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<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9045-2446> (2019) Physical Education,  
Citizenship and Social Justice: A Position Statement. *Quest*, 71 (2).  
pp. 188-201.

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**Physical Education, Citizenship and Social Justice:  
A Position Statement**

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This article examines the complex but seldom articulated relationship of primary physical education, citizenship and social justice. We argue that to conflate physical *activity* and sport with physical *education* in unacknowledged ways may serve to perpetuate the status quo. More significantly the current emphasis on *activity* through competitive sport in the teaching of physical *education* in primary schools is both reductive and educationally limiting, affecting not only teachers' professionalism but the wider educational experience of young people. The trend towards competitive sport at the expense of a broader educational experience further represents a potentially serious omission: an abrogation of responsibility on the part of schools in England and Wales to meet the statutory requirements of the Education Reform Act (1988). On the thirtieth anniversary of the Act we adopt a novel approach, utilising Foucauldian ideas, to examine movements in the development of policy and understand the contemporary context as a means to suggest more propitious ways forward.

## **Key Words**

## **Introduction**

On the thirtieth anniversary of the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) we consider the spirit of the Act in order to examine the current state of physical education (i.e. curriculum content and specialist teachers) and further explore related concerns around teacher professionalism (Sloan 2010) and the pupil experience (Kirk 2012). In particular, we argue that contemporary practices in primary physical education in England rely heavily, if not always exclusively on children's engagement in competitive sport, often at the expense of a wider and more encompassing physical education experience.

Since the 1980s there has been a growing tendency to elide and conflate the concepts: physical *education* and physical *activity* to a point at which today the two are often

uncritically combined and commonly employed interchangeably. This was most evident, for example, in the publication: *Physical Education from 5 to 16* (HMI 1989, p.2), in which the aims placed clear emphasis upon physical activity in terms of the affective need to ‘foster self-esteem through the acquisition of physical competence and poise’ and also cognitively, in developing ‘an understanding of the importance of exercise in maintaining a healthy life’. This comes as no surprise for, as Sparkes (1989) noted at the time, health-related fitness became a major innovation within physical education throughout the 1980s with the movement gaining uncritical acceptance and significant momentum in schools. Similarly, Kirk (1988) discussed the influence and growing popularity of health-based physical education as part of a more pervasive discourse of health-related fitness. More critically perhaps, Evans and Clark (1988) argued that the problem with activity-led approaches in physical education is that they define a ‘philosophy of action’ (p.126) in which the proclivity towards health-related fitness brings with it strong, individualist overtones; a by-product of neo-liberal ideology. In practice by placing responsibility for health upon the individual rather than taking wider account of important social processes: social class, gender, ethnicity and other structural inequalities, key issues of citizenship and social justice may be lost or unwittingly overlooked. Indeed, the prevalence of an individualist ideology bequeathed from a predominantly middle class vantage point can produce an effect of power (Foucault, 2002a) that silences social inequality and further assuages an uncritical and largely unchallenged common sense perspective: that everyone has the same opportunity and hence responsibility.

This prevailing tendency is exacerbated by the unhelpful alignment and often conflicting interests (Scruton and Flintoff 2002) of physical activity and sport (Bailey et al. 2009). Indeed, sport has long been a dominant theme in state-sector physical education dating back over half a century. Emerging from the 1960s and 1970s onwards its philosophy eventually expanded through the publication: *Sport for All* (Green et al. 2005). The

ascendancy of sport in physical education has historically appealed to a spirit of meritocracy, competition and the ability of the individual to excel (Sparkes 1991; Marsden and Weston 2007). In contrast, we suggest a more egalitarian, child centred and progressive orientation – (concerned with notions of inclusion, personal and social development and pro-social behaviour), is in closer keeping with the purported aims and values of the ERA (1988). Rhetorically, at least, the Education Reform Act places a statutory responsibility on schools to provide a broad and balanced curriculum that ‘promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society’ and which ‘prepares pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life’ (NCC, 1990, p.1). Thus we argue that emphasis on sport and the *physical* alone is unlikely to be entirely sufficient in realising the aspirations of young people in specific local contexts, where needs invariably differ and hence a more nuanced approach is required (Kirk, 2002).

In the context of physical education and school sport, Bailey et al. (2009, p.1) argue there are at least ‘four broad domains: physical, social, affective and cognitive’ which should accommodate the value and wider educational benefits of physical education. On a cognate theme, Harris (2018 p.2) has suggested that ‘high quality physical education ... [can] contribute to children’s confidence, self-esteem and self-worth; enhance social development by helping children to cooperate and compete and to develop a sense of fairness, justice and respect’. Taken at face value the development of these and other salient values and dispositions would seem to represent the constituents of a notion of high quality physical education that transcends the exclusivity of health-related fitness and/or competitive school sport. Of course this may not apply in all cases and it is certainly worth noting that physical education may not produce the alleged positive outcomes for all children and may instead be more socially exclusive than inclusive, as reported. Regardless our contention is that the current climate may otherwise deny the *possibility* of a more positive experience, especially

in contexts that are pedagogically challenged and/or constrained by the exponential rise of private providers, sports coaches and instructors (Harris 2018; Lyle 2002, of which, more later). The resultant collateral impact has affected not only the pupil experience but further resulted in primary teachers becoming increasingly de-professionalised, especially in terms of losing currency, contact and pedagogical expertise in teaching physical education (Harris 2018). Following the preceding discussion our purpose now is to focus on policy-making as a means to identify and elucidate key moments in the evolution and development of physical education over the last thirty years. We follow significant policy movements, since the inception of the ERA, not only to establish reasons for the current trend in physical education policy and practice but also to demonstrate how national debates and policy developments can be seen to coalesce around global neo-liberal policy orientations (Ball, 2013).

### **Theoretical approach**

Given the emphasis on policy processes, we employ a Foucauldian approach to examine the evolution and political formation of policy developments and other linked discourses. Foucault's concepts are especially useful in this regard in helping draw our attention to prevailing continuities and discontinuities in policy making, and in further showing how such salient discourses are constitutive of knowledge around contemporary practices. In employing the term: discourse we understand that it 'approximates to a framework of meaning that is historically produced in a particular culture at a particular time' (Foucault 2002b, p.209). Accordingly, our analysis shows how so-called 'truths' around policy-making produce an 'effect of power' (Foucault, 2002a) that speaks into existence a range of contemporary practices, moving us away from broader values and dispositions towards a default 'regime' of competitive sport. This produces an insoluble tension in which many schools are now unable to fulfil statutory responsibilities let alone a genuine moral commitment to wider notions of citizenship - (implicit in the ERA, subsequent cross-

curricular guidance and more formally mandated through the secondary Order in 2002) - as part of a broad, balanced and socially-just physical education curriculum. Of course, the question of whether schools have ever been to do this fully remains an intractably moot point.

Theoretically, we mobilise our analysis through a genealogical account that presents a selection of significant moments to enable insights to be drawn on the formation of knowledge and truth around contemporary practice. For Foucault (1991), genealogy is a nebulous concept, mapping and tracing a complex anatomy of continuities and discontinuity. Given that ‘discourses are formed by specific rules that make it possible for some statements, but not others, to be made at particular times, places and institutional locations’ (Foucault 1976, p. 52), we ask both: who are the ‘transmitting authorities’ and the intended ‘subjects’ of policy making? Our selections in this process are unavoidably contained within policy choices that, at best, provide only limited insights. They are thus simultaneously revealing and concealing. As Foucault (2002b, p.5) would affirm (policy) discourses have ‘several pasts, several forms of connexion, several hierarchies of importance, several networks of determination, several teleologies’. This suggests only fragments of ‘truth’ are possible. Moreover, such ‘discursive practices’ have so-called ‘relational modalities’ (Foucault, 2002a) that cross with movements in politics and the media. A relatively recent example is how such political enunciations around a perceived impending crisis of obesity produce a moral imperative to encourage health related fitness with reported corollary benefits for mental health and resilience (Rumsby, 2015). Crucially, then, physical education is reconstituted a panacea to address a perceived epidemic as part of a more complex, variable and politically-charged formation. This produces a discursive terrain through which teachers are reconstructed: ‘subjects’ to be shaped and re-professionalised as responsible moral agents. In what follows, we draw on four key milestones in contemporary policy, to examine how such moments have negatively impacted the culture of primary physical education, teachers and

the pupil experience. We conclude with a recommendation, the cornerstone of our position statement: a case study of good practice through the realisation of a whole-school approach to physical education.

### **The emergence of the National Curriculum**

Following the Education Reform Act three years elapsed before the inaugural National Curriculum Order for Physical Education was finally published. This followed extensive consultation of some four-hundred and ten bodies, including local education authorities in England, curriculum advisers, assessment and validating bodies, career associations, invited members of industry, parents and a broad range of further and higher education associations and institutions (NCC, 1991, p. 33).

In policy terms the document provided relatively few surprises. On the one hand it produced somewhat seamless continuity with the preceding decade's emphasis on health related fitness: 'end of key stage statements ... make it sufficiently clear that attainment in physical education should be judged mainly on the basis of pupils' physical activity' (NCC, 1991, p.13). On the other, it emphasised, much more than previously, the importance of developing:

... a broad and balanced physical education curriculum which is progressive, stimulating and challenging for pupils of all abilities. Physical education has important effects on health, life-styles and interpersonal skills (NCC, 1991, p.4).

The appeal to breadth and balance is buttressed with recognition that the curriculum should also 'allow sufficient flexibility in relation to the talents and interests of the pupils' (p.10) and that such flexibility 'will enable virtually all pupils to demonstrate achievement ... with little or no interpretation of modification required for pupils with SEN (p.11).

Rhetorically the latter conveyed an interesting departure from the foreshadowed ideology of



individualism and hence a potentially more inclusive orientation. This is best captured in the view that: ‘at Key Stages 1 and 2 all pupils should experience the five areas of athletic activities, dance, games, gymnastic activities and outdoor and adventurous activities’ (p.13) supplemented with ‘the requirement that all pupils should learn to swim at least 25 metres and demonstrate an understanding of water safety by the end of Key stage 2’ (p.15). As we shall see later, such inclusive sentiments tended to disperse over time and hence produce an unstable ‘field of strategic possibilities’ (Foucault, 2002a, p.40). The later slippage to elitism and competitive school sport, for example, is most noteworthy.

A further compelling thought at policy level is the authoritative statement that ‘primary teachers will need support to improve their knowledge, understanding and skills in some areas of physical education’ (p.10) and that such proposals be ‘subject to provision of appropriate in-service training for primary teachers in particular’ (p.16). On reflection it is staggering to think that almost thirty years on the same issues prevail (Harris, 2018). In the Foucauldian sense the ‘manifest discourse’ of stated support for primary teachers is not a ‘fact’ but rather a reflection of the broader context within which the ‘already-said’ simultaneously reflects the ‘never-said’, ‘the repressive presence of what it does not say ... that undermines from within all that is said’ (Foucault, 2002a, p.28). The foreshadowed claim then becomes a ‘writing that is merely the hollow of its own mark’ (ibid.), as competing statements, running beneath it, displace its supposed authority. This fact was realised through the onset of outsourced sports coaches whose subsequent impact squeezed out primary teachers. In-service training then became redundant and the deprofessionalisation of teachers was effectively naturalised.

### **The affirmation of performance**

From this ambiguous beginning physical education came to adopt, much more, the formation of a discourse of the *physical* conceived through the lens of sporting performance. For example, in terms of developing positive attitudes, pupils should be taught how:

‘to observe the conventions of fair play, honest competition and good sporting behaviour as individual participants ... how to cope with success and limitations in performance; ... to consolidate their performances ... ‘ (p.114).

In Foucauldian terms this system of references serves to conflate notions of ‘fairness, honesty and good sporting behaviour’ with more systematic regulation: to ‘consolidate (their) performances’. The emphasis upon the personal pronoun: ‘their’ affirms the importance of individualism with a corresponding performativity and care for the self, to ‘cope with success and limitations in performance’. This emphasis also provides a useful illustration of the ‘interplay’ between the curriculum and the pervasive influence of politics and the media. It is likely no accident, for example, that the appeal to a restoration of school sport was at the time strongly advocated by the then Prime Minister John Major. Moreover, that the then Minister for Sport, Iain Sproat, would issue a ‘blueprint for the revitalising of school sport’ (Evans and Penney, 1995, p.186; Houlihan and Green, 2006) proclaiming the virtues of five core team games as a means to mobilise more effective physical education. The ‘reciprocal determination’ (Foucault, 2002b, p.33) of discourses is further assured through the parallel publication of *Sport: Raising the Game* (DNH, 1995). This document not only affirmed the perceived value of competitive team sport but further invoked notions of ‘elitism, nationalism and cultural restorationism within the areas of PE and sport policy’ (Penney and Evans, 1997, p.24). It thus serves as a potent reminder of how sport policy can *inter alia* be instrumentally employed as a means to discipline, for ‘discourse is the power which is to be seized’ (Foucault, 1984, p.110). In this vein it has the potential to produce in young people (and also perhaps teachers) an obsequious obedience to ‘subject-hood’, through an uncritical

acceptance of nationhood, conceived through sport's image, while simultaneously displacing critical engagement with authentic citizenship and social justice (Garratt and Piper, 2003).

### **The rebirth of the ERA**

A change of government in 1997, from Conservative to New Labour, marked a more radical departure and 'diffraction' (Foucault, 2002b) from the appearance of an otherwise seamless continuity. This occasioned a concurrent reinforcement of school sport in the construction of physical education discourse but with a reconfigured and newly emphasised values-led perspective and adjacent complementary social policy objectives. At the turn of the new millennium significant momentum around values education (Talbot and Tate, 1997), the reincarnation of the ERA and role of education for citizenship (Crick, 2000) was very much in force. These provided a clear conceptual core to induct young people into society employing an active, participatory model (Garratt and Piper, 2010) and further reinforced the reciprocal relation of policy developments around community cohesion (Home Office 2001 and 2002). From within this new formation emerged a more nuanced physical education curriculum; one which rhetorically, at least, espoused the virtues of active citizenship and social democracy and which reflected a generic policy ensemble in which global policy making processes had a significant bearing upon domestic educational systems and curricula. This generic appeal is captured in the former Secretary of State, David Blunkett's foreword to the National Curriculum, where, for example, he emphasised the importance of 'equality of opportunity' and 'education for citizenship and democracy' (1999, p.4), a tone more resoundingly captured in the aspiration to promote:

'pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through physical education ... *spiritual development*, through ... a sense of achievement and [ ] positive attitudes towards themselves; *moral development* ... a sense of fair play based on rules and the

conventions of activities, develop positive sporting behaviour ...; *social development* ... social skills in activities involving cooperation and collaboration, responsibility, personal commitment, loyalty and teamwork, and considering the social importance of physical activity, sport and dance *cultural development* ... the significance of activities from their own and other cultures ... and consider how sport can transcend cultural boundaries' (DfEE, 1999, p.8, original emphasis).

We suggest the discursive formation here contains an implicit appeal to a more discerning and critically sensitive balance between sport and physical activity, citizenship and social justice, moving beyond the oft cited criticism of sport-based PE curricula as: 'more of the same for the more able' (Penney and Harris, 1997). Indeed, the 'process orientation of physical education' (Lee, 2004, p.8) has the potential to promote inclusive practice. A notion of education with the ability to lead-out beyond the explicitly corporeal and hence meet the stated aims of the ERA. At least this would be so if read in isolation or as a transparent statement of intent (Maw, 1993). In reality, however, it emerged from a less stable genealogy, where relations of power were not fixed but essentially contested. This was especially the case through the reciprocation of policies: *A Sporting Future for All*<sup>1</sup> (DCMS, 2000) and *Game Plan* (DCMS, 2002), which galvanised the link between sport, physical education and social cohesion.

### **The years in between ...**

Between 1999 and 2013 the primary physical education curriculum remained officially unchanged. Yet despite surface appearances it would be crude to suggest mere stagnation of this fourteen year period. Quite apart from two new Prime Ministers and the

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<sup>1</sup> In the foreword to this influential policy text, the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair, opened by proclaiming that: 'Sport matters'. Sport is not merely regarded a panacea for society's ills but one that largely absolves government of responsibility by enabling 'individuals [striving] to succeed' (2000, p.3). This was later awkwardly juxtaposed with *Game Plan* (2002), exhibiting a clear strategy and hence more explicit intervention.

first Coalition Government since 1945, the first decade heralded significant change in the development of policy for physical education and school sport (Jung et al., 2014).

In *A Sporting Future for All* (DCMS, 2000), for example, a curious conflation emerged of elitist overtones matched with explicit notions of inclusion and mass participation, in effect a nostalgic appeal to *Sport for All* (Sports Council, 1981). This surface ambiguity, reflected in the Government's appeal to the 'highest aspirations for sport in this country' and 'more success for our top competitors and teams in international competition' was paralleled with sober recognition that: 'There are not enough opportunities for children and young people to take part (DCMS, 2000, p.6). Here the apparent tension is discursively managed through the invocation of an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 2006), one in which we are all in sport together:

The Government and those who run sport need to work together to overcome these problems. We believe it can be done ... If all of us commit ourselves to an agreed action plan, we can make a real difference to our country's performance' (DCMS, 2000, p.6).

The mobilisation of first-person pronouns is crucial: 'we' and 'us' require action both of self and the 'object' of a plan to succeed. The possessive pronoun: 'our' invokes a consensual rhetoric and hence collective moral obligation. The appeal to a rhetorical sense of community, through sport's enlightened image, creates the possibility of cultural transformation. To refrain and let down implies a breach of national responsibility, the risk of failing the nation. In Foucauldian (1983) terms this is a function of disciplinary power that guides the possibility of conduct by putting in place the possible outcome. The 'art of government' thus emerges through a form of coercion, known here as a five part plan

(below), to guide the regulation of behaviours and secure the desired outcome through the ‘conduct of conducts’ (Foucault, 2002, p.341):

... provide up to £150 million to tackle the worst part of the school sports and arts infrastructure - primary schools; create 110 Specialist Sports Colleges by 2003 (secondary schools with a special focus on physical education and sport) to provide the lead in innovative practice and to work with partner secondary and primary schools to share good practice and raise standards (DCMS, 2000, pp.7-8).

The impact of sweeping structural change matched with unprecedented financial incentives (in the form of significant National Lottery Funding) produced an ‘effect of power’ that elevated the status of sport like never before. The reincarnation of mass participation, reminiscent of *Sport for All*, was a deliberative ploy: a political act to usher in and further conceal the deceit of an essentially elitist agenda. Within this discursive formation *A Sporting Future for All* makes a concerted appeal to equality while simultaneously invoking the Orwellian aphorism that all pupils are equal but some are more equal than others. Flintoff (2003) noted at the time, for example, that participation in the School Sport Co-ordinator Programme, introduced in 2000, was somewhat patchy and that not all schools had been involved despite its claimed ambition, nor that School Sport Coordinators, typically located in secondary schools, were necessarily the ‘best placed to support the development of primary PE’ (Flintoff, 2003, p.242).

The primacy of sport in physical education was further secured through the subsequent publication: *Learning Through PE and Sport* (DfES/DCMS, 2003). This conveyed an ambitious agenda matched to a powerful discursive triumvirate of the: ‘instrumental’ - linked to notions of improved pupil behaviour and attainment; ‘remedial’ – as a means to curb obesity and prevent disease; and ‘successful’ in terms of ‘ensuring

talented young sports people have a clear pathway to elite sport and competition whatever their circumstances' (DfES/DCMS, 2003, p.1). To this end the then New Labour Government invested heavily in a series of eight new programmes with 'linked work on coaching to support delivery' (ibid., p.1). To pledge a firm commitment to setting out the PE, School Sport and Club Links (PESSCL) strategy launched in 2002, the Government further invested some:

£459 million to transform PE and school sport. This funding is on top of £686 million being invested to improve school sport facilities across England. Together, this means that over £1 billion is being made available for PE and school sport, and all schools in England will benefit in some way (ibid., p.1).

This was later consolidated through the publication: *High Quality PE and Sport for Young People* (DfES/DCMS, 2004). As with its predecessor it emerged as a cross-departmental policy combining discourses of education and sport but invariably privileging the latter through a galvanization of links between sports clubs and schools. Thus, in setting out the 'meaning' of quality, the document focused on what 'leaders, managers, teachers and coaches' (DfES/DCMS, 2004, p.1) need to do to inspire and achieve high quality PE and sport. In many ways the dispersion and wider propagation of the physical education curriculum to sports clubs, coaches and other agencies merely reflected the more pervasive governmental (Foucault, 1979) influence of neo-liberal policy-making, the privatisation of schools and move to outsource educational services (Ball, 2007). All of which reflected the increasing interventionist role of the state in policy making processes.

The dominance of sport in physical education (Jung et al., 2014) was further reflected in *Playing to Win* (DCMS, 2008) and *The PE and Sport Strategy for Young People* (Sport England/YST, 2009). The then Secretary of State for the Department of Culture, Media and

Sport was unequivocal: ‘when you play sport, you play to win’ (2008, p.1). The logic of this affirmation, a vision of ‘excellence’, is that ‘world leading sports development ... means a clearer separation between the development of sport, on the one hand, and the promotion of physical activity on the other’ (ibid.). Yet if winning is preeminent and there are few who can, then there must, *ipso facto*, be many more ‘losers’. A further irony, as Kirk (2010) noted, is that competitive sport rarely promotes lifelong participation since most adults do not partake in competitive team games. Moreover, Flintoff (2008) remarked how the narrow focus on traditionally gender-biased sports through inter-school competitions has done little to support the participation of young women in physical education. The aspiration for sport to promote active citizenship and social justice through the life course, if ever this were possible, is thus roundly compromised.

While the privileging of performance and elite sport served as a primer for the forthcoming 2012 London Olympic Games, it did little to instil confidence in the notion of inclusive physical education (see Piper and Garratt, 2013 on the question of legacy and mass participation). In practice the elision of sport and PE risked promoting a ‘dividing practice’ (Foucault, 1977, p.184), separating the successful from the unsuccessful and further reinforcing the division between pupils as fundamentally unequal. As Foucault argues, ‘the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalising judgement ... make it possible to qualify, to classify and to *punish*’ (ibid., emphasis added). Indeed, Gove’s recommendation of the use of ‘extra physical activity such as running around a playing field’ (Bienkov, 2014), as a means of ‘correct training’ (Foucault, 1977) to punish pupils, conveys a spectral resonance with ‘muscular Christianity’ (Holt, 1989), and thus a crude characterisation of physical education and sport as symbolic of the Victorian elite.

This quaint anachronism was never more in evidence than when the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition Government came to force in 2010 and Michael Gove was



installed as Secretary of State for Education. Genealogically, Gove's entrance marked both continuity and discontinuity with the previous decade. On the one hand his decision to axe dedicated funding to school sports partnerships – (£162million per annum) served to dismantle many local networks of schools and PE teachers, a departure threatening some 450 school sports partnerships. Even a partial retraction (intended to release secondary teachers for one day per week [Mackintosh, 2014]) meant that 'barely half of 28,000 primaries and secondaries' in England were participating subsequently (Campbell, 2012). On the other hand, the resultant effect was the continuous reinforcement of competitive sport in physical education, supported with Lottery funding as a means to build a 'framework of competitions'. As Gove affirmed: 'I have concluded that the existing network of school sport partnerships is neither affordable nor likely to be the best way to help schools achieve their potential in improving competitive sport' (DfE, 2010, p.1). The corollary was a reification of a yet narrower conceptualisation of physical education, already conflated with competitive sport but now further eroded through the glorification of traditional games, arguably modelled on elitist Victorian nostalgia. That is, one that is essentially a continuity of the underpinning ideology of *Sport: Raising the Game* (DNH, 1995), which also emphasised the role of individuals, citizenship and national prestige.

### **The revised national curriculum ...**

In 2013 a revised national curriculum for physical education was published which appeared to consolidate the authority of Gove's régime (of truth). This coincided with the Government's announcement of a major new funding initiative to support the delivery of physical education and sport in primary schools (of which, more below). The revised curriculum characteristically focused on the importance of success through competition:

A high-quality physical education curriculum inspires all pupils to succeed and excel in competitive sport and other physically-demanding activities. It should provide opportunities for pupils to become physically confident in a way which supports their health and fitness. Opportunities to compete in sport and other activities build character and help to embed values such as fairness and respect (DfE, 2013 p.1).

The physical education and sport premium initially provided funding of £150 million per year for the academic years 2013/14 and 2014/15 but was thereafter extended. Ring-fenced and paid directly to primary schools its purpose is to improve the quality of physical education and sport, where schools are free to determine how best to enhance (their) provision.

While such funding creates a positive surface appearance, the politics of the last fifteen years has produced an ‘effect of power’ in which the outsourcing of specialist coaches has become a default regime. As Smith (2015) notes, the utilisation of coaches to deliver all aspects of physical education in primary schools is a growing phenomenon and problem; not least because in many cases teachers are either absent at the point of delivery or otherwise acting in a supervisory capacity. This not only raises a critical question about the degree to which teachers are involved in curriculum planning (ibid.) but further emphasises the poverty of funding, especially when it is utilised in ways that do little to enhance teachers’ confidence and/or professional development in physical education. As Harris (2018, p.3) argues, ‘the “handing over” ... to non-qualified teachers (in the form of sports coaches and instructors) with often relatively low level qualifications, limited knowledge of pupils, and minimal understanding of key pedagogical issues such as inclusion, progression and assessment’ is a factor that seriously comprises the quality of physical education and its relationship with broader educational goals, including citizenship and social justice. The lack of attention to

physical education within Initial Teacher Training, as recently reported by OfSted (2017), further compounds the impact of this genealogical trend. So what is to be done?

### **Recommendation**

This article has sought to examine the relationship between physical education, citizenship and social justice in the context of the thirtieth anniversary of the Education Reform Act. In so doing we have drawn critical attention to the often crude conflation of physical education with competitive sport in policy and practice and further considered the impact upon primary teachers' professionalism and the pupil experience. We acknowledge there will be teachers and schools for whom the value of physical education will sometimes be doubted, not least among those lacking self-confidence in teaching, of whom there are undoubtedly many primary specialists. Following the work of Harris et al. (2012) and Carse (2015), we thus recommend that ITT provision be substantially revised. It can play a key role in better preparing primary teachers to engage with physical education pedagogy more effectively. Moreover, if this represents a medium to long term ambition then, more immediately, we believe that individual schools can do considerably more to elevate the status of physical education in ways that challenge the dominance of competitive sport. For us, this involves a broader and more balanced concept of physical *education* and arguably one that actively involves teachers rather than professional sports coaches and/or qualified instructors. Indeed, while the latter undoubtedly understand the grammar of competitive sport, we suggest they are perhaps rather less *au fait* than qualified teachers in understanding the rudiments of physical education pedagogy in the primary phase or, indeed, the needs of the developing child<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> We acknowledge the potential limitation of our recommendation when placed within the broader economic and global education policy context, for global analyses of policy processes suggest we cannot understand individual education systems simply by reference to internal processes alone. While the primacy of performatively driven educational goals may, in practice, be hard to circumvent we must nevertheless begin somewhere, inviting examples of more creative, critically discerning and innovative pedagogical practices.

With this in mind, we turn our regard to a case study of positive practice in a Local Authority (LA) maintained primary school located in West Yorkshire, United Kingdom (UK), with over 400 pupils on roll across two Key Stages (KS1-2). The school is located between two large conurbations comprising a rich cultural mix and diverse student body. Physical education facilities consist of two halls, playing fields and playgrounds, along with several school minibuses to facilitate pupil transport. Here, the subject of physical education receives much critical attention and a very high profile. This is achieved through a clear commitment to curriculum time, local networking and continuous positivity among staff to ensure the subject is elevated within and beyond the school. The school is affiliated to a School Sports Partnership and uses local sports facilities - (including the martial arts club, swimming pool and tennis club) to complement impressive on-site facilities.

The school has a minimum commitment to two hours of core PE per week consisting of a whole afternoon dedicated to the subject and to be undertaken by the whole school (staff and pupils). In a bid to elevate its status, on PE day pupils are required to come to school dressed in PE kits. The delivery of the subject is driven and aided by teachers creating an innovative curriculum and implemented through a well-established format. A starter lesson begins the process where pupils are taught through the prism of the physical: first as to how their bodies work and function, then by a lesson of choice. The elective lessons are changed each term, with the aim of allowing students to apply new learning to different and diverse physical and cultural environments, ones which they choose and establish. This broad variety of physical challenges allows pupils to develop, select and apply new learning (affective, social and cognitive domains of learning) in a positively structured and culturally nuanced way (Frapwell, 2015). The privileging of the class teacher taking the subject of PE ensures that all teachers within the school undertake regular continuous professional development, where such investment confers many additional benefits. For example, in promoting the

subject among teachers it supports both confidence and experience while facilitating cross curricular links to achieve greater permeation across the subject range. Designated investment also fosters creativity and growth across the PE curriculum to enhance the pupil experience.

In this spirit, we suggest it is sometimes the simplest ideas that have the greatest potential impact. Hence we make development by *doing* development. If more schools were able to take an active lead in transforming performatively-driven curricula then arguably a more discerning and socially just physical education curriculum might, over time, be successfully realised.

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