



A Cyclopedia of Girls and Physical Education

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Abstract

This article experiments with form to offer readers a sense of girls' experiences of physical education in Aotearoa New Zealand. Inspired by Rebecca Solnit's (2014) *Cyclopedia of an Arctic Expedition*, and theoretical ideas from new materialisms and postqualitative inquiry, we assemble an alphabetised cyclopedia of participant comments that evoke varied scenes and sensations. Rather than arranging girls' comments into stable themes that develop a cohesive argument, the cyclopedia functions more as an invitation to an encounter where meaning emerges relationally in the act of reading. Reading is conceptualised as an 'event' that is open-ended, where impressions always become anew. The cyclopedia begins with a preface to set the scene, and concludes with an afterword that provides further methodological context for the reader.

Keywords Affect · Event · Experimental writing · New materialisms · Postqualitative inquiry

Preface: An Invitation

This cyclopedia offers readers a sense of girls' embodied and emotional experiences of physical education (PE) in Aotearoa New Zealand. The alphabetised entries are composed of participant comments that evoke an array of feelings, scenes and atmospheres. The intent is not to develop a linear, cohesive argument about girls' experiences of PE; rather, the cyclopedia offers readers an encounter where meaning emerges relationally and affectively in the act of reading. Drawing on theoretical perspectives from new materialisms and postqualitative inquiry, we conceptualise each reading of the cyclopedia as an 'event', that is emergent and open-ended, 'mak-

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ing itself felt somehow in the immediacy of the moment' (Bozalek & Taylor, 2021, p. 66). In this frame, events are indeterminate and come into being through relations that include the reader's own memories, experiences and feelings. Thus, the cyclopedia neither poses a question nor seeks to offer an answer that might equate to a contribution of 'new' knowledge. Instead, the 'new' emerges relationally, between entry and entry, word and memory, sensation and feeling.

The cyclopedia entries derive from a study exploring Year 7–10 girls' experiences of physical education in co-educational settings. While the cyclopedia does not offer a set question, the research itself was guided by a central concern: How do girls feel in PE? Existing studies suggest girls' enjoyment and participation in PE decline as they age (Sport New Zealand, 2021). Myriad factors influence girls' (dis)engagement, including traditional norms of femininity, gendered teaching practices and expectations, an emphasis on traditional and competitive sports, lack of confidence and fear of being judged (Cameron & Humbert, 2020; Cockburn & Clarke, 2002; Fisette, 2013; Hill, 2015). Fuelled by our desire to create more inclusive environments for students in PE, the project sought to better understand girls' emotional experiences and the factors that may enhance or constrain their motivation and enjoyment. Participants shared their thoughts and feelings through an range of embodied and creative methods that facilitated collective conversation, independent reflection and creative expression¹.

Both new materialisms and postqualitative inquiry have the capacity to unsettle conventional assumptions about research, what counts as data, and how data are reported. Rather than treating research as a discrete process of collecting and representing pre-existing experiences, new materialist and postqualitative scholars conceptualise research and the production of knowledge as an emergent, ongoing process (Barad, 2007; St. Pierre, 2013). This perspective embraces an ontology of immanence, where 'we move from existence to the not yet, from being to becoming' (St. Pierre, 2024, p.15). Research becomes less concerned with representing an already existing reality and more interested in what is coming into being. In turn, conventional understandings of research 'findings' and the reporting of research are reconfigured. This cyclopedia can be thought of as a 'practical experimentation and the creation of the *not yet* instead of the repetition of what *is*' (St Pierre, 2019, p. 3, italics in original). In a new materialist sense, it is an onto-epistemological encounter in which knowing and being emerge together (Barad, 2007), with researchers and readers not as outside observers of the world but part of it in its ongoing becoming. Therefore, the cyclopedia does not seek to resolve girls' experiences of PE into a coherent account; instead, it invites an ethical encounter where meaning emerges relationally among participants, text, reader and researcher.

¹ Participants shared their thoughts and feelings through 'in-the-moment' thinking-feeling fragments gathered during PE lessons. They were also invited to take part in two material and arts-based workshops: the first involved participants sharing objects that connected to their experiences and thoughts of PE; the second involved artwork/artifact creation. Voluntary participants were recruited from two urban co-educational schools in Aotearoa New Zealand. Participants were aged between 11 and 13 years and their self-identified ethnicities include Māori, Indian, Filipino, Tongan, South Korean, Russian, NZ European/Pākehā, Irish, and South American. Ethics approval was granted by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (approval number 24/34) on 6 May 2024.

This cyclopedia invites readers into the research assemblage, where reading becomes an active process of world-making. The entries do not claim to represent all girls' experiences and feelings in PE. They are partial and situated: some were shared during PE lessons, in workshop conversations or through creative expressions (e.g., poetry, posters); others were written independently and shared only with the researchers. While the entries are organised alphabetically, they can be read sequentially – or not. A linear form of reading is not required for an impression to occur. The alphabetised entry title also does not constrain its meaning. The given title may be a word found in the fragment or entry. Sometimes, the title is more of an affective spark – an impression – emerging from our encounters with participants, their words, and their facial and bodily expressions such as laughter, groans and the rolling of eyes. For readers, another word or sensation may emerge. While entry titles may appear as a form of traditional research coding, it is more of an unfaithful coding (MacLure, 2008), with space for wonder or the *not yet* to emerge. Our intention is not to pin each entry down with meaning, but to let them move freely, to let them breathe. The invitation is open; the reader is welcome to meander, to skip, to return, to wonder. The cyclopedia is not static; it moves with the reader. In this sense, each reading is a mattering (Barad, 2007) of girls and physical education, of which we are part.

A Cyclopedia of Girls and Physical Education

Achievement. Being fair and being kind to the people on your team and stuff. Because I don't really care who actually wins the game.

Apprehension. You're like, always looking around to see if someone saw you mess up.

Atmosphere. Being cheered for makes you feel good, because like, you know someone's supporting you, and it makes you feel good about it. Yeah, it makes you try harder.

Bad days. The teachers will expect a lot from you, and sometimes you have your bad days, and you're not feeling it, and they'll get angry at you. Yeah, I don't like that.

Badminton. I love it.

Basketball. I hate basketball. I'm not really sure of the rules, because there's so many rules, and if you do it wrong, people get mad at you.

Belonging. Treat us all the same, no more, no less.

Boredom. We don't know how to play because they don't teach us properly. Yeah, it's really boring. The teacher just sets it up and goes 'away you go', like we already know how to play.

Butterflies. Sometimes, like my stomach. Or like my heart. If it's a sport I don't really like, it's like butterflies. It's just like pressure, and if you mess up, you'll feel embarrassed.

Changing rooms. The boys, they don't care, they just will be bare out like anywhere in the bathrooms. But like with the girls, you have to wait in a line and then the bell rings and you're still in the line waiting for the cubicle.

Cheering. We were just cheering each other on while the boys were screaming at each other that they were doing stuff wrong.

Choice. I want to choose my own opponent and team. So I could choose people who are on the same level as me.

Cold. Even if it's freezing outside, we can't wear our jackets or jumpers. Then the teacher goes outside wearing like five layers. He's like, "it's not cold", but he's in jeans, a long-sleeve T shirt and a jacket. And once I got really sick because of that.

Comfort. If I were placed with people that only have enjoyment in their mind and not winning, I'd feel a lot more comfortable, because it's like an assurance that even if I mess up, it's not to be taken seriously. *See also* Choice.

Competence. Even if the teacher states that "this is non-competitive", I still feel like I need to do good or I will be a failure to my team.

Competition. *See* Cheering; Competence; Disappointment; Discrimination.

Confusion. I couldn't really get what they meant. So I asked my friends and they say they don't know as well, but I can't even like ask the teacher because they say "oh why didn't you listen at that time? What were you guys doing?"

Disappointment. I mostly experience this emotion a majority of time, when I'm forced to do PE in a group. I feel like I'm the reason why my team loses and when the male classmates comment on it, or rather yell at me, it makes me feel even more discouraged to participate. PE feels more like a chore rather than something to enjoy.

Discomfort. Swimming, my friends and I don't feel comfortable, because there is this guy in my class, we feel like you're showing too much skin. He watches us underwater. We told the teacher once. He took a picture of a girl once, her legs.

Discouragement. *See* Boredom; Exclusion; Frustration.

Discrimination. All the girls would get chosen last, and we felt quite discriminated by that because we were underestimated for our ability in managing something that boys were good at as well as girls.

Dismissal. When I got stepped by a guy really hard the teacher says I'm fine and I am over exaggerating when I am not.

Dodgeball. They like throw a ball so hard. Like you actually have to dodge for your life cause otherwise if it hits you, it really hurts.

Dread. It made me feel uncomfortable and desperate not to do PE.

Embarrassment. *See* Humiliation; Laughter; Shame.

Encouragement. Hype me up and tell me positive things about my ability.

Enjoyment. Every now and then, I actually enjoy doing PE. But that's only because we got to choose our team. Being with friends during PE is a lot more fun or being with non-competitive people.

Excitement. *See* Atmosphere; Friends.

Exclusion. Cause I think when you're in a full game and you don't have a designated thing to do a lot of the time, sometimes you end up in a corner. You just end up sort of not doing anything sometimes, especially like when you're playing a game. For example, last time we were doing rugby, we were playing touch, Jack was on my team and he would do all of it. He would run up, he would be the one running and doing all the scores and everything, and like, no one else really got a word in. Yeah no one else got to do anything which made PE not fun.

Failure. *See* Competence; Disappointment; Humiliation.

Fairness. Mr B. picks our teams because he actually makes it even.

Fat shaming. Girls who are kind of big, they get bullied too. They're like, "You're so fat".

Fun. See Comfort; Choice; Freedom; Friends.

Fun group. When you're in the fun group, it's like if you do something wrong, you kind of don't get shamed for it, and you're given another chance.

Freedom. I had so much more fun because I was paired with a girl. Cause you can mess up without getting like yelled at. It doesn't actually matter whether you are good at anything.

Free sanitary products. Because they're kind of expensive nowadays and like it was good having them in the bathroom knowing that you could just like quickly get one and then go into a stall without having to bring one all the way from your bag into the bathroom. Yeah, especially when there's boys in the hallway and I'm standing there with my bag waiting for them to go away.

Friends. It's really fun because like you don't really have to win. You can let like the others who really want to win win, but like when you're just having a good time with your friends, it just makes it more fun and like want to do it more. Yeah, those sports are good. When you're having fun with your friends.

Friend Game. I kind of wish we had like many games for only friends, because softball today, my friend Cate wanted to have a try at batting. She didn't want to because she was like nervous about doing it in front of other people. And then we asked [the teacher] if we can just quickly do like a friendly thing, just like one of us pitching, then she can like bat and then one of us fielding. Yeah. It just feels like it would be nice having like just a little friend game. Like it's smaller, like three or four you.

Frustration. The teacher doesn't really tell us the rules of things. He just makes us play them. Like he just assumes we all know how to play it. Like it's better if we play games before it, to get used to it, like warm-ups that like show you some skills. See also Boredom.

Games. I definitely prefer playing games to actual sport.

Gender bias. When we go to do the teams, some of the guys don't want girls on their team because they think they are not as good as boys.

Getting changed. Swimming is worse, because you get like a minute and a half.

And you have to get fully naked. And there's only two cubicles and like basically since we're all like growing girls, like we don't, I mean, I don't really mind, but some of the girls, some of my friends don't want to change in front of each other, so we all like either go into the big stall together or we have to wait for it. That's why it takes longer, and I feel like we should have a bit more time. Guys have less things to put on, they don't have to wear bras and stuff.

Happiness. See Choice; Friends.

Hogging the ball. Our teacher separates us into teams and then their team were passing the ball to the girls as well. But our team, were just like, if the ball goes to the boys, they just play with the ball, like they don't pass it to girls. See also Sexism.

Humiliation. When the boys laugh at you when they think you do something wrong like miss the ball or make a mistake.

Instruction. Explain the game better.

Irritation. There were like two games, like serious and then, like just non-serious where you just have fun. Me and my friend Anna, we did serious, but the boys were like too much, and they always get super mad and stuff.

Judgemental boys. Yeah, when they get sorted into teams, Miss M. does it randomly. And I don't know, they don't get put with any of their friends, so they immediately say, "Oh, we're going to lose." And like it could be a team full of girls. And those girls, maybe they are really good at that sport, but a guy just doesn't know. So, he just immediately thinks they're going to lose and doesn't try.

Kings of PE. There's like the boys who think they're Kings of PE. You drop the ball, they laugh at you. They take up lots of space. *See also* Hogging the ball; Humiliation; Space.

Kindness. *See* Achievement; Peer Support.

Laughter. You have to sort of laugh it off so that no one else can make fun of you before you do. Like you make fun of yourself so that no one else can do it first.

Left-over girls. When we get captains, so two kids in the class pick the teams, and it's all the boys, then all the sporty girls and then you've just got the leftover girls, and they like take turns, and like then you're just awkwardly sitting there just waiting for you to get picked.

Masculinity. Sometimes the boys can be nice, but they don't let it show. The boys in my class are kind of the popular boys in the school, so they don't want to let down their reputation. The boys think it's not cool to be nice, but they think it's cool to shame people.

Masking. It's just like when we're upset, it's much easier to just not actually react. Like more just like put on a mask, and like the boys are like, 'Oh, come on. We totally won.' But we're just like, 'Okay, we're fine.' Like when we're not.

Motivation. I like how we can choose which person to go with because that makes me more competitive, it's fun and effort at the same time.

Movement. I feel happy and encouraging when I do PE because I just like to do exercise.

Music. I like how we play music while playing the sport because it makes us less awkward and fun.

Noise. The hall is super loud during social dance, there's too many people around for me to focus and it's just super stressful.

Opportunity. *See* Choice; Friend Game; Partners; Revenge.

Overlooked. I'm sporty, but like to the class, I'm not that sporty because they don't really notice us.

Over-stimulation. There's so much going on. People boss you around. Yeah. And you don't know what to do. You just stand there, for like, no reason. I mean, there is a reason because you don't know what is going on.

Partners. If you are just by yourself with a partner, there's less people to let down if you get it wrong.

Peer Support. I really like the PE when you help someone else and they get better. And like, if there was someone that looks like they not really involved, you go and play with them and try to get them more energised, so they actually want to do it.

Performance. I liked it when the teacher said "oh good job" rather than shouting in front of everyone.

Phones. When we had dance, a kid in my class just pulled out his phone out of his pocket and just started filming. *See also* Discomfort.

Prejudice. People automatically thinking you'll be bad or like... Yeah like not even bothering to look, just assuming that you're bad. I'm faster than one of the boys that was in the group, but I got kicked out because I think they thought that I wasn't going be good at the relay, so I didn't get to do it.

Pressure. I missed the ball and all the boys were like, "Ana, you could have caught that".

Pride. My team was in dead last and then I went and made us come second, which was pretty good.

Respect. I have an opinion and the teachers should respect that.

Revenge. When like boys get annoying, I wait for the day we play dodgeball.

Self consciousness. *See* Changing Rooms; Shorts.

Sexism. Your gender is put over your ability. *See also* Discrimination; Gender Bias; Judgemental boys; Prejudice.

Shame. When the boys yell at you and when they think you do something wrong, like miss the ball or make a mistake.

Shorts. The PE shorts, like they're very...they're very short. Yeah, so that's why that's why I secretly wear the formal shorts.

Space. There are no Kings of PE who are women.

Sportsmanship. The thing is, it's kind of stupid because nearly all the boys did their speech on sportsmanship, but still, they don't show it.

Sporty People. I feel like sporty people, it's kind of easier for them to understand because they already do sports. But then, like it's still your job to help the other people who don't know the sports.

Stretching. We don't get to do stretches and stuff before doing PE and I get cramps.

Swimming cap. Caps suck, because I feel like I'm bald. Yeah, you don't look good.

Satisfaction. *See* Revenge.

Uncertainty. I just watch what others are doing and then copy.

Uniforms. Yeah, they're stinky.

Voice. Play games that the girls want to play too, not just the boys. Get everyone to say what they want to do and try to do that at one point in the year, so everyone gets to do something they want to do. And actually listen to our ideas.

Warm-ups. Running is not a warm-up.

Yelling. *See* Kings of PE; Shame;

Yoga. We need to do yoga. Like to stretch and get more flexible. Yoga's fun.

Zumba. Cringe.

Afterword: An Impression

Reading this cyclopedia inaugurates a form of 'data engagement' (Ellingson & Sotirin, 2020) that exceeds conventional research boundaries or 'answers'. Postqualitative approaches perceive data not as inert facts 'out there' waiting to be collected and analysed; rather, data are dynamic and come into being through ontological, epistemological and methodological structures (St Pierre, 2013; Koro-Ljungberg &

MacLure, 2013). Ellingson and Sotirin offer an eloquent image of this idea: ‘Data are less like pebbles researchers gather on a beach and more like the beach itself—constantly shifting sands subject to an ever-changing landscape of rolling waves, sun, wind, and human and nonhuman activity’ (2020, p. 821). In this sense, data are always in motion, always already becoming. This cyclopedia is a small archive of girls’ words, yet there is no endpoint. The sands keep on shifting.

Conceptualising the reading of the cyclopedia as an ‘event’ embraces this dynamism (Bozalek & Taylor, 2021). Reading is not a passive act of consuming static facts, it is an onto-epistemological encounter where meaning emerges relationally (Barad, 2007). Data are lively; they act on us, exceed us, trouble us (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Koro-Ljungberg, 2013; St Pierre, 2013). MacLure (2010, 2013) describes this capacity as the wonder of data: the shards that radiate and ‘glow’ and reach out to grasp us. This cyclopedia is an assemblage that includes participant comments, researcher curiosity and curation (Fox & Alldred, 2014). We are not separate as researchers – these fragments caught our attention, sparking our memories, perhaps from the research process, our own childhoods and teaching experiences. Before entering academia, we both taught physical education in New Zealand schools. Now we work with university students, including preservice teachers who will teach the next generation of young people. We began this project aware physical education is a complex space that privileges some students while marginalising others. Our histories and hopes for physical education are inextricable from the research: they shaped the questions and tasks we designed for participants; the affective atmosphere of the workshops, our shared laughter and moments of commiseration; and ultimately guided the selection of entries that now comprise the cyclopedia.

The reader is also inseparable, their past, present and what may arise in the future, part of the reading ‘event’. Events are open-ended and any ‘meaning’ or impression that might emerge is not fully knowable in advance. Some entries may be perceived as ordinary or contradictory. They may spark sensations of discomfort, curiosity, frustration or hope. As they mingle with readers’ memories, feelings and experiences, impressions always become anew. We might think of reading as a form of ‘plugging in’ (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, 2020) of our own histories, professional knowledge and bodily sensations: ‘Plugging in is a production of the new: *the assemblage in formation*’ (Jackson & Mazzei, 2020, p. 2, emphasis in original). Thus, the cyclopedia is not static; it is always in motion, breathing, becoming.

Methodologically, the cyclopedia refuses closure. It becomes an opening through which questions, connections and possibilities can emerge. In this sense, the cyclopedia’s potential lies in what it produces rather than merely in what it communicates. Reading the cyclopedia as a form of ‘plugging in’, we ‘activate a circuit to see what sparks, jolts, and puts thought in motion’ (Jackson & Mazzei, 2020, p. 3). Instead of interpreting girls’ words, tracing their connections to existing research or pedagogical practices, the emphasis is on what the event makes possible (Bozalek & Taylor, 2021). The affective event of reading might ‘generate sensations resonating in the body as well as the brain’ (MacLure, 2010, p. 282). For us, an entry sometimes sparks a memory viscerally felt in the body, perhaps a tightness in the chest, a deep breath or

a chuckle of recognition. At times, an entry recalls a pedagogical decision we made as teachers, evoking a sense of comfort and affirmation; at other times, a feeling of sadness and regret. The event of reading might leave an impression or animate further thought. An impression can be thought of as ‘an affect that leaves its mark or trace’, and may encompass bodily sensation, emotion and thought (Ahmed, 2014, p. 6). An impression is not predetermined but emerges in the encounter; they are indeterminate matterings that vary with the reader (Barad, 2007).

Attending to impression can value the ordinary, the everyday moments of physical education that leave a trace. Entries may evoke what Kathleen Stewart (2007) calls ordinary affects: the small atmospheres that charge a scene—*Cold* air on bare thighs, the choreography of *Changing Rooms* waiting for the cubicle, the sense of joy sparked through *Friends* and *Peer Support*, the sensation of *Dread* and *Disappointment* settling in the gut. In PE, such atmospheres shape feelings of comfort and belonging; they shape who learns to love moving and who learns to fade to the edges. We are reminded of the embodied impact of physical education on our students, and of the pedagogical responsibility that accompanies it. Physical education spaces and practices leave a residue, and that residue may or may not be what we hoped for or intended.

This readerly encounter may animate further thought, where ‘answers’ are not an endpoint in the research process but ‘an opening’ (Koro-Ljungberg & Barko, 2012, p. 256), perhaps in the form of ‘becoming questions’ that emerge ‘in the middle of things: they glimmer and glow to unsettle and reconfigure thought’ (Jackson & Mazzei, 2020, p.7). For us, we wonder what it would take for *Fun Group* to be the norm rather than the exception? How might we design lessons that avoid *Gender Bias*, *Hogging the Ball* and *Humiliation*? How might *Peer Support* and *Friend Game* reconfigure assessment, safety and skill progression? How do we as teachers notice the myriad forces – physical environment, clothing, menstruation, tiredness, discomfort, peer dynamics – that create *Bad Days* and erode *Motivation*? These questions urge us to consider the purpose of PE and to reflect critically on whether we create conditions that realise or constrain this intent. They invite us to look beyond conceiving PE within existing structures and instead orient our thinking towards the *not yet* – what PE might become. We hope readers will have their own questions². The invitation is open.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

² Our questions arise from our prior experiences teaching physical education in schools, and our current work with pre-service and in-service teachers in the university setting. In creating this cyclopedia, we also have our students in mind as potential readers. What questions and classroom conversations might it spark?

Ethical Approval The study was granted from the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee, 6 May 2024, AUTEC approval number: 24/34 Girls and Physical Education Aotearoa.

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