when teachers have low expectancies from their students, it is more likely that students reveal signs of helplessness. Furthermore, in another study by Martinek (as cited in Mawer, 1995) it was proved that when teachers lessen the importance given to
students’ efforts may lead to lack of interest and avoidance of participation by the students. Mawer (1995) suggests that teachers should “make a special effort to show interest and sympathy in the efforts of low achievers by accepting the pupil’s contribution” (Mawer, 1995, p. 111). Adequate, positive and suitable communication is a key element in teaching.

2.6.2 Student-Teacher Relationship

“Good communication accelerates learning, and builds positive self-esteem whilst poor communication can obviously act in the opposite way” (Ward, 2004, p. 40). Ward (2004) further suggests that when communicating it is best to use positive phrases, such as, “would like to” instead of negative ones, such as, “don’t” as these stimulate motivation and minimize resistance. The student-teacher relationship should be one of straightforwardness and effortlessness. The more the teacher will try to be authoritarian, the fewer students will be willing to participate and learn during lessons.

One way of encouraging and further motivate the students is to provide “positive feedback because when communicating negative expectations students can foster a feeling of helplessness over a period of time” (Mawer, 1995). As further suggested by Mawer (1995), teachers should avoid comparing students’ abilities as this does not promote a positive learning situation.

2.6.3 Quality Teaching

According to Gilliver (2003), teachers can have a positive impact on their students if they show that they are experts in the field and show enthusiasm when teaching the subject. By believing in students, providing feedback on progress, and coming up with new ideas for lessons, teachers can really make a difference in students’ motivation for participation and learning (Gilliver, 2003).
In the United Kingdom, the Department of Education (DfE) and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), (as cited in Qualifications and Curriculum Authority PE team and Penney, 2003, p.7), report that students “show little or no enjoyment or desire to take part in physical activities” when the lesson is not of a high quality. It is unlikely that students “sit on the sidelines and avoid getting involved in any capacity” if there is an interesting lesson going on with elements of fun and enthusiasm (DfE and DCMS as cited in Qualifications and Curriculum Authority PE team and Penney, 2003, p.7).

Along with other literature, this proves that in order for the class teacher to plan quality Physical Education lessons, the class teacher has to be prepared to teach Physical Education from quite a number of aspects, that is, knowledgeably, cognitively, physically and emotionally.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY
3.1 Introduction

In order to grasp a better understanding of teachers’ attitudes towards teaching of Physical Education, I chose to study the junior years’ teachers themselves. In my research I talked to a number of Primary teachers and explored their views about their teaching of Physical Education as class teachers. Generally it is taken for granted that Primary class teachers are fully equipped as regards to knowledge and self-confidence, to teach Physical Education. Hence this study is seeking to analyse comments and views of Primary class teachers with respect to such issues.

3.2 Method of Data Collection

A qualitative approach was used to best address the aims of this study. I find it is more fitting that when researching about experiences, feelings and beliefs, a qualitative research is more suitable than quantitative methodology. Moreover, since qualitative methodology provides a significant amount of detail as opposed to quantitative methodology, it is usually believed that it provides profound and loaded information. In fact, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2005) suggest that when one wants to gather comparable data, it is best to use a quantitative method of research whereas if one requires a collection of data which is unique and involves personalised information, one should direct the research method towards a qualitative one. While keeping in mind the aims of this study, a number of research methods were considered – I decided it was best to conduct structured interviews. This methodology provided me data which is still personalised but to a certain extent also comparable.

3.2.1 The Interview

The research interview “may be used as the principal means of gathering information having direct bearing on the research objectives” (Cohen, et al., 2005, p. 268). It moves away from seeing information gathered as disconnected
from individuals providing it and shifts towards “regarding knowledge as generated between humans, often through conversations” (Kvale, 1996 as cited in Cohen, et. al, 2005, p. 267).

Interviews carried out in this study mainly target five areas which help me compare, contrast and highlight important points regarding teachers’ attitudes towards teaching of Physical Education. These areas consist of personal experiences of Physical Education and sport, Physical Education lessons as conducted by class teachers, the importance of Physical Education as viewed by class teachers, teachers’ personal feelings and teachers’ training.

3.2.2 Interview Questions

Questions used during the interview were prepared beforehand and the same exact, sequenced questions were used with all the participants. This makes the interview a structured and standardised one (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). Questions were set in a particular sequence on purpose so that the participant first relates to own past and present experiences of sport participation and then moves on to current attitudes towards teaching of Physical Education as a teacher. A mix of close ended, dichotomous and open ended questions was used during the interview so as to obtain data which can be compared but is also still in depth, personalised and loaded with information.

3.2.3 Tools used for Data Collection

Participants taking the interview were asked the previously prepared structured questions. As advised by Khan (2008) an audio recording was used since “it is not possible to copy all that is said at conversational speed” (Khan, 2008, p. 109). Furthermore Khan (2008) suggests that the interviewer should be in a neutral position, remains calm and quiet and avoids getting surprised or
emotional to a likely or an unlikely response. As much as possible, these suggestions were followed when conducting the interviews.

### 3.3 Piloting the Interviews

Pilot studies can be “time-consuming, frustrating, and fraught with unanticipated problems, but it is better to deal with them before investing a great deal of time, money and effort in the full study” (Mason and Zuercher, 1995). Keeping such a quote in mind, I decided to carry out a pilot study, mostly to improve the validity of my interview and indentify improvements I can make in my interview questions and their sequencing.

Out of a twenty-four interviews which were to be carried out for the actual study, I decided that one-fourth of that number, hence, six, would be enough for a valid and suitable pilot study. The original questions used for the pilot interviews (see Appendix 1) were not really changed as regards to wording but they helped me learn that more questions were needed to be asked in order to avoid assumptions. Furthermore, I learnt that very often respondents usually relate to their past experiences to provide answers and therefore I realised that it was paramount to also ask about their own past and present, personal experiences.

Peat, Williams and Xuan (2002) suggest that when piloting a study the researcher should ask the participants for feedback to identify vagueness and difficult questions. When I did so, all of the respondents answered that there were not difficult questions and found themselves very comfortable answering all of the questions. However, three out of six of the pilot respondents said that they would have liked to mention past experiences and how they are related to their present teaching. Hence, this confirmed that I definitely had to include a
couple of questions about personal experience of Physical Education in the past and present physical activity.

As further suggested by Pete et al. (2002), I recorded the time taken to complete the interview and realised that I would not go overboard if I add two or three more questions. The average time of the pilot interviews was of four and a half minutes whereas the average time of the modified interview which was used for the actual study (see Appendix 2) is of seven minutes and forty-five seconds. I found this to be a very practical since I managed to collect the information needed without bothering much the participants with lengthy meetings and asking about irrelevant experiences and/or facts.

3.4 Identifying the Sample

As suggested by the Bachelor of Education (Honours) Dissertation Committee in the Dissertations Guidebook (2010), the number of interviews should be between fifteen and twenty-five. I chose to do twenty-five interviews with teachers teaching the Junior Years in Government State Schools. However towards the end of the process of data collection one participant decided to cancel the interview due to personal reasons. Hence, twenty-four interviews were carried out in all. The number of interviews, given that it is nearly the maximum of what is suggested, provides a significantly large coverage of teachers teaching in different regions in Malta.

Primary class teachers to be interviewed as part of my research were contacted personally as I went to Government State Schools which are located in different regions in Malta and kindly asked the Head master/mistress if I could set up an appointment teachers teaching Junior Years in that school.
The sample of teachers who participated in this research totals to twenty four; seven Year 4 teachers, nine Year 5 teachers and eight Year 6 teachers. Participants who gave contribution to this research were ensured that they will in no way be identifiable. Hence I cannot mention participating schools in particular since in some schools there is only one teacher per year group and hence could then be identifiable. However, it is important to note that participating schools were randomly chosen from different regions in Malta including the northern, south-eastern, central and south-western regions.

Participants had to be Primary class teachers who teach either a Year 4 or a Year 5 or a Year 6 class in a Government State School. Since contributors all teach in State Primary Schools they all teach mixed ability classes of both male and female students.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Subsequent to the handing in of my proposal for this dissertation to the Education Directorate I was informed that there was no need to fill in a Research Ethics Proposal Form (see Appendix 3), since my research regards teachers who are adults and can decide for themselves whether they want to participate or not and what information they are willing to share or not. Furthermore, none of the participants is in any way identifiable or can be related to any information or particular findings of this research.

Before the commencement of each interview the participant would be ensured that; at any time the participant can decide not to be part of the research anymore and hence given information would be immediately pulled out and destroyed; if the participant feels uncomfortable answering any question can decide not to do so; name of individual, school name or any other information which would make participants identifiable would not be disclosed; and that the data collected would only be viewed by myself to be presented and analysed as part of this research.
3.6 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to scrutinize data drawn from interviews conducted. Thematic Analysis refers “to patterns in the data that reveal something of interest regarding the research topic at hand” (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 149). According to Ayres (2008), when using Thematic Analysis, data from interviews is segmented, categorised, summarised and reconstructed so that important concepts emerge.

Interviews conducted were given code names as T1, T2, T3 and so on. All interviews were then transcribed into text. A sample interview transcription of one Primary class teacher is found in Appendix 4. Data gathered from interviews was then analysed, compared and contrasted using Thematic Analysis so that interesting concepts concerning the research topic were revealed.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS
4.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to relate findings from the data gathered in the review to data gathered through the interviews conducted. The aim of this study is to understand Primary class teachers’ attitudes towards teaching of Physical Education and to collect information and ideas on how teachers can be helped to feel more at ease when teaching this subject.

4.2 Teachers’ Personal Experiences of Physical Education and Sport

4.2.1 During your Primary and Secondary schooling, what were your experiences as regards to Physical Education?

Out of twenty-four Primary class teachers who answered to the above question, thirteen answered that they had a negative experience of Physical Education lessons in their Primary years in some way or another. Two of these respondents, T17 and T20 declared that the situation got better when they started going to a Secondary school as lessons were more organised.

The main reasons given for having a negative experience of Physical Education by these thirteen respondents were either because very few lessons were held or because the few lessons that were held were of a bad quality with lack of equipment and proper facilities. This issue was also currently pointed out in a study by the NAO (2010) where it was reported that “more investment is needed in order to ensure that each school has the proper indoor/outdoor facilities and equipment to carry out frequent quality PE, sport and other physical activity programmes in schools” (p. 7). However, it is also important to note that as highlighted in the same NAO study (2010), quality and delivery of Physical Education lessons are “influenced by the degree of creativity and
commitment of the individual class teacher and it also depends on personal abilities and aptitudes” (p. 8).

This leads to another two common answers given by respondents who had a negative experience of Physical Education at school, that is, lessons consisted of little variation and the teacher was not quite the appropriate person to deliver Physical Education lessons. Such teachers were described as having lack of positive attitude, not being knowledgeable and not having an appropriate physique to carry out Physical Education lessons. Gilliver (2003) points out, that teachers can impact students positively if they show they are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about a subject. In addition, given that the respondents stated that there was little variation in Physical Education lessons shows that long-term planning was not really an issue and that there was little or no Formative Assessment or any other sort of assessment taking place.

Lack of variation also implies lack of inclusive education. In fact, T19 confessed that she had a negative experience due to comparisons between students made by the teacher. With disappointment she states, “THEY used to play basketball because I believe they used to train with a team or something like that, but I surely do not remember myself playing basketball at all”. Therefore, repetitive exercises and games was not the only issue; there was also lack of variation in teaching styles while giving preference only to high achievers in physical activity. This is quite the opposite of inclusive education.

Seven respondents out of twenty-four class teachers stated that they had a positive experience of Physical Education lessons at both Primary and Secondary schooling. The remaining four respondents said that they had a positive experience of Physical Education in Primary school but a negative one at Secondary schooling. The most common reasons given by respondents who admitted that they have had a positive experience of Physical Education during
their schooling was that the lessons were enjoyable and that there was a variation in games and exercises done. In particular, T18 acknowledged that she had a very positive experience of Physical Education at school as she “always had a lot of Physical Education, lots of varied activities” such as, “athletics [and] gymnastics”. This goes in line with Gilliver’s (2003) point that when teachers come up with new ideas and show enthusiasm when teaching the subject they have a positive impact on the students.

The four respondents who commented that they had a more negative experience in Secondary school, T15, T16, T19 and T22 expressed multiple reasons for such an experience. The reasons given were mainly because either the teacher was too hard on the students and expected too much of them or that students were expected to do exercises which were too difficult and repetitive. Such reasons led these respondents to speak of their negative experiences as they do not go in line with what Mawer (1995) suggests; that is, the teacher should have constructive and practical feedback and targets in order to ensure enthusiasm and participation from the students’ behalf.

Moreover, one of these four respondents, T19, also mentioned that the teacher always used to compare students and choose the same preferred students. This definitely does not reflect inclusive education. As Mawer (1995) suggests, comparing students’ abilities should be avoided, as this does not promote a positive learning situation. This particular respondent was very emotional and still frustrated for never being selected on a team to play a team game since she was physically small and short. Instead she was always sent with the same group of other students to “go run around the play ground, go up and down the stairs which were very high for me as I was really short and this was a torture for me”. Fortunately, this respondent grew up to be a teacher who is very well aware of the injustice that she had to go through and does her best to make sure nothing similar takes place in her class. In this case, this respondent was strong enough to transform her negative experience into a positive one and as a class
teacher herself tries as much as possible to have a positive attitude towards teaching Physical Education. This is a clear example showing the extent to which students can recall school-experiences which affect them for life. Even though this respondent is now an adult, she is still hurt about what she had to go through during each and every Physical Education lesson held.

4.2.2 Do you consider yourself as a physically active person? If yes, what type of exercise/physical activity/sport do you practice?

Five out of twenty-four respondents answered that they consider themselves as physically active persons. Out of these five respondents, T7 and T8, stated that they do regular muscle conditioning exercises such as sit ups, leg raises, squats, elastics, yoga and going to the gym. The other three respondents, T13, T20 and T21, happen to be involved in football where two of them play regularly in matches and the third one is a referee, thus all of them also stated that they do a lot of jogging and running in their free time.

Eight out of twenty-four respondents consider themselves as ‘average’ physically active persons. Activities mentioned by these respondents were walking, jogging, cycling, swimming, aerobics and going to the gym. However, in some way or another they all mentioned that they wish they had more time to do more sports and physical exercise.

Eleven out of twenty-four respondents answered that they do not consider themselves as physically active persons. Though, it is interesting to note that two of these respondents mentioned that they do or occasionally do some sort of physical exercise.
Activities mentioned were yoga, aerobics, zumba, walking and dancing. This shows that Primary school educators interviewed have vague ideas about what a ‘physically active person’ is.

The WHO (2010) recommends that for “adults aged 18-64, physical activity includes leisure time physical activity, transportation (e.g. walking or cycling), occupational (i.e. work), household chores, play, games, sports or planned exercise, in the context of daily, family, and community activities” (p. 26).

However it is not the aim of this study to seek educators’ understanding of what a ‘physically active person’ is, therefore when respondents chose not to give a definite answer whether they were physically active persons or not, they were not interrupted or further asked on the subject. The significance of this finding will be elaborated more in section 4.4.1.

4.3 Class Teachers and Physical Education Lessons

4.3.1 As a Primary class teacher, how many lessons of Physical Education do you conduct yourself per week? What is the duration of this/these lesson/s?

Twelve out of twenty-four respondents stated that they carry out one lesson of Physical Education themselves per week. Four of these respondents felt it was important to also mention that their students have another lesson of Physical Education which is carried out by the peripatetic teacher. T7 also mentioned that when time permits she carries out ten-minute brain gym sessions. All of these twelve respondents stated that Physical Education lessons which are held by themselves are usually from thirty to forty-five minutes in length.
Eight interviewees said that they carry out one or two lessons per week. T15 added that she only carries out two lessons when time and weather permit. T22 pointed out that Primary class teachers of the same year group have a particular agreement; they plan and agree beforehand on how many lessons of Physical Education, Art and Music are going to be held during a particular week, then they decide amongst themselves who is best to carry out which lesson for all the classes of that year group. For example, one teacher is to carry out two lessons of Physical Education, another teacher carries out two lessons of Art and the third teacher carries out two lesson of Music to all the classes of that year group. In this way teachers feel comfortable teaching the subject in which they feel most confident in and students enjoy the lessons more since teachers conducting the lessons prepare and deliver lessons with a more positive attitude. All of these eight respondents stated that their lessons last from thirty to forty-five minutes.

T10 and T21 stated that they carry out two lessons of Physical Education themselves per week. T21 said that when time permits she even carries out three lessons. The time of these lessons was said to be from twenty to thirty minutes.

T14 and T16 admitted that they try to carry out at least one lesson of Physical Education per week but if they are pressed by time or workload they do not hesitate to skip this lesson. When they do carry the lesson it lasts from twenty to forty minutes.

Even when taking the best case scenario from the data gathered in this study, that is, T21 stating that when time and workload permit, she carries out three thirty minute lessons of Physical Education, the recommendation by the Department for Curriculum Management and eLearning of at least four thirty-
minute weekly sessions of Physical Education are still not met. This also further proves NAO’s (2010) detections published where it was stated that “NAO detected a high risk of many children having less than the four thirty-minute weekly sessions recommended by the Department for Curriculum Management and eLearning” (NAO, 2010, p. 7).

4.3.2 What determines the number of Physical Education lessons held per week?

When asked to define what determines the number of Physical Education lessons held per week class teachers gave multiple reasons.

T15 mentioned the problem of having yard space. T1, T2, T5 and T6 revealed that students’ behaviour, work done and peripatetic lessons held are of great influence on the number of Physical Education lessons conducted. Such reasons may indicate that Physical Education is still seen as a reward for students’ work done or for good behaviour.

The class timetable was mentioned by five different respondents. The study carried out by the NAO (2010) “clearly demonstrated the considerable pressure being placed on children, teachers, parents and school management to give overriding priority to examined subjects at both primary and secondary level of education” (p. 7). The fact that even parents give precedence to certain subjects further stresses teachers to inevitably pressure students to do well in particular areas. Class teachers interviewed confessed, some of them with great frustration, that at times they are forced to alter their timetable in order to ensure higher marks in core subjects by their students. In comparison with the NAO statement, they acknowledge parents as one entity that really makes a lot of pressure to ensure that their children get the highest marks possible in their tests.
The most common reasons mentioned though were school activities, syllabus and curriculum. These were considered as main reasons by nearly all of the twenty-four respondents. Such pressure on teachers and students does not only dishearten enthusiasm to sink into other subjects than those mostly prioritised by the educational system but also brings along a lot of stress. As stated by some respondents, there is a lot to be covered in the Primary syllabus and when that is combined with planned school activities leave little time and slight enthusiasm for teachers to conduct ‘other’ lessons. Teachers, students and even parents end up always worrying that not all of the syllabus will be covered and hence, unfortunately, many a times it is seen that these children will be illiterate and uneducated. Moreover, I believe that the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) and the school activities should be ‘blamed’ less as these, at least, offer some opportunities for students to experience new areas of education which very often are in touch with social, natural, physical and creative aspects. In fact, the NCF states that learning experiences through “health education activities aim at equipping learners with the necessary knowledge, attitudes and skills which they will need to maintain, promote and enhance physical, emotional, psychological and social well-being throughout their school life and as lifelong learners” (NCF, 2011, p. 42).

4.4 The importance of Physical Education as viewed by Class Teachers

4.4.1 Do you think that Physical Education lessons are important? Why?

All of the twenty-four respondents answered that they think that Physical Education lessons are important. T16 stresses that she knows that Physical Education lessons are very important “because children have a lot of energy
which they need to use up. During break time it is not enough, if you add up all the break times it is just half an hour and even the fact that it’s structured”. She further adds, “During break it’s just free play but during a Physical Education lesson it’s structured since you have to reach certain goals and acquire certain skills. It’s also important for their development”. Other interviewees gave a number of varied and different reasons.

The most common reason, which was pointed out by ten different respondents, was that Physical Education lessons help students to keep fit and physically active. Similarly, for eight occurrences, respondents highlighted that Physical Education lessons are important to develop holistically, promote sports and live a healthy lifestyle. Other reasons mentioned were that Physical Education is important as it helps students to concentrate. It motivates them since it relaxes and ‘releases’ the mind while physically moving and using up energy. This is confirmed by the previously mentioned UN Inter-Agency Task Force (2003) where it was reported that when students are given the opportunity of play and sport, their overall achievement actually increases.

T7, T12, T14 and T16 stated that Physical Education lessons are important to improve physical aspect by developing motor skills as well as experience success and build confidence. The NCF (2011) also recognises the importance of Physical Education and sports, as while learning skills and working as a team, students develop social and emotional intelligences.

It is interesting to note that with reference to findings discussed in section 4.2.4 of this study, respondents who acknowledged themselves as physically active, came up with particular answers when asked about the importance of Physical Education. Reasons given by these respondents can be also applied to these respondents’ own selves. These contributors state that Physical Education lessons are important as to keep fit and physically active. In addition they point
out that these lessons are important as they “relax and release the mind” while developing your physical aspect and yourself holistically. They further state that Physical Education helps you use up energy as well as motivates you and facilitates concentration.

4.4.2 What do you think the children learn from Physical Education lessons?

When asked this question, class teachers gave an array of skills, values and other aspects which are learnt through Physical Education. It is interesting to note though, that twenty out of twenty-four respondents, mentioned group/team work as something learnt through Physical Education. Thus the most common thing that Primary class teachers think that their students learn from Physical Education lessons is to work in collaboration and cooperatively with each other. Such finding is significant as it might reflect that students actually do not know how to work in groups/teams. In addition, this also reveals something significant on teachers’ views of Physical Education. Having the majority of the participants who contributed to this study listing teamwork as a main skill to be learnt during Physical Education lessons might imply that the majority of these teachers view Physical Education just as team games.

Respondents brought up other characteristics which they think that students learn from Physical Education lessons. These can be grouped in three categories: learning social aspects, following rules and personal development.

4.4.2.1 Social aspects

Just as the UN Inter-Agency Task Force (2003) lists skills and values learnt through sport, respondents stated that through Physical Education students learn that the most important thing is to take part and not always to win. Moreover, healthy competition is imperative and therefore students learn both
how to win and lose. They learn social aspects and how to respect others while also being fair amongst them.

4.4.2.2 Following Rules

Even though all interviewees teach Junior Years in Primary education, namely, Years 4, 5 and 6, teachers still admit that through Physical Education students learn how to follow instructions and how to take turns. This might imply that even as children are getting older, they are still not getting enough training on how to concentrate and listen to instructions given, as well as respect others while patiently waiting for their turn. However it could be that they are so eager to participate that when they actually have the opportunity to do some physical activity they just do not want to waste any time waiting. It could also be that there is lack of class management along with lack of planning consequently students end up with too much waiting-time to have their turn.

Respondents also pointed out that through Physical Education lessons students also learn different games and their rules as well as the importance of doing a warming up before starting the session.

4.4.2.3 Personal Development

"Outside the classroom, sport is a “school for life”, teaching basic values and life skills important for holistic development" (UN Inter-Agency Task Force, 2003, p. 8). This is often highlighted by the class teachers themselves. T6 in particular states that "from Physical Education lessons students learn how to relax their mind and body to be able to concentrate and express themselves’. They state that students learn the importance of Physical Education and form their attitude about it as it develops their skills.
4.5 Class Teachers’ Feelings

4.5.1 Do you like conducting Physical Education lessons? Why?

T9, T14, T18 and T22 answered that they do not like conducting Physical Education lessons. Reasons given were that either because they do not consider themselves as physically active persons and therefore they were not the right persons to conduct such lesson, or they do not know how to. In addition they confessed that they do not feel confident about conducting a Physical Education lesson. T14 and T18 stated that students are too competitive and/or misbehave during the lesson.

When interviewing these respondents I could see that when they speak of them not liking to conduct Physical Education lessons they are dissatisfied with themselves. Moreover, I could also perceive frustration and helplessness in the voice tone and facial expressions of those who do not consider themselves as physically active persons but are still expected to carry out Physical Education lessons. It is not that they do not want to conduct these lessons but they really do not feel up to standard to be the ones conducting them. In fact, one of these four respondents, T22, confesses, “although I feel the children need Physical Education...my physical body doesn’t help a lot”.

As Bryant et al., (2009) point out, this also impacts on students’ learning. As discussed earlier in Chapter 2 of this study, teachers’ self-presentation and perceived confidence in the subject influence students’ learning (Bryant et al., 2009). Misbehaviour and the ‘not knowing how’ are most probably the result of lack of teacher-training in the Physical Education sector.
Twenty respondents stated that they like conducting Physical Education lessons. The most common reasons given were that Physical Education lessons are enjoyable for both the teacher and the students and that teachers like seeing students enjoying themselves. In addition, respondents said that apart from liking to see students acquire and improve skills, when they go back to class they like the fact that students are more motivated and concentrated on work given. However, T10, T16 and T17 pointed out that they only enjoy conducting the lesson when things do not get too technical and when lessons are planned beforehand.

4.5.2 What aspects/skills might be helping or inhibiting you from feeling comfortable and confident enough to deliver Physical Education lessons?

All of the respondents seemed very well aware of what is helping and what is not when it comes to delivering Physical Education lessons. Most of the respondents mentioned a number of aspects and skills which are or possibly are not so helpful.

Some of the positive aspects mentioned were, plenty of space and resources available in the school, the teacher being physically young and also being knowledgeable and biased towards favouring the subject. T5, T11 and T12 said that they have a good relationship with the students and thus can communicate very well with them. This helps teachers to find a balance between work to be done and ‘other’ lessons. In addition these respondents stated that they have good classroom management and like seeing children happy while developing positive attitudes towards a healthy lifestyle. Moreover respondents stated that planning is paramount; in fact, as explained in section 4.3.1, T22 along with other colleagues, plan and schedule lessons together to ensure that their students do not miss any lessons as well as fully benefit from such situation.
As inferred from data collected, aspects which inhibit Primary class teachers from feeling confident to deliver Physical Education lessons can be mainly categorised as lack of training. In fact, T3, T9, T11 and T16 stated immediately that lack of training in the Physical Education area is an issue. This causes deficiency in classroom management during Physical Education lessons, lack of confidence and knowledge which then therefore leads to reluctance towards the subject. A particular respondent, T18 was very emotional when speaking of this issue as she confessed that she puts a lot of effort in preparing the lesson but still does not get the desired outcome. She further expresses her feeling of frustration since she feels the responsibility and expectancy to carry these lessons but admits that she “cannot be good in everything”. “PE lessons delivered by class teachers in Primary Schools may not always be of the expected quality and standard”, states the NAO (2010, p.8). When comparing such statement with what T18 said it shows that class teachers are also aware that their Physical Education lessons are not of the expected quality and standard.

Other disadvantageous aspects mentioned were the lack of space, which in turn also puts the weather as a problem, lack of proper equipment and time constrictions.

4.6 Class Teachers’ Training and Preparation

4.6.1 During your teaching training, did you have any training related to Physical Education?

Four teachers stated that they did not have any kind of training related to Physical Education. In addition, T9 and T10 said that they had some sort of training but found it was not relevant as it consisted of lectures and lesson
displays. All of the other participants said that they had some sort of training in one way or another.

Teacher-training consisted of how to prepare and deliver a lesson, lectures on different areas of sport, group work and hands-on experience like for example, organising a sports day. T13 declared, “I chose extracurricular credits at university related to sports – swimming, athletics, [and] hockey”.

An interesting contrast emerges as eighteen teachers stated that they actually had training regarding Physical Education as part of their coursework, but then they confessed that they feel they did not have enough training. This reflects the fact that although a number of these class teachers had study-units at University regarding Physical Education, it was not enough to make them feel prepared and confident to conduct Physical Education lessons when they went out to work in schools.

4.6.2 Would you be interested in taking further training regards to teaching of Physical Education? (If yes), what topics would you like to be included in such additional training?

While T1 and T2 declared that they would not be interested to take additional training. T22 stated she would not need additional training as she states: “usually when I plan my lessons...I look on the internet. I search the internet and I find the topics which I need for a particular lesson or area which I’m covering”.

The rest of the interviewees said that they would like to take additional training regarding teaching of Physical Education. All of these respondents were very keen to share their ideas of what to include in such additional training. Four of these respondents stated that ‘anything’ would be good as long as it is relevant.
to Physical Education. Respondents also mentioned things like talks and information about Health and Safety, First Aid, how to make cross-curricular links and where to seek professional support. A number of respondents also mentioned that they would like to be presented with practical ideas and exercises related to the syllabus to be covered which they can then carry out themselves. Furthermore, they added that they would like to have sessions on specific areas of sport which includes more technical training while also learning new games and game rules, as they do not feel comfortable conducting a game when it is the students that are pointing out, or even fighting over a rule which was not followed.

In addition respondents said that they need more resources from where they can get ideas or at least more training on how to plan lessons and schemes of work for Physical Education. T16 and T17 also suggested that they would find it to be an excellent idea if they have an in-service where teachers work collaboratively and plan sets of lesson plans together.

Having all of these class teachers coming up with so many ideas was quite a relief for me. It showed me that they are willing to improve the situation but they obviously need to be helped out. This will be further discussed in the next chapter Recommendations and Conclusions.
CHAPTER 5

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS
5.1 Recommendations

5.1.1 Personal Experiences

All of the teachers interviewed recalled personal memories of Physical Education during their Primary and Secondary years. This shows that past experiences, being positive and negative, linger in mind even after long periods of time. Hence one of the factors which should direct educators towards providing quality and superior educational experiences to their students is so that when they grow up they will have positive experiences to recall.

If educators provide a nourishing experience through Physical Education it is more likely that students will form a positive attitude towards physical activity which in turn will be reflected in their everyday life. “Learning is about expanding our perspectives, updating our approaches, moving beyond our comfort zones, challenging set modes of thinking and doing” (Ministry of Education, Employment and the Family, 2011, p. 12). As Primary class teachers we should strive to intrinsically motivate and instil students to endorse physical activity as part of their lifestyle.

5.1.2 The Educational System

For teachers and students to start prioritising Physical Education it first needs to be prioritised by the educational system itself. Although the University of Malta offers a Bachelor of Education (Honours) with Physical Education course which prepares students to become Physical Education teachers, it lacks continuity with post-secondary education, as there is not an Advanced Level Examination of Physical Education. This seems to suggest that Physical Education is not as intensive as other subjects. Even if still at Primary education, students and moreover, teachers, are given the message that to be
proficient in Physical Education you do not actually need Advanced Level qualification in Physical Education since, as is listed on the University of Malta website, “passes at Advanced Level at Grade C or better in any two subjects” is enough to possibly qualify you as a prospective Physical Education teacher.

5.1.3 Primary Class Teachers’ Training

Class teachers’ remarks and opinions should be listened to more; after all they are professionals in the area with current hands-on experience. “Everyone who has been a teacher knows that once the classroom door is closed what happens is not about theory but about interactions between students and teacher” (Sunderman, Tracey, Kim and Orfield, 2004, p. 6). When teachers were asked about what to include in additional training they were very keen on providing suggestions. This proposes that they know they need more training in Physical Education and therefore recommend having additional guidance and preparation.

As reflected by data gathered from this study, not all of the class teachers are passionate towards physical activity. This fact makes it harder for these educators to come up with motivating and enthusiastic lesson plans of Physical Education. If provided with additional resources, such as lesson plans, games and exercises, class teachers would be aided and feel more confident and at ease to conduct Physical Education lessons.

When taking into consideration the Bachelor of Education (Honours) with Primary Education course which I read at the University of Malta during the period of 2008 and 2012, I only had two study-units regarding Physical Education. These study-units were very useful and informative as they provided us with information concerning the preparation and conduction of lessons, possible exercises to be carried out with students and most importantly gave us hands-on experience through micro-teaching and setting up a sports
day in a school. I have to admit though that two study-units in four years of
teacher-training are not enough. Had I not been personally, naturally inclined
towards liking and interesting myself in sports, I would not have felt prepared
and confident enough to prepare and conduct Physical Education lessons. More
study-units in relation to Physical Education should be taken into consideration
as they are highly valued by prospective teachers and will definitely be
appreciated by young students when these teachers go out in schools to teach.

A recommendation which might facilitate class teachers' work could be to work
as a team with other class teachers. Such teamwork could consist of having a
particular teacher to teach a subject, such as Art to all the classes of that year
group, while another teacher conducts Physical Education lessons.

Moreover, one can also consider peripatetic Physical Education teachers
working in collaboration with class teachers. As suggested by Sharpe and
Hawes (2007), subject-proficient and class teachers should plan and organise
learning programmes collectively. In such case it would be best if a particular
peripatetic Physical Education teacher is allocated to a particular school so that
there is more concentration on particular aims to be reached.

In addition, refreshment courses can further enhance teachers' performance.
Respondents stating that they are physically active persons and who conduct
Physical Education lessons regularly still propose that such courses are needed
and would facilitate teaching of Physical Education.

5.1.4 Boosting Up Sport Programmes

As reported by the NAO (2010) report, the Maltese Sports Council is taking
initiatives to compensate for limitations as regards to physical activity by
proposing schemes which “include activities during school hours and after-
school programmes in certain schools” (p. 7). The same report further states that “close collaboration and partnership with a broad range of connected organisations, including...KMS and the Sport Promotion Unit within this organisation” is needed to “encourage lifelong participation in sport and leisure activities, providing opportunities for enjoyment, recreation, and the pursuit of a healthy lifestyle” (NAO, 2010, p. 15). Such programmes and initiatives should be boosted up and encouraged to advance and prosper in order to further promote physical activity.

5.2 Further Research

This dissertation introduced a research area which can be further developed through additional research. Further research can be carried out taking into consideration gender in relation to carrying out of Physical Education lessons. Another aspect which would be interesting to investigate would be the age of class teachers.

Moreover, additional research could seek to gather information regarding Physical Education as portrayed by the Educational System itself. Additionally, research regarding how well-informed are Primary class teachers on Physical Education can provide further information to compare and contrast with this study.

5.3 Strengths and Limitations

Since this study is qualitative in nature it only includes contributions given by twenty-four Primary class teachers of all Primary class teachers working in Malta. Although the data gathered is in detail since it is a qualitative one, it only represents the views and contributions of a small section of Primary class teachers. Results cannot therefore be considered to be fully representative. However, using interviews as a method of data collection aided me to gather
more detailed information enriched by respondents’ expressed feelings and emotions since there was personal contact. Conversely, this led to an inevitable limitation, that is, consumption of time. Preparation of interview questions, setting up meetings, conducting and analysing interviews is very time consuming and requires a lot of work and effort. Nonetheless, when taking into consideration that the information gathered is in such detail and potentiates in-depth discussions it turns out to be an upbeat.

5.4 Conclusion

In general, the findings from this study confirm much of what was reported in the study carried out by NAO (2010). The following points summarise the conclusions reached in this study.

Respondents who consider themselves as physically active persons tend to be more enthusiastic, creative and motivated to conduct Physical Education lessons. On the other hand, although they know that Physical Education lessons are important, respondents who do not consider themselves as physically active find themselves in a more problematic situation to conduct Physical Education lessons themselves.

Results from this study confirm what the NAO (2010) study detected, that is, “a high risk of many children having less than the four thirty-minute weekly sessions recommended by the Department for Curriculum Management and eLearning” (p. 7). In fact, none of the respondents of this study stated that they carry so many Physical Education lessons in a week.

As observed by the NAO (2010), one of the key issues which was obstructing improvements in delivery of Physical Education lessons by Primary teachers
was “the pressure placed on the Primary School Teacher to give overriding priority to first cover the syllabi of examined subjects” (p. 23). This was also highlighted in this study as when asked about what determines the number of Physical Education lessons conducted one of the main reasons given was that of covering syllabi of ‘core’ subjects. However one should keep in mind that as stated by the IOM (2013), “regular physical activity promotes growth and development and has multiple benefits for physical, mental and cognitive health that undoubtedly contribute to learning” (p. 77).

This study pointed out that more teacher-training regarding Physical Education is needed. The findings of this study match that which was reported in the NAO (2010), that is, class teachers show low level of involvement due to “lack of sufficient knowledge, skill or aptitude to teach the subject, as well as fear that a child might get hurt” (p.23).

Since all of the interviewees mentioned that students learn the skill of working in teams through Physical Education, indicates that class teachers might be misinformed on what is learnt through these lessons. NAO (2010) states that, “PE lessons delivered by class teachers in Primary Schools may not always be of the expected quality and standard” (NAO, 2010, p. 8). This further stresses the point that teachers are not getting enough training on how to prepare and conduct Physical Education lessons which are of the expected quality and standard. This also reflects that Curmi’s (1999) finding of teachers and parents approving the attachment of a specialised Physical Education teacher to Primary schools is still needed.

NAO (2010) suggests that quality Physical Education should aim to “develop the knowledge, attitudes, skills and competence” to benefit from an array selection of sport experiences while also “build students’ confidence in their individual physical abilities and encourage them to become involved in lifelong sport and
other physical activity” (NAO, 2010, p. 10). Moreover, “frequent bouts of physical activity throughout the day yield short-term benefits for mental and cognitive health while also providing opportunities to practice skills and building confidence that promotes ongoing engagement in physical activity” (IOM, 2013, p. 77). In addition, NAO (2010) suggests that quality Physical Education lessons should aim to provide enjoyable learning experiences of physical activity which “contribute to students’ social and moral development” (NAO, 2010, p. 10). This study does not only highlight that more teacher-training is needed but, as results confirm, teachers are aware that they need more training regarding Physical Education in order to conduct lessons which match up to such quality and standard. As discussed in the previous chapter, particular interviewees admit that they do not feel confident and well-prepared to conduct quality Physical Education lessons.

In summary, teachers’ attitudes towards teaching of Physical Education are affected by past personal experiences, teacher-training, time available and by themselves being physically active. The more teachers are motivated and enthusiastic about conducting Physical Education lessons the more students will have a positive experience and endorse physical activity as part of their lifestyle.


Curmi, A. (1999). *The attitudes of teachers and parents towards the teaching of physical education at primary level.* Unpublished research report, University of Malta, Malta.


APPENDICES
Appendix 1

Questions used for Pilot Study
As a Primary class teacher, how many lessons of Physical Education do you conduct yourself per week?

What is the duration of this/these lesson/s?

What determines the number of Physical Education lessons held per week?

Do you think that Physical Education lessons are important? Why?

What do you think that children learn from Physical Education lessons?

Do you like conducting Physical Education lessons? Why?

*If respondent does not like conducting Physical Education lesson ask:*

What aspects might be inhibiting you from feeling comfortable and confident enough to deliver Physical Education lessons?

*If respondent likes conducting Physical Education lessons ask:*

What aspects and skills do you think that are helping you to feel comfortable and confident enough to deliver Physical Education lessons?

Would you be interested in taking further training as regards to teaching of Physical Education?

What topics would you like to be included in such additional training?
Appendix 2

Interview Questions
During your Primary and Secondary schooling, what were your experiences as regards to Physical Education?

Do you consider yourself as a physically active person?

*If respondent does not consider him/herself as a physically active person proceed to next question.*

*If respondent considers him/herself as a physically active person ask:*

What type of exercise / physical activity / sport do you practice?

As a Primary class teacher, how many lessons of Physical Education lessons do you conduct yourself per week?

What is the duration of this/these lesson/s?

What determines the number of Physical Education lessons held per week?

Do you think that Physical Education lessons are important? Why?

What do you think that children learn from Physical Education lessons?

Do you like conducting Physical Education lessons? Why?

What aspects might be helping or inhibiting you from feeling comfortable and confident enough to deliver Physical Education lessons?
During your teaching training, did you have any training related to Physical Education?

*If respondent did not have any training related to Physical Education proceed to next question.*

*If respondent had some kind of training related to Physical Education ask:*

What did this training consist of?

Would you be interested in taking further training regards to teaching of Physical Education?

*If respondent gives a positive answer ask:*

What would you like to be included in such additional training?
Appendix 3

Proposal for this Study
**UNIVERSITY OF MALTA**  
Faculty of Education  
B.Ed. (Hons) Dissertation Committee

### Dissertation Proposal Form

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#### Students' Particulars

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<td>79204770</td>
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**Email**

| adarm01@um.edu.mt |

**Signature**

*“External Supervisor to submit CV with this form*

#### Advisor’s Particulars

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*“External Advisor to submit CV with this form.*

### Ethical Clearance: To be filled in by Supervisor

Do you consider that the proposed work requires ethical clearance from the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC)?

**Note:** Guidelines and application form for ethical clearance is available from [http://www.um.edu.mt/urec/gpreform](http://www.um.edu.mt/urec/gpreform)

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### FOR OFFICIAL USE

Your dissertation proposal:  
- [ ] has been accepted  
- [ ] has been rejected  
- [✓] is to be amended as remarked

- [ ] You do not need to submit an Ethics Form.  
- [ ] You need to submit an Ethics Form.
**Chairperson (Dissertation Supervisor):**

**Date:** 24/6/10

**Proposed title of dissertation:**
Not more than more 15 words.

**Teachers' Attitudes Towards Teaching of Physical Education in Years 4, 5 and 6.**

**Brief description (abstract) of the proposed research work**

**Objective:**

To shed light on teachers' attitudes towards the teaching of physical education in the junior years of primary education

**Description:**

According to a recently published report by NAO on Physical Education and Sport in State Primary and Secondary Schools:

- Three out of every four Primary School Teachers reported that Primary School children could not afford to have the recommended daily thirty-minute PE lesson during school hours.

- Most PE Perpetual Teachers (twenty-three respondents) indicated that, based on their experience in schools, Primary School Teachers generally held PE lessons either occasionally (twice or three times a month), rarely (less than twice or three times a month), or never.

- "Only twenty-one Heads of School out of the sixty-one that responded rated as 'satisfactory' or 'very satisfactory' the frequency of PE lessons held by Primary School Teachers."

- "Nine out of the College Principals participating in the NAO survey noted that insufficient time was being dedicated to PE in Primary Schools."

In the light of these findings this research intends to investigate the attitudes of primary class teachers in state schools towards the teaching of Physical Education and Sport in the junior years of primary schooling.

The researcher will conduct interviews with class teachers in order to shed light on this situation. Teachers' perspectives highlighting possible concerns, problems or difficulties will be examined.

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**Description of research methods to be applied**

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Appendix 4

Sample Interview Transcript
Transcript Interview with Primary Class Teacher

During your Primary and Secondary schooling, what were your experiences as regards to Physical Education?

Very positive. We always had a lot of Physical Education, lots of varied activities, athletics, gymnastics...mostly secondary. Primary was a bit less but secondary we did a lot.

Do you consider yourself as a physically active person?

Em...no.

As a Primary class teacher, how many lessons of Physical Education lessons do you conduct yourself per week?

Myself? Once a week. Once myself and once the PE teacher.

What is the duration of this lesson?

Forty-five minutes.

What determines the number of Physical Education lessons held per week?
Heq...other activities. If we have other activities like outings and...other appointments, lessons which are not planned, for example talks about healthy eating or...those obviously then have to...make priorities.

**Do you think that Physical Education lessons are important?**

Yes, yes, very, very ...and why? Very important. First of all it helps you to concentrate. If you are physically active your mind works better, you can concentrate more on what you’re doing. They are very important.

**What do you think that children learn from Physical Education lessons?**

They learn how to express themselves, movement. They understand their body better, how to move and it helps them feel better on the whole.

**Do you like conducting Physical Education lessons? Why?**

Yes and no. It depends on facilities, behaviour.

**What aspects might be helping or inhibiting you from feeling comfortable and confident enough to deliver Physical Education lessons?**

Maybe smaller groups of children. Sometimes when you have a large class it’s not easy to organise certain activities. It takes a lot of time to organise activities and then when you come to do them you have less time. So if certain things are in place for example the activity is already organised, say you have different activities, all the equipment ready, you just start, then you can say that the kids have, you know, the right amount of time to do their activity. When you don’t have these things prepared obviously it takes more time,
more management, and more...strenuous on the teacher who is taking care of the whole group.

**During your teaching training, did you have any training related to Physical Education?**

Yes, yes I had.

**What did this training consist of?**

We had group activities, group work. We had to make a dance using physical movement. We had quite a few.

**Would you be interested in taking further training regards to teaching of Physical Education?**

Yes, yes definitely.

**What would you like to be included in such additional training?**

It would be ideal to cover all the topics in PE...to reinforce work done with class.