

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

A portrait of current practice in Scottish schools and pre-school centres

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Introduction

Physical Education – a portrait of current practice is one in a series of portraits by HMIE, depicting current practice in key aspects of the Scottish curriculum. The portrait series is a recent initiative by HMIE, flowing from the *Improving Scottish Education* (ISE) report¹. It is intended to promote improvements in Scottish education by drawing on the findings of inspections to stimulate reflection and debate. From time to time, portraits will be enhanced to include case studies of effective practice, usually to coincide with a good practice event in that subject.

An important purpose of the portrait series is to relate existing pedagogy and curricular provision to the aspirations of *Curriculum for Excellence* (CfE)². By stimulating debate about teaching for effective learning, the portraits will challenge us all to review the extent to which current practice is successfully promoting the four capacities in all young learners.

This portrait is based on evidence obtained from HMIE visits to schools during the period 2002 to 2007. These visits included both general inspections and other visits to examine effective practice. Inspectors evaluated the quality of learning, teaching, meeting learners' needs and achievement.

¹ Improving Scottish Education. HM Inspectors of Education 2006

² CfE - The four capacities: Successful Learners; Confident Individuals; Responsible Citizens; and Effective Contributors

Improving Scottish Education

Improving Scottish Education (ISE) was published by HMIE in March 2006. It suggests building on the strengths in Scottish education to meet the needs of learners and improve their levels of achievement so that they are able to meet the challenges of a global society. Meeting social challenges provides the context for this portrait on physical education. The portrait considers two key areas in which significant scope remains for physical education to make a greater contribution to learners' development.

- **Encouraging a greater sense of responsibility and independence.** Many physical education teachers recognise the benefits of providing some learning experiences where pupils can direct their own learning. Teachers know that learners are more likely to be engaged and challenged when taking part in relevant experiences which motivate them to improve their own performances. However, these opportunities are yet to be enjoyed by learners in many physical education lessons and in a good number of schools.
- **Increasing learners' self-confidence and ability to collaborate in achieving success.** Many physical education teachers are providing learning opportunities that require active collaboration and group working. High quality collaborative activities at the secondary stages that build effectively on pupils' prior learning, help to develop self-confidence and prepare pupils better for the future. Inspectors find that collaborative tasks are less frequent at the secondary stages than in primary. Some pupils disengage from physical education because their learning experiences do not sufficiently promote their self confidence. In some cases this may be because pupils have a poor self or body image, are perhaps overweight or shy, or perhaps feel less well coordinated than their peers. Some, including a disproportionate amount of girls, opt out of physical education and physical activity because they are not offered sufficient choice which reflects their individual needs. To counter these negative outcomes, as teachers we need to further our awareness of the barriers some young people face when coming to physical education, improve breadth and choice of experiences to meet their needs, and promote an increased awareness of opportunities available after school and in the community for pupils to participate in physical activity. Specific skills which help serve this purpose include experiences where learners have to work in pairs, small groups and teams to provide solutions to problems and challenges allowing them to perform more successfully.

Physical Education and Curriculum for Excellence

How can physical education help to develop successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors?

Physical education teachers are increasingly recognising the potential of CfE to improve learners' achievement. Physical education has many strengths to build on. High quality physical education can encourage young people to develop knowledge, understanding and skills across a range of physical education, sport and health – enhancing experiences. More than that, it can develop in them the desire and commitment to continue to enjoy, improve and achieve in line with their own personal capacities throughout their lifetime. While recognising that physical education contributes in many ways to holistic achievement, this section of the portrait explores some of the more specific contributions which the subject can make in the context of each of the four capacities.

SUCCESSFUL LEARNERS

What do we do well presently in physical education to develop successful learners?

As successful learners, children and young people need to develop the capacity to learn both independently and as part of groups. This is central to the teaching approaches in physical education in effective schools. Learners are often successful and make good progress when physical education programmes are well balanced and varied. This happens best when secondary physical education departments are well aware of a pupil's experiences in primary school and ensure that experiences build effectively on prior learning.

Successful learners often have a range of highly developed skills and can apply these effectively and with fluency in a wide range of activities. Well-developed fitness levels ensure that learners can sustain a high level of performance. Successful learners demonstrate a secure understanding of the movement principles and fitness that underpin successful performance. Some of the features of effective physical education provision which promote success in learning include the following.

- Performances by groups, teams and pairs of learners are enhanced when teachers arrange for the participants to communicate purposefully with each other.
- Increasingly, learners in physical education use technology to improve their performances, although this tends to be restricted to examination courses.
- Independent learning has a high profile in effective lessons, particularly where learners are given the opportunity and time to develop and progress their individual skill levels.
- Learners are given opportunities to be creative and to make reasoned evaluations of their own and of others' performance.
- In most secondary schools, course content at Standard Grade provides variety and pupils respond well. Learners make good progress in Standard Grade and the vast majority gain awards at General or Credit levels.

The following are specific examples of effective practice in encouraging successful learners through physical education.

- *Children in the nursery were successfully extending their skills in learning outdoors through orienteering as part of their physical development and movement programme.*
- *Primary pupils had additional experiences in creative dance, over and above physical education time as part of an arts across the curriculum project. Their high quality performances were further integrated with other subject specific work across the school such as environmental studies projects.*
- *Girls in the secondary school were being well served by the physical education department's provision of a wider range of aesthetic and fitness oriented activities with a critical emphasis on a diverse range of dance experiences. They were successfully extending their repertoire of skills within dance enabling them to create their own movement sequences.*
- *As part of their swimming experiences, staff helped to develop pupils' understanding of technique through the integration of information and communication technology (ICT) as part of their learning experience. This helped them to make their stroke more effective and further improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their performance.*
- *Pupils were successfully developing their ability to set appropriate goals and targets to improve their performance. This helped them to ensure their practice was focussed and their performance was being monitored. It contributed to their ability to be resilient in pursuing goals and coping with setbacks.*

Signpost to successful learners

Successful learners in physical education may display the following characteristics.

- *They develop and apply practical skills to pursue a healthy lifestyle and for the sense of accomplishment, achievement and enjoyment associated with healthy and successful competition.*
- *They understand the effects of physical activity and exercise on their body and on their lifestyles.*
- *They assess their skill level and ways of improving and 'read situations' in activities when deciding responses.*
- *They understand the physical, social and emotional factors that influence their performance.*
- *They move competently, confidently, safely and with fluency.*
- *They make reasoned evaluations of their own health and wellbeing.*
- *They embrace challenge and change with optimism.*
- *They express themselves creatively within individual and group contexts.*
- *They demonstrate resilience in competitive and challenging situations.*
- *They set and review personal goals for achievement in health and wellbeing.*
- *In making decisions about their performance they demonstrate an understanding of the major movement principles critical for success.*

Moving towards excellence – how might physical education contribute more to the development of successful learners?

In improving the quality of provision, teachers are likely to consider how effective their approaches are for developing responsibility and independence in all learners. They may also consider the extent to which their programmes link effectively with other stages to ensure that pupils build on their prior learning and experiences over time. Features of practice in schools where scope remains to improve aspects of provision may include the following.

- While the most effective provision includes a wide choice of experiences, care needs to be taken to ensure that the needs of all pupils, particularly girls, are well met. Outdoor learning opportunities are not always well provided for.
- In more than a few primary and secondary schools, physical education experiences are not part of a well planned curricular framework but are often mainly opportunities for physical activity and recreation. Such opportunities are not always fully developing pupils' skills and understanding in a way that will allow them to become more successful and confident learners.
- While pupils are introduced to different kinds of learning in new situations in the early years of secondary, this is not sufficiently the case from S3 onwards.
- Progression from S2 into S3 is not always well planned, particularly for girls. Pupils can become less interested and more disengaged from physical education and physical activity again at S4.
- At Higher and Intermediate levels, learning experiences tend to be much narrower in focus with some learners experiencing a course which is not particularly well suited to their needs. Courses often have little choice or flexibility, few aesthetic elements and in some cases as few as two elements.

It is the quality of learning experiences within individual lessons, however, that can make the greatest impression on pupils' success. The following questions are drawn from features of effective learning and teaching, and may be helpful when teachers consider the way lessons are delivered to promote successful learning.

- Do lessons begin with an overview which shares purposes and sets expectations?
- Are demonstration, discussion, evaluation and review of progress important features of the lesson?
- Do learners have high levels of participation, engagement and sustained activity?
- Do teachers strike a good balance between developing skills and applying them in contexts?
- Do teachers provide specific and detailed feedback to individuals to allow them to overcome barriers to their learning and progress?

- Are learners well motivated and physically and mentally challenged?
- Is good attention paid to addressing differences in pupils' needs?
- Do teachers sufficiently promote pupils thinking and understanding through open questioning?
- Are sufficient time, space and resources provided to enable all pupils to learn and achieve?
- Is the value of physical education explained in a way that all stakeholders can understand?
- Do teachers promote positive attitudes to physical education and physical activity and show enthusiasm for physical activity themselves?
- Are high expectations set for what individuals can achieve through physical education?
- Do lessons finish with a plenary which links to the learning objectives for the lesson, thereby allowing pupils to assess their own progress during the lesson?

EFFECTIVE CONTRIBUTORS

What do we do well presently in physical education to develop effective contributors?

As effective contributors, children and young people are equipped to make individual and group contributions to team and school successes. For example, through sport leadership programmes they can learn how to lead and promote aspects of the physical development of other young people. Strengths within this area include the ability of learners to work successfully independently, in partnerships and in teams. All learners benefit from being given the opportunity to lead and take the initiative in directing the work of groups, often developing problem solving techniques as they prepare strategies and solutions.

As effective contributors, learners are equipped to work in partnerships and teams to solve problems in and through activity and to create and develop solutions in performance. In order to bring about success it is vital that they are involved in sharing their ideas through effective communication and in developing their solutions collaboratively with others.

The following are descriptions of specific examples of effective practice in encouraging effective contributors through physical education.

- *Pupils in P7 had developed their skills and competencies well through the physical education programme. This was helping them to make effective contributions to individual and team performances across a range of both new and familiar activities.*

Signpost to effective contributors

Effective contributors in physical education may display the following characteristics.

- *They can engage positively in experiences that are fun, enjoyable, exciting and challenging in a variety of contexts including the outdoors.*
- *They can explore feelings, attitudes, relationships and values in relation to health-related activity and interact well with others.*
- *They can participate positively with others in a range of health-enhancing activities, demonstrating initiative, leadership and problem solving abilities.*
- *They can contribute to the wider life of the school and community through involvement in physical and health-related activities.*
- *They can contribute to decisions about the content of the health and wellbeing programmes and how they are delivered.*

- *Senior pupils were undertaking a course leading to the Community Sports Leader Award. They led physical education lessons at local primary schools working with learners at various stages.*
- *Pupils in S1/S2 were benefiting from a block of skill acquisition activities. The activities were included in the S1 core programme for all learners. This experience presented learners with opportunities to practise the coordination, balance, timing and movement skills which were pivotal in terms of accessing other aspects of their programme successfully.*
- *A group of S5/S6 girls undertook a course leading to the Junior Dance Leader Award. The participants drew on their knowledge and experience of dance, much of which was developed during their own time out of school.*

- *The school was encouraging effective contributions, in and out of school, from all pupils in physical education through a range of experiences which were well matched to individuals' needs. Through their varied, attractive and highly appropriate delivery they had further established links through active schools coordinators and others, with groups who were well established in the local community.*
- *Physical education experiences had a pivotal role in equipping all pupils with the necessary skills and confidence to take advantage of the range of opportunities for personal achievement available in the wider life of the school, through provision of extra curricular activities and outdoor learning.*

Moving towards excellence – how might physical education contribute more to the development of effective contributors?

Overall, while learners are often given good opportunities to communicate with each other as an integral part of their learning, they do not have the same opportunities to apply critical thinking. The following questions are drawn from features of effective practice found in many schools, and may be helpful when, as teachers, we consider the way activities are planned to promote effective contributors.

- In improving the quality of pupils' experiences, to what extent have we considered how we develop more effective contributors by enhancing pupils' practical understanding of the principles underpinning performance, rather than simply the technical detail of skills development?
- How effectively do we build on learners' prior learning and earlier willingness to contribute effectively in lessons, for example as secondary teachers by having a sound awareness of and taking learners' primary school experiences into consideration?
- Do we ensure that experiences enable learners to contribute fully at all stages, thereby helping them to raise their performance levels progressively from stage to stage?
- Are a few pupils opting out of physical education? If so why?
- To what extent do we evaluate the quality of learners' experiences in physical education, and the extent to which all children and young people contribute fully?
- How effectively do we promote learners' achievements in physical education through monitoring and tracking, and profiling and sharing this information with learners to help them plan their next steps in their learning?
- Does our delivery of experiences encourage learning and involvement in physical activity and sport beyond school?

Signpost to confident individuals

Confident individuals may display the following characteristics.

- *They work well independently and with other pupils.*
- *They apply knowledge and understanding of safe practices.*
- *They demonstrate responsibility for their own health by making informed and appropriate lifestyle choices.*
- *They reflect critically on a range of health issues and develop decision-making skills.*
- *They apply their knowledge and understanding of risk in order to keep safe.*
- *They use skills to cope with pressures, conflicts and life changes.*
- *They recognise and deal with peer and media pressure in the context of health and wellbeing.*
- *They identify appropriate sources of help and support to live a healthy lifestyle.*
- *They develop self-awareness and build self-esteem through health and wellbeing experiences.*
- *They pursue a healthier lifestyle.*
- *They willingly grasp leadership opportunities.*
- *They embrace competition positively.*

CONFIDENT INDIVIDUALS

What do we do well presently in physical education to develop confident individuals?

Pupils' confidence can be significantly enhanced through a sense of physical, mental and emotional wellbeing and self-respect stemming from their participation in physical education. This will often include experiences which help to develop their psycho-motor skills.

- Strengths in developing confident individuals include enabling pupils to pursue a healthy and active lifestyle. Pupils generally have opportunities to achieve in a wide range of different physical activities which often include dance, gymnastics, individual, team, fitness and water based experiences.
- The learning and teaching approaches chosen by the teacher have the potential to greatly influence the degree to which pupils develop confidence. Over recent decades teachers have embraced methods of delivery beyond a reliance on teacher-directed learning. Many effective schools have widened the pupils' experience to include opportunities for guided discovery, problem solving, peer and self-assessment and individualised learning. Pupils generally respond positively and gain in confidence from these varied approaches.

- At Higher, many effective departments have moved towards greater independence for the pupils in both thought and action, where the role of the teacher changes at times from directing to facilitating and coordinating learning. Increasingly, assessment for learning is helping to improve learning and teaching approaches.
- Courses at Higher in some schools use ICT to enrich learning, although practice is not yet consistent. Many departments are still building up their resources, or taking part in staff development, such as learning from colleagues, in order to enhance their skills.
- Within National Qualifications, some schools are providing pupils with more opportunities to plan and analyse their performance in a systematic way. Within Advanced Higher courses the emphasis is on refining performance and handing responsibility over to pupils to direct their learning through discussion.

The following are descriptions of specific examples of effective practice in encouraging confident individuals through physical education.

- *Pupils at a primary school were becoming more confident individuals through very good physical education links with pre-primary programmes and well-established links with the local secondary schools. This ensured that pupils were well prepared for their future experiences and that their progress was maximised.*
- *Primary pupils were developing their confidence further through well-structured cricket and golf experiences as part of their physical education experiences. They were more confident about their performance and their likelihood of success in new activities as a result, and more confident about benefiting from opportunities within their community to extend their involvement.*
- *Secondary pupils were becoming more confident performers through developments across the physical education curriculum. These developments included integrating ICT into learners' experiences, and an expansion of non-traditional activities which included Ultimate Frisbee, 'futebol de salo', Handball and Tag Rugby.*
- *Girls were experiencing an enhanced core physical education programme through links with a local college which provided experiences to lead pupils in fitness, dance and box-ercise activities. This was enhancing girls' self confidence in their ability to cope effectively with new skills and movements.*
- *Secondary pupils were benefiting from the school's approach to include outdoor learning opportunities in the core and choice programme for pupils which included both dry-slope skiing and orienteering. Such experiences boosted pupils' confidence through receiving positive feedback about their ability to tackle new challenges and cope with the unpredictable nature of learning outdoors and handling the accompanying risk.*
- *Pupils with additional support needs in the additional support needs department were being presented with a wide range of experiences in physical education which were tailored specifically to their needs. The experiences included good scope for them to participate with other mainstream pupils in such a way as to further enhance their confidence levels.*
- *Staff were successfully promoting greater confidence in pupils through: the regular use of praise and encouragement; controlling competition at times to allow a focus on individual improvement rather than comparative performance; the promotion of a wide variety of role models; listening and taking action on pupils' views about the types of experiences to which they will respond positively, including more elements of personalisation and choice to meet learners' needs more directly; the setting and achievement of personal goals; the use of detailed, positive and personalised feedback and the celebration of success in different ways for different learners.*

Moving towards excellence – how might physical education contribute more to the development of confident individuals?

Promoting confidence in all learners is a significant matter for those teaching physical education. Is the delivery of experiences producing confident individuals across the entire pupil spectrum? For many of our learners, confidence in their ability, their self image, their views of their performance relative to others and their attitude to physical education, health and wellbeing are poorly developed at present. This is particularly the case for those who are overweight, shy, lacking in confidence, less well coordinated and those who are not games players or are uncompetitive by nature. Have staff considered the extent to which they ensure that physical education provides opportunities for all learners to experience success, at all levels of prior achievement? Are all learners presented with opportunities for choice to make learning more motivating and appropriate to their individual needs and aspirations? Is confidence promoted for certain groups only?

The following questions are drawn from features of effective practice found in many schools, and may be helpful when, as teachers, we consider the way physical education experiences promote confidence in all pupils.

- Are we confident that all learners have the same scope for developing personal confidence through their physical education experiences?
- Are learning experiences imaginative, creative, stimulating and challenging?
- How effectively is ICT used to enrich learners' confidence through understanding and personal reflection on performance, in experiences at all stages?
- Do staff interact regularly with pupils to provide them with a clear idea about the barriers in their learning, areas where they are lacking confidence, and strategies on how to overcome them?
- To what extent do we use indoor and outdoor learning experiences to promote team working, motivation, and to enable pupils to assess risk and take decisions?
- Do staff ensure that they provide experiences which involve all pupils at all times during the lesson, or do some lose confidence through not being involved or selected?
- Are pupils confident enough in their abilities to continue to be actively involved out-with school and to confidently seek out such opportunities for physical activity and sport within the local community?

RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS

What do we do well presently in physical education to develop responsible citizens?

As responsible citizens, learners are enabled to participate responsibly in and contribute to the sporting, social and cultural life of their school and community. This participation is often founded on an appreciation and respect for contributions made by others.

Signpost to responsible citizens

In physical education responsible citizens may display the following characteristics.

- *They make informed choices and decisions about the nature of their involvement in physical education.*
- *They evaluate their own and others' contribution to team play and performances.*
- *They respect and value others' right to participate, perform and achieve in physical education.*
- *They respect the contribution of others in group and team play.*
- *They demonstrate a commitment to participate responsibly in social and cultural sporting events.*
- *They can cooperate effectively with others to reach a successful outcome.*
- *They can handle the outcome of competition well and consider defeat to be part of the learning process.*

Key to physical education's contribution to developing responsible citizens is the promotion of respect for the involvement of others. It is also essential that children and young people learn to participate responsibly in physical activities, particularly performances in group or team situations. A commitment to responsible participation is vital if success is to be achieved. Through participation in physical education and other physical activities, pupils can be encouraged to take more of a part in the social, cultural and sporting life of the school.

Through taking part in a variety of physical and health promoting experiences, pupils develop the resilience to appreciate the outcomes of competition, for example the emotions involved in winning or losing. They learn how to be 'good sports'. They are helped to recognise that participation has a positive impact on improving performance and is part of an ongoing learning process. Pupils are also given the opportunity to recognise and cope more effectively with risk and handle such experiences in a mature and responsible manner.

The following are descriptions of specific examples of effective practice in encouraging responsible citizens through physical education.

- *Primary school learners in physical education were presented with regular opportunities to observe and comment on other learners' performances with the aim of ensuring a shared understanding of the features leading to high- quality performance. Positive and constructive feedback was being given in a way that showed respect for all involved.*
- *Pupils in P7 had developed their skills and competencies well through the varied physical education programme. They were actively involved during break and lunchtimes in leading and promoting active play with early years learners.*

- *Blind pupils were being given the opportunity to take part in a wide range of outdoor adventure activities as an enhancement of their physical education programme on an annual basis. Such experiences were helping them to increase their confidence and to develop their understanding of how to act responsibly in the outdoors and to appreciate Scotland's natural heritage.*
- *Senior girls were involved in leading an after-school club for pupils from a local special school which focussed on a movement programme. The girls were developing responsibility for organising pupils' experiences.*

Moving towards excellence – how might physical education contribute more to the development of responsible citizens?

To what extent have teachers considered how, through planning for a wide range of opportunities, pupils can be increasingly challenged and motivated to become more responsible and independent citizens through their learning in physical education? The following questions are drawn from features of effective practice found in many schools, and may be helpful when, as teachers, we consider the way in which experiences in physical education help all children and young people to develop as responsible citizens.

- Do we provide learning experiences that enable all pupils to appreciate winning and losing, and to develop the resilience to handle the emotions of each experience?
- Are cooperative and competitive learning experiences embedded within the delivery of physical education to ensure all pupils have opportunities to experience all facets of performing?
- Do we ensure that all children and young people have opportunities to contribute to the wider sporting and cultural aspects of the school and community?
- Do any of the activities we offer inadvertently exclude some groups of pupils, and prevent them from having good opportunities to learn to value, appreciate and respect the contributions and skills of others?