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## **Power, control and professional influence: the curious case of Physical Education in Scotland.**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The policies advanced for physical education in Scottish schools in recent decades have often been influenced by the contrasting stakeholder views of national educational agencies, teacher education institutions and teachers. This article presents in preliminary fashion a historical and contemporary analysis of the major policy interventions and the influences which have characterized their development. We argue that even though physical education has managed to retain its curriculum presence, lack of clarity and consensus on the nature and direction of subject intentions has frequently led to variable progress. What has helped in these circumstances has been physical education's location as a conduit for various education, health and sport related discussions on achieving policy ambitions. However, further problematic realization of outcomes allied to encroachment from various health and sporting initiatives could mean that the largely fortunate circumstances within which physical education currently operates could change quickly unless identified targets are more clearly met.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Physical education as a curriculum subject has often been quite difficult to fathom; an ever present in the weekly experiences of most pupils but also a subject whose status and educational contribution have been regularly questioned (Thorburn 2010a). It is against this backdrop that subject advocates have been particularly occupied with how best to articulate the curriculum contribution of physical education in order to secure and enhance the subject's place in schools (Bailey & McNamee 2010). As the policy process tends to both frame problems and provide intended solutions (Horrell *et al.* in press) our quest in this paper is to investigate the main influences on policy in physical education in Scotland over the last thirty-five years. In doing so, we particularly focus on the fluctuations in power, control and professional representation that has informed various curriculum reviews. Humes & Bryce (1999) indicate that for a consensus model of policy making to prevail, it requires from the outset stakeholders to recognize that they are not equal contributors and that policy is part of a managed process. Furthermore, McPherson & Raab (1988) suggest that to be part of the policy community requires more than expertise alone. A sense of deference, a respect for confidentiality and an ability to work through the proper channels are necessary. At certain times, variations between a pluralist and corporatist interpretation of a consensus model of policy making exist (McPherson & Raab 1988). Pluralist approaches occur when the expertise of professionals is particularly sought and is characterized by time spent negotiating and agreeing details with all concerned. Corporatist approaches

are defined by more obvious centrist control of policy through, for example, only inviting carefully selected professionals to be involved with policy initiatives. Later in the paper we briefly describe what appears to be a new variation of the corporatist approach where teachers' voluntary contribution to the policy process is sought within subject-based working groups (SQA 2010).

For the present, we set out specifically to understand the extent to which changing policies in physical education have been influenced by contrasting approaches to policy making and by the roles undertaken by national agencies (e.g. examination and curriculum authorities, inspectorate organisations), teacher education institutions (TEIs) and teachers of physical education. Since devolution physical education has moved up the policy agenda, making the following analysis a timely contribution to the debate about the implication of shifting models of policy development (Scottish Executive 2004a: Reid & Thorburn in press). Furthermore, this type of analysis has seldom occurred previously; historical reviews by Thomson (1993: 2003) and contemporary reviews by Thorburn (2010a) being rare exceptions to the case. In setting out our analysis of events, we aim to avoid where possible becoming overly drawn towards the minutia of subject knowledge concerns and intend instead to ensure that arguments are discussed in the context of wider debates about the relationships between the aforementioned stakeholders. However, we are mindful in developing this perspective that subject advocates are often guilty of unduly mystifying their curriculum contribution in order to continue with stable provision (Goodson & Marsh 1996). Therefore, as necessary, contested issues on subject knowledge are teased out in order to better comprehend contrasting influences on policy. In making decisions about a suitable time span for the paper, we recognize the benefits of certain stable points of reference; namely, that from the mid 1970s onwards the majority of secondary schools have been comprehensive in nature and that it has been graduate degree programmes which have been used as the main requirement for entry into the teaching profession. Additionally, our focus is predominantly on secondary school physical education, as various authors e.g. Jess & Collins (2003) and Thorburn *et al.* (2009) have critiqued the particular history and circumstance of primary age physical education programmes. The analysis that follows is grounded in the documentary sources available. However in order to verify the accuracy of our explanations we have informally canvassed a range of current and retired colleagues in order to confirm our interpretation of events and the role of key individuals in the policy process.

## **POLICY MAKING AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

Until the mid 1970s physical education existed in a 'world of its own' where the predominant focus of teachers' reflections was on subject specific issues (Thomson 1993: 6). Curriculum Paper 12 (Scottish Education Department 1972) outlined the relative merits of human movement studies, functional skill-based programmes and the like. This interested many teachers with up to 500 delegates annually attending conferences of the Scottish Physical Education Association (SPEA) on such matters. Thomson (1993: 6) describes this as an 'essentially inward looking' period where physical educationalists were unencumbered by the need to adhere to centrally prescribed course guidelines and assessment protocols. However, in the years

since, various education-wide agendas have required physical educationalists to review their subject aims at a time when there have been doubts over 'the marginality of physical education to the school's central purposes' (Kirk 1988: 137) and where Barrow (1981: 60) considered that 'physical educational instructors are in the interesting position of being only marginally related to education'.

The last thirty-five years bear witness to a particularly intense period of policy making with physical education aims and contribution being discussed across four sets of national educational reforms: in chronological order, the introduction of Standard Grade Physical Education (SGPE) awards for the middle years of secondary schooling in the mid 1980s (SOEID/SCCC 1977); 5-14 Expressive Arts developments in the early 1990s (SOED 1992); the introduction of the Higher Still framework in the 1990s (SOED 1994) and the 3-18 Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) programme from 2004 onwards (Scottish Executive 2004b). Furthermore, commissioned policy reports e.g. the Review Group Report on Physical Education (Scottish Executive 2004a) have also addressed points of unease about the effectiveness as well as the future direction of physical education. Scottish Parliamentary reporting has also been concerned with physical education provision (Scottish Government 2009). In addition, physical education is also associated with policy making interventions and targets in health and sport. For example, concerns over low physical activity levels (Scottish Executive 1998: 2003) and the weak links between physical education and sport more widely (Sport Scotland 2003; Scottish Executive 2007) are outlined in a number of policy statements. Our analysis commences with a review of SGPE and Higher Still developments prior to a review of physical education as part of 5-14 Expressive Arts and CfE programmes. Thereafter, physical education policy links to current health and sport agendas are discussed.

### **Standard Grade Physical Education**

As Brewer & Sharp (1999: 542) indicate the significance of SGPE should 'not be underestimated' due to physical education becoming an examination subject for the first time and its influence upon subsequent course development. Responsibility for the introduction and implementation of SGPE was predominantly in the hands of a Joint Working Party (JWP) which consisted of representatives from the then Scottish Education Department (SED), HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE), examination authorities and national-based curriculum organizations combined with a few selected Head teachers and teachers. JWP members tended to work in consensual ways under the 'assumptive world of officialdom' (Humes 2008: 71). Thomson (1993: 6) commented that within the JWP lecturers from TEIs were increasingly 'marginalized as the fulcrum of power and influence shifted to the SED and the Inspectorate'. In explaining this circumstance, Kirk (2006b) notes the impact of contrasting gender-informed views on the educational contribution of physical education. In 1975, the Scottish Central Committee on Physical Education made a submission which proposed that the 'realms of meaning' framework devised by Phenix (1964) offered greater potential for a movement based subject. The subject emphasis here would be on cognition and conceptual development, and the prominence of aesthetic informed activities such as educational gymnastics and

modern dance. The submission was supported by lecturers at Dunfermline College of Physical Education (the women's college) if not necessarily by female teachers of physical education (Sharp 1990). By contrast, the Scottish School of Physical Education, (the male college) made a later counter submission which emphasized much more the development of perceptual-motor skills through games and sports. It was this view which was endorsed in subsequent SGPE policy reporting. The female view was not just ignored but rejected (Kirk 2006b) with physical education being described as a 'non-cognitive activity' (SOEID/ SCCC 1977: 4.17).

As the overall Standard Grade framework was based on Hirst's influential cognitively-inclined 'forms of knowledge' critique (Hirst, 1974) it could have 'cast physical education well and truly into the educational hinterland' (McNamee 2005: 2). Yet this did not occur as policy makers in physical education (skilfully managed by SED and HMIE advocates during a period of intense industrial action in the mid 1980s), in effect, argued that while Hirst's academic conception of education was essentially correct, it could with some careful adjustment and redefinition, accommodate physical education within it. And so physical education became widely offered as an option in the Creative and Aesthetic 'column' in the new modal curriculum. Physical education had negotiated its first major policy hurdle. Much time was subsequently devoted to teasing out structural design issues associated with offering a broad and inclusive account of physical education. Seconded staff from TEIs worked as development officers offering support to schools. The solution of offering choice at school level based on selecting within certain categories of activities was widely praised (Thomson 1993). The SGPE rationale for integrating practical experiences with content knowledge of activities, fitness and training, skill development and tactical understandings has been relatively popular with pupils and revealed a 'latent demand for structured courses in physical education' (Thomson, 1993: 12). Numbers rose quickly to a level where around a third of students annually chose SGPE (Thomson 2003; Brewer 2008).

The development of SGPE was generally indicative of pluralist policy making. Members of the JWP along with the majority of teachers recognized the benefits of adding examination award provision, especially at a time when graduate only teacher education programmes had recently begun. However, the gendered nature of content knowledge and the way in which some schools constructed their courses has provoked criticism (Menzie's 1997). Additionally, girls have typically made up only 20% to 30% of the cohort of pupils completing awards with figures altering little over the last two decades (Thorburn 2010b). This has generated concern about the quality of girls learning and assessment experiences (Cooper 1995; Menzie's 1998) with at one point an Assessment Panel subcommittee presenting further guidance on how the arrangements for practical performance should be completed (Scottish Examination Board 1997).

### **Higher Still Physical Education**

Initially moves to offer a higher level award in physical education were rejected on the basis of there being no demand for such a qualification (Thomson 1993). However, permission was later granted by the Secretary of State for Scotland for a higher level award. Higher Grade Physical Education (HGPE) began in 1993,



even though it was well known that the new award would require revision as part of the forthcoming Higher Still Development Programme between 1995 and 1999. The JWP for HGPE had a similar representation and leadership influence to that accompanying the development of SGPE, with staff from TEIs again assisting with implementation. Higher Still Physical Education (HSPE) had a similarly constructed (but much larger) development group. However, from the outset, implementation was supported by seconded teachers (rather than TEI lecturers) working closely under the leadership of an HM Inspector. This form of development continued over a five year period with various seconded teachers replacing others over time. There was one TEI representative on the development group. However, Thomson's (1993) observation that their influence was on the wane was certainly evident during the development of HSPE and highlights the more corporatist control of policy which existed at the time (Paterson 2000).

Accordingly, relative to SGPE, less manoeuvrability was available for teachers as more of the overarching design principles had already been decided upon, as policy implementation was expected to be a tightly managed affair which could not become distracted or unduly delayed by teachers' professional concerns (Raffe *et al.*, 2002). Therefore, the dominance of the single rationale advanced for improving performance and understanding (a continuance of a male version of physical education) rarely had the capacity to be challenged in policy making forum. Contrary views tended to come from outside the official policy making community. For example, Reid (1996a; 1996b) a teacher education lecturer at Moray House School of Education, questioned the adequacy of HSPE (largely on the basis of dualist mind/body philosophical concerns, as evidenced by the conceptual confusion of trying to assess practical learning gains by means of extended written answers). However, Reid's alternate treatise on practical knowledge was not discussed during the policy making process; further evidence of the limited role of TEIs and of the disconnection between the research and policy communities which existed (Thorburn 2010b). Nevertheless, despite these concerns physical education had crossed a further policy hurdle. Previous governmental unease about the need for higher level awards was swept aside during Higher Still developments with provision now extending (without delay or political approval) to include awards at Advanced Higher level as well.

However there are difficulties with HSPE. When analysing teaching, learning and assessment at higher level, Thorburn & Collins (2003; 2006) found that only relatively few teachers could retain experiential learning approaches while also securing high levels of attainment. In most courses, there were either marked imbalances between standards of practical performance and analytical thinking or the overuse of rote driven teaching, learning and assessment procedures. These attainment problems have not notably lessened with time with many of the credibility issues associated with offering examinations awards in physical education remaining (Thorburn 2010b). Furthermore, there is continued unease about the rather tight focus on performance improvement pursued from predominantly skill learning, training and tactical perspectives. During the introductions of HGPE and HSPE, curriculum mapping schemas aimed to highlight the importance and availability of an aesthetically informed and personalised perspective on learning. However

this option was rarely selected by teachers as a contributor to their courses with assessment answers remaining few in number and poor in quality (Thorburn 2010a). In addition, diversification into health and wellbeing has only belatedly begun, even though developing a suite of fitness and exercise awards was originally scheduled to begin many years earlier. There are also concerns that the vocational contribution possible in HSPE has yet to be reflected in a greater commitment to supporting coaching and sports organization awards. Therefore, unease remains on whether 'opportunity for all', the major aim of Higher Still awards (SOED 1994) really exists in physical education as yet.

### **Physical education and the 5-14 Expressive Arts Guidelines**

In between examination developments, physical educationalists were also required in the early 1990s to reconsider their place and contribution across the 5-14 age range. The intention to support curriculum breadth and improved teaching led to a fivefold classification of subject areas and recommended time allocations (SOED 1992). Personal and social education was not among the five defined subject areas but was expected to contribute to cross-curriculum teaching as well as being an occasional area of concentrated work (Betteridge 1999). Health education was a component part of the Environmental Studies guidelines. A pluralistic account of physical education might plausibly have been expected to articulate with curriculum guidelines to do with personal, social and health education. However, under the new arrangements physical education was located in the Expressive Arts guidelines (along with Drama, Music and Art) with a nominal allocation of less than 5% of curriculum time in which to articulate with a schedule of Outcomes, Strands and Attainment targets across six levels of achievement.

As the physical education guidelines were framed around rather opaque aesthetic references (under a predominantly cognitive account of physical education) it was always likely that many teachers (in particular, male teachers whose teacher education experiences covered such areas in less detail) would find the guidelines difficult to comprehend. Policy in this instance appears to have been heavily influenced by the role of one female teacher educator in physical education who was the only subject representative on the panel compiling the overall Expressive Arts guidelines. Given the often contested nature of aims in physical education, this is a highly pressured position for a single person to be placed in and something of a weakness in the way the policy community was organised in this instance. Generally, Wilson *et al.*, (2005) found that most teachers did not view the guidelines for the Expressive Arts favourably and for physical education, in particular, Thomson (1996: 42) more forthrightly commented that 'the whole concept of physical education within the Expressive Arts is proving nearly impossible to implement'. HMIE recognised the implementation problems as well, but described them rather differently noting in secondary schools that while 'some departments had, commendably, reviewed their courses in line with the advice on physical education in the national guidelines 5-14 there remain many departments who had yet to do so' (SOEID/HMIE 1995: 3.10).

The managed solution of clustering subjects together appears to have benefited physical education less well than when single subject developments were underway as part of the Standard Grade and Higher Still programmes. Nevertheless, physical

education had crossed a further policy hurdle, even if the new guidelines rarely chimed with many teachers' professional beliefs (Sharp 1990). These curriculum developments also highlight the fluctuating influence of HMIE. While they were credited during the introduction of SGPE for the calibre of their guidance (Thomson 1993), the 5-14 guidelines reflect wider concerns about the reduction in the points of contact between HMIE and scholarly groups, and the impact this had on policy and practice (Weir 2008). A decade on from the introduction of the 5-14 guidelines, HMIE analysis of primary physical education (HMIE 2001) 'was more acerbic in tone than its earlier secondary school equivalent' (Thorburn 2010a: 16). Reporting indicates that only a third of schools were delivering very good programmes with weaknesses including limited integration with other areas of school learning and modest use of effective dialogue and diagnostic feedback. Arguably, an input of new ideas from teacher educators and others was required for greater improvements, coupled with a more open recognition from HMIE of the thinking-in-action challenges teachers faced in implementing the 5-14 guidelines.

Such evidence (along with the continuance of earlier mentioned SGPE and HSPE problems) tends to highlight that the physical education policy community at national level remains relatively incapable of rectifying identified weaknesses. For example, twelve years after the 5-14 Guidelines began, the 'Report of the Review Group on Physical Education' (Scottish Executive 2004a) effectively passed on discussing the validity of physical education as an Expressive Art. The report notes 'strong arguments' on this matter and advises that 'this is an issue which would merit further examination with the aim of providing a clear statement and rationale for the status of physical education in the future' (Scottish Executive, 2004: 27). At this important time, not only was there a relative absence of national leadership, there was also modest local authority support for physical education (due largely to the demise of advisory services) combined with 'the lack of a professional association [similar to the SPEA] to voice its concerns' (Brewer 2003: 592).

However, the security of at least having national guidelines for pupils aged 5-14 years tended to highlight the curriculum weakness of 'core' physical education (weekly programmes of around an hour per pupil per week) during the middle years of secondary schooling (for pupils aged 15-16). In comparison with other areas, provision for these years continued to be relatively unregulated and often squeezed for curriculum time by other competing priorities (Littlefield *et al.*, 2003). The criticism emerging of low interest and participation rates (for girls in particular) along with concerns about the lack of activity choices available made uncomfortable reading (Scottish Executive, 2004a). Some considered the prioritising of examination over core physical education was, in part, responsible for creating this problem (Cairney 2004), yet the situation in Scotland reflects international evidence that core programmes towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century were in crisis, as they were perceived to be remote from the needs of pupils and inflexible in terms of how curricula are constructed (Hardman & Marshall 2005). What happened next was therefore particularly curious, as a combination of three interrelated factors - research evidence of considerable health declines in young people, whole school curriculum reform and the positive advocacy of an influential policy advocate (Peter Peacock) - combined to elevate the status and position of physical education.



## **Physical education, health and wellbeing and Curriculum for Excellence**

Physical education as part of health and well-being is now pivotal to delivering the aims of CfE, a new 3-18 years school wide programme designed to provide greater pupil learning coherence across primary and secondary schooling (Scottish Executive 2004b). Peter Peacock (Minister of Education and Young People from 2002 to 2006) announced that physical education 'is an area of the curriculum which, exceptionally, needs greater priority to support the health and well-being of young people in Scotland' (Scottish Executive 2004c: 1). Thus, the policy process insisted that the centrality of physical education to a balanced education is recognized for its capacity to be the key influence in enacting the cultural change required towards physically active living, even though, as Reid & Thorburn (in press) note, Peacock's decision was taken against the advice of education civil servants who believed it would obstruct a wider curriculum review. Thus, along with numeracy and literacy, health and wellbeing is one of only three areas for which all teachers have a whole school responsibility. The commitment to physical education is supported by a Scottish Government pledge to double curriculum time to a minimum of two hours per week; the only subject time requirement specified in the CfE guidelines. Such a commitment reflects the centrality of schools as they are 'the only place where equity of access and opportunity to good quality' physical education programmes can be achieved (Scottish Executive 2004a: 27). For the present, physical education had negotiated another major policy hurdle.

However, as previously noted, there are concerns about how physical education will manage to fulfil policy expectations. The hub of the current dilemma is that increased policy prominence is not necessarily the same as increased educational worthiness (Kirk 2006a). Therefore, there is a need for physical educators not to be overly drawn into 'playing a political game' (Penney 2008: 33) and to critically consider instead what is distinctive and educational about physical education. Yet, at Scottish Government level, there might be a belief that there is a clear link between poor physical health, increased child obesity rates and the effectiveness of physical education programmes in schools. Key to emphasising health messages in an educational setting therefore will be how the outcomes scheduled for physical education are defined. The high degree of similarity between the outcomes framed for CfE and the 5-14 national guidelines for the Expressive Arts (e.g. very similar outcomes on 'cooperation and competition' and 'evaluating and appreciating') is of concern given how problematic these have proved to implement since the early 1990s (Learning and Teaching Scotland 2009). The similarities highlight a lack of conceptual and pedagogical anticipation about how the new curriculum arrangements can support holistic learning approaches and adequately inform teachers about how outcomes can be straightforwardly realised. Furthermore, noting that CfE outcomes have separated 'physical education' and 'physical activity and sport' is a signal that physical educationalists need to carefully define why employing teachers (rather than say fitness instructors) is worth the investment, as concerns about the relative value of physical education remain. For example, Barrow (2008: 274) continues to argue that when beset by limited resources 'a case might be made for appointing a history teacher rather than a physical education teacher' on the basis that fitness and participation 'in sport and the like could be relatively

easily attained and maintained with or without a school system'; an indication that in Barrow's view at least the educative prospects of physical education have not noticeably improved over the last three decades.

Furthermore, the precise nature of the intended integration between physical and mental, emotional and social wellbeing requires being clear and coherent, so that all teachers can contribute to pupils health and wellbeing. Under the new experiences and outcomes what characterizes mental, emotional and social wellbeing statements is an emphasis on the 'feelings', 'thoughts' and 'skills and strategies' which will help pupils understand more about learning and managing their wellbeing through, for example, improving coping skills and developing positive relationships (Learning and Teaching Scotland 2009). By contrast, descriptions of 'physical wellbeing' only have limited integration with the other (mental, social and emotional) areas of wellbeing. The connections between physical wellbeing statements on 'understanding of the human body', assessing and managing risk', 'keeping myself and others safe' and 'travelling safely', and learning via a first person experiential-based ontology, are relatively undeveloped at present. The current emphasis on safety tends to limit the connections possible with the other areas of wellbeing. It is unfortunate that a more innovative and embodied view of learning has not been developed e.g. through adopting a more personalised perspective on learning which was more in tune with the first person learning imperatives advanced under CfE. The current implementation approach of relying heavily on teachers to devise ways of meeting targets could be problematic as planned improvements not only involve a re-conceptualization of the subject, but teacher involvement in new professional development opportunities which outline how the teaching of physical education can become more informed and expert. In these circumstances, the continued absence of a national steering group or equivalent organization to monitor policy plans is surprising given the increased interest and investment in health and education. Furthermore, given the scale of new thinking required, it might have been helpful if recent HMIE reporting had more forthrightly addressed issues such as integrated learning rather than relying on the their more typical approach of posing questions for teachers to reflect upon (HMIE 2008).

### **Links with the wider community**

In addition, to the above challenges, physical education also needs to consider its connections with wider society ambitions. Historically, this is not a noted attribute of physical education (Kirk 2006b); the claimed collapse of the 'essential continuity between physical education and the conduct of school sport' (Thomson 1993: 9), being perhaps the most notable recent misreading of events. Despite some criticism of the overuse of competition and elitism, the collapse of school sport in the mid 1980s highlighted the disconnection with core physical education programmes, where very often versions of sport were enacted in lessons. What became necessary to improve matters was a centrally organised scheme which would incentivise teachers to contribute to school sport. By the turn of the century the Scottish Executive was interested in funding through their national agency for sport (Sport Scotland) various initiatives to improve participation. The first phase of the School Sport Coordinator Programme (SSCP) from 1999 to 2003 involved

teachers (over 95% of whom were physical education teachers) being released from their teaching duties on a one day per week basis to coordinate school-wide attempts to improve levels of participation. Most teachers, however, did not consider the SSCP role as being a particularly worthwhile part of their professional remit or a contributor towards career development. In addition, persuading other teachers to volunteer their time was difficult due variously to lack of interest and payment, and by teachers' desire to adhere to the new conditions of service agreement (Coalter & Thorburn 2003). Thus, in essence, the remit became one of 'leading' more than 'coordinating'.

However, despite limited evidence of improved participation, the SSCP became subsumed within the more overarching and ambitious 'Active Schools' programme from 2003 onwards with funding committed through to 2011. Every primary network of schools plus each secondary school now has an active sports coordinator for two days each week. However, the requirements to become a coordinator have widened to being degree educated rather than necessarily teacher educated. This could lead to a degree of professional unease among physical education teachers as new partnerships with the extended school community are developed. What appears evident is that these types of professional sensitivities might be more acknowledged in policy discussions with the education (rather than health and sport) community. For example, a noticeable feature of the 'Fit for Girls' (FfG) programme is the open criticism which was made of physical education teaching. For one school it was declared that 'There was neither an interest nor targeted approach to improving girls' participation in PE and sport; consequently a recent school survey found 56% of girls were not enjoying PE' (Sport Scotland 2008: 18). Additionally, there is some concern about the close association and privileged access some policy entrepreneurs can have with the policy process, with involvement possessing little in the way of the usual democratic checks expected (Humes 2008). For example, there were recent signs that policy might be influenced by charitable organizations funded by private capital such as the Winning Scotland Foundation which aims to promote sport and challenge Scots to fulfil their potential by institutionalizing a culture of winning in schools (Thorburn 2009). If the practice of physical education wishes to avoid becoming unduly influenced by such value-laden entrepreneurial associations, it would be useful if teachers could, as proactively as possible, coherently outline how government targets can be realized in ways which promote the educational merits of pupils' learning experiences.

## **CONCLUSION**

The evidence from analysis of physical education over four sets of major policy reforms in the last three decades present a curious mix of findings. On the plus side the subject can take some satisfaction in that it has demonstrated it can respond relatively constructively when working under centrally prescribed policy arrangements. Even when beset by inter-subject divisions on aims and purposes, there has been a collective recognition nevertheless of the need to build a curriculum base rather than face the adverse effects of becoming an even more marginalized and low status presence. However, when the emphasis has been less on reacting to events and more on designing solutions, greater problems are apparent, e.g. the

difficulties there have been in responding to identified weaknesses with: the quality of girls learning experiences in SGPE; the opaque language and teaching advice in the 5-14 Expressive Arts Guidelines; and the chronic imbalance between levels of practical standards of performance and analytical understanding in HSPE. The lack of a thriving professional development culture and professional association has been further exacerbated by the demise of advisory services and support at local authority level.

Overall, therefore, the scale of revisions ahead under the CfE reforms, coming as they do with an increased responsibility for designing courses across an entire 3-18 age range (including the creation of new national qualifications to replace previous Standard Grade and Intermediate level Higher Still awards from 2013 onwards), raises some concerns. Furthermore, policy on these matters is being taken forward by SQA generated Subject Working Groups largely consisting of teachers who are willing to volunteer their time. Policy now appears to be shaped by volunteerism rather than the patronage and privilege models of times past (SQA 2010). However, given what is involved we must wonder whether volunteerism by itself is an adequate point of entry for assuming responsibility in framing national policies. While the patronage model was far from equal and ideal, it did at least contain the possibility that those with adequate experience and knowledge might be invited to contribute to addressing policy priorities. Current developments tend to confirm the controlling influence of national education agencies and the continuing decline of TEs and subject knowledge debate. Arguably this could create future difficulties in merging research with improved teaching on such matters as how in CfE to integrate physical wellbeing with other aspects of wellbeing. Priestley & Humes (2010) note how CfE in general might fail to generate the type of learning improvements planned, and similarly in physical education confusion on aims and methods might lead many teachers to reproduce programmes which reflect their own beliefs, rather than use their increased teacher autonomy to redraw and enlarge their definition of professional practice.

Yet, despite these concerns, physical education has now a much more visible 'centre stage' curriculum presence than previously. Driven predominantly by health evidence, physical education is considered to be a major contributor to bringing about school and community based active lifelong learning improvements. However, the lack of definition about how to meet outcome targets risks non delivery, if past evidence is anything to go by. Core physical education in the middle years of secondary schooling has frequently faced the biggest problems, with lack of guidelines and mixed policy messages not helping matters (Thorburn 2010a). In future years, other policy advocates predominantly from health and sport backgrounds may try to influence matters more. Arguably, this currently places physical education in the curious position of being both closer to centre stage, and potentially closer to curriculum obscurity, at one and the same time.



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