

## **Micropolitics in Physical Education: Investigating the lived experiences of a new head of department in a secondary school.**

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### **Abstract**

This paper stories the challenges faced by Laura, a young female Head of Physical Education (HoPE) in the North-West of England after moving from London. In exploring the micropolitical realities of her experiences, it shows how power is multifaceted and operates through different levels within the physical education department and throughout the wider school.

Adopting a qualitative methodology, the study used an extended life history interview to chronicle, interpret and (re)present Laura's experiences as a narrative, with the aim of re-telling her story. This research found that different cultures exist in different school departments, leading to variations in the way school leaders acquire and use multiple techniques of power.

The research established that being a HoPE can present a myriad of challenges, namely conflicting ideologies within the department, teachers' longstanding resistance to change and a lack of support from Senior Leaders; all of which can leave a Head of Department vulnerable in their role. This study also shows that, while utilising various form of power – that is, *power through*, *power with* and *power over* her colleagues – Laura was ultimately able to achieve her goals, but the resistance from other staff meant that achieving these came at a significant emotional cost as she ultimately left her role. The implications of this study are threefold: first, for those teachers who seek a move into Middle Leadership, it is important that they are aware of the micropolitical challenges synonymous with these roles; second, that they are able to 'read' these situations as they arise; and third, that they can develop a range of appropriate strategies to counteract resistance from colleagues.

### **Keywords**

Micropolitics; power; strategies; resistance; culture