Chapter 1

What is physical education?

Susan Capel and Margaret Whitehead

Introduction

This chapter is designed to provide a context for the debates raised throughout this book. In conducting a debate it is always valuable to be clear about the definition of key terms related to the area under discussion and this is the first task of the chapter, that is, to define the nature of physical education, recreation and sport. Second, views and opinions are very often closely related to the social and cultural context surrounding the issues under consideration. The chapter will also, therefore, briefly describe the social and cultural context of the development of physical education in schools in England. Significant changes in physical education will be identified and reasons for these proposed, including the changing justifications for including the subject in the curriculum. The introduction of the National Curriculum for Physical Education (NCPE) in England and its effect on practice in schools will be debated. Finally the chapter will review the current nature of physical education in England today.

The issues in this chapter are presented as a dialogue to serve as an example of the nature of a debate in which physical educationists might well be involved. As the debate proceeds you will find examples of the participants being challenged to explain their views in more detail and to defend their positions. It is hoped that this chapter will encourage you to question and interrogate the views of others, as appropriate, and to formulate your own views on the issues under discussion. With the exception of Chapter 4, other chapters in this book are not written in this format; however, many of the issues introduced in other chapters could be the subject of a debate with others. Articulating views and defending beliefs are very valuable skills, well worth mastering.

Key concepts in physical education

MARGARET WHITEHEAD (MW): Debates about the nature of physical education are often made difficult because there is some confusion about the meaning of the terms being used.

SUSAN CAPEL (SC): I agree there is confusion about the nature of the subject – indeed, there does not seem to be clear agreement here, it means different things to different people and for some people their definitions are implicit; in other words they have not considered, explicitly, what they understand by physical education. Many people seem to regard physical education as a range of physical activities which take place on playing fields, in the gym, the dance hall or the swimming pool. Others focus on the contribution the subject makes to the school curriculum, citing it as where attention is given to learning physical skills and/or where young people are encouraged to learn how to work with others and manage both winning and losing. Another problem is that people often confuse physical education with recreation and/or sport. In order to help us to define what physical education is and distinguish it from other modes of physical activity, can we differentiate between the concepts of physical education, recreation and sport?

MW: This is a very contentious area. However I agree that we need to understand very clearly the nature of these concepts so that we all know to what we are referring. Misunderstandings often arise on account of people talking at cross purposes or without being explicit about definitions. It certainly needs to be made clear that the subject of this book is not sport per se, nor is it recreation, although both are closely related to physical education in different ways.

SC: It also needs to be understood that the definitions we propose will relate specifically to language used in the UK. Other countries use different terms, for example in some countries 'sport' and 'physical education' are synonymous.

MW: Yes that is true. Readers from outside the UK should consider carefully how terminology is used in their country and how this relates to the way the concepts are employed in UK.

Looking first at physical education and recreation, I would suggest that physical education is a term that applies to work in the movement field carried out schools. It is a compulsory subject in which all pupils have to take part. I would also suggest that recreation is usually understood to be a self-chosen activity. Physical education as part of education is seen to be important and to have value within the school curriculum, whereas recreation is usually understood as engaged in by the individual for pure enjoyment.

Physical education has a place in education on the grounds that it can foster physical development and movement competence. The subject works towards involving learners in a range of physical activities such as games,

gymnastics and dance that use large muscle groups. Furthermore physical education has a role to inform learners about the knowledge and understanding that underpin a healthy lifestyle.

Definitions of physical education that have been formulated in key literature focus on the centrality of the movement experience in physical education and/or on the subject as contributing to education of the whole child. In respect of the first, the NCPE in England (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), 2007a: i) defines physical education for 11- to 16-year-old learners as a subject:

> which develops pupils' competence and confidence to take part in a range of physical activities that become a central part of their lives, both in and out of school. A high-quality physical education curriculum enables all pupils to enjoy and succeed in many kinds of physical activity. They develop a wide range of skills and the ability to use tactics, strategies and compositional ideas to perform successfully. When they are performing, they think about what they are doing, analyse the situation and make decisions. They also reflect on their own and others' performances and find ways to improve them.

In respect of the second approach, Bucher (1983: 13) defined physical education as 'an integral part of the total education process,... a field of endeavour that has as its aim the improvement of human performance through the medium of physical activities that have been selected with a view to realising this outcome'. Others have extended this definition to include the development of physically, mentally, emotionally and socially fit citizens. Arnold (1979) defined physical education as: education *through* movement, *about* movement and *in* movement (this is covered in Chapter 2). Similarly the Association for Physical Education in the UK (afPE, 2009) advocates that:

> the learning experiences of physical education should focus on young people 'Learning to Move' and 'Moving to Learn'. Learning to move is about the learning of the movement skills required for participation in different types of physical activities. Moving to learn is not only about the learning needed for participation in physical activities but also the learning integrated with other aspects of school learning within and beyond the curriculum.

While these definitions take slightly different approaches they stress the value of physical education as part of education. I believe that the value of physical education lies in its unique contribution to education in developing our physical capabilities. This development should facilitate lifelong participation in physical activity. In addition the subject area plays a role in

education by fostering self-confidence and self-realisation, and by sharing the responsibility with other subject areas to help learners to master personal skills such as co-operation, creativity and independence.

In contrast definitions of recreation tend to refer to it as a way of 'enjoying yourself when you are not working' (*Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/recreation_1?q=Recreation) or to an activity through which individuals can be free of pressure, in the interests of enabling them to relax and subsequently re-engage in their 'work activities' with renewed energy and application. Recreation is closely related to leisure activities, to having fun or being involved in a pastime. Other definitions focus on re-creation, being a time when individuals can shed their responsibilities, indulge in self-chosen activities and live for the moment. This can be seen to foster a sense of self with the benefit of becoming reinvigorated and refreshed.

It is a worry that physical education is sometimes viewed as being just a break from the 'serious' work of education and is valued only for the benefits it brings to 'rest' cognitive faculties in the interests of learners being able to work better in lessons that follow. This gives the impression that cognitive functions are not used in physical education, which is certainly not the case, and it can lead to the attitude that physical education is just for fun and has no significant contribution to make to education. This attitude can have unfortunate implications for arguing for the place of the subject in the very overcrowded curriculum and should be challenged.

SC: The argument you put forward lays great stress on the value of physical education, you are surely not arguing that recreation is without value? I would see recreation as an essential part of life – an enriching experience which can, in a sense, 'rebalance' lives. Indeed one of the arguments for having physical education in the curriculum is in the interests of learners being motivated to take part in physical activity in their leisure time, outside school and after schooling is finished.

This is surely part of the role of physical education – to prepare young people for participating in physical activity throughout life?

MW: I agree that recreation is of value and I would hope that young people will be inspired to be active in their leisure time. A key role of physical education is to foster the development of physical competence so that individuals will have the motivation and confidence to continue with activity outside school. Physical education is very important in this respect as it offers the unique opportunity for all to learn from expert practitioners who are trained to establish and improve movement skills. This opportunity should not be lost. It is certainly true that in the later years of schooling physical educationists need to anticipate the changing contexts that young people will encounter with respect to access to physical activity when they leave school. However I do not advocate physical education becoming viewed solely as recreation with these older learners, but rather that learners are given more

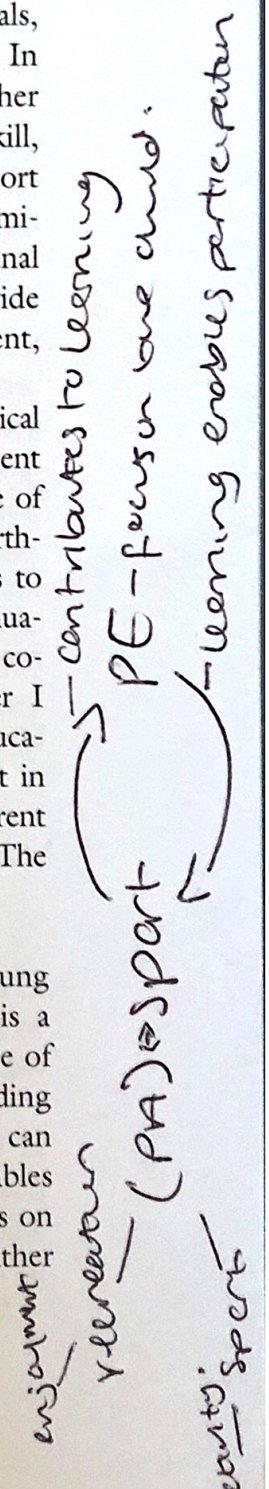
choice of activity and opportunities to further their movement competence in a wide variety of contexts, within and outside the school setting. Opportunities for working with expert practitioners can be expensive and are less easy to find outside the school and we must use all the time we have in school to encourage learners to gain confidence and real satisfaction from engaging in physical activity and mastering physical skills.

SC: I think we should now look at the definition of sport and how this relates both to recreation and to physical education. Surely sport can itself be recreation?

MW: Yes, sport can be seen as a subsection of recreation alongside activities such as stamp collecting, watching DVDs and window-shopping. Sport is generally understood as physical activity in a competitive setting. Individuals, small and larger groups compete against each other with the goal to win. In team sports co-operation is also needed to outwit the opponents. Other concepts that are related to sport are elite performance, high levels of skill, practice, rewards and acclaim. Younger and older people take part in sport either in their leisure time as recreation or in a professional or semi-professional capacity. Involvement in sport may be a job or a recreational activity. Those who take part in sport in their leisure time do so for a wide variety of reasons. For example some thrive on the competitive element, others enjoy the social side while others see sport as a vehicle to keep fit.

SC: There seems to be a great deal of debate about the place of sport in physical education, even though sport clearly promotes the development of movement skills as well as being valuable as a worthwhile use of leisure time outside of school. Competitive sport in school provides the foundation both for worthwhile adult recreation and professional sport and it undoubtedly appeals to some learners. It is also true that competitive sport can serve a range of valuable educational ends such as developing movement competence, fostering co-operation and learning self-management and self-assessment. However I would assert that it should not be the dominant experience in physical education. Perhaps the problem lies in an over-emphasis on competitive sport in physical education at the expense of a wider range of experience in different activity contexts. Physical education is not sport, it is far wider than sport. The Department of Education and Science (DES, 1991: 7) explains:

> Sport covers a range of physical activities in which adults and young people may participate. Physical education on the other hand is a process of learning, the context being mainly physical. The purpose of this process is to develop specific knowledge, skills and understanding and to promote physical competence. Different sporting activities can and do contribute to the learning process, and the learning enables participation in sport. The focus in physical education, however, is on the child and his or her development of physical competence, rather than on the activity.



Notwithstanding this clear statement many see sport as synonymous with physical education. Again the DES (1991: 7) document is helpful here in stating that

> The place of games and sport in schools has been widely misinterpreted by some commentators in recent times, particularly in the national media. There are those who have argued (although very few in number) that competitive physical activities provided through sport should have no part in the educational process and should be discouraged in schools. Others appear to think that the physical education programme should consist solely of competitive team games. We accept neither of these views, nor is either an accurate description of what currently happens in schools.

In the context of the two quotations above it has perhaps not been helpful that, in the recent past, our subject has frequently been referred to as 'Physical Education and School Sport'. This wording can be read in two ways. It can either be read as indicating that the two concepts are separate, there being two aspects of the subject area covered in curriculum time – physical education and sport. Or it can be read to mean that physical education takes place in curricular time and sport takes place in extra-curricular time. Neither interpretation is accurate or helpful. The first reading is inaccurate as sport is part of physical education not a separate area. The second reading is counter-productive as it implies that extra-curricular work should focus solely on competitive team sports for the most gifted. This seriously narrows the extra-curricular opportunities the school might offer 'out of hours'. Chapters 4 and 11 consider extra-curricular physical activity/sport provision.

MW: You are not denying that sport has a place in the curriculum of physical education?

SC: Certainly not. What I am arguing is that physical education is not sport as defined above. Sport describes a particular form of physical activity that young people should learn as part of their physical education. Sport is part of physical education, but only a part. And when sport in the form of competitive games is taught in physical education it should not be engaged in, in such a way that winning at all costs is seen as acceptable.

While sport is undoubtedly an important element of physical education, I believe that it has been the predominance of sport in the form of competitive games in the physical education curriculum that has resulted in many, both boys and girls, becoming disillusioned in our curriculum area. In fact involvement in sport can erode their confidence and motivation in respect of taking part in physical activity. The predominance of competitive games in the physical education curriculum is well documented (see below). There are at least three reasons for this: first, many physical education teachers join the profession wishing to pass on their enthusiasm for games to learn-

ers (the impact of socialisation on physical education teachers is looked at in Chapter 8); second, there are generally ample facilities available for games in most schools; and third, the NCPE in England has encouraged competitive games in the curriculum through the requirements it has identified. For example, in curriculum specifications in 1992, 1995 and 1999 games were compulsory from early schooling to learners of 15 years old (Table 1.1 provides a brief overview of the requirements in each of the NCPE documents at each key stage). The 1999 curriculum made games compulsory throughout schooling. The 2007 curriculum does not specify which activities should be taught, leaving it open for teachers to select what they will teach. With games so firmly established in physical education in schools for very many years, this freedom has tended to result in more time being given to games rather than a wider range of activities being offered (see, for example, Evans and Davies, 1986; Green, 2003).

MW: Would I be correct to sum up the definitions we are proposing by saying that while physical education, physical recreation and sport share a number of features in common, such as involving active physical participation and providing opportunities for a healthy active lifestyle, they are distinct. Physical education is a compulsory school subject that is designed to make an important and unique contribution to education in developing learners' physical abilities and encouraging lifelong participation in physical activity. In addition the subject plays a part in promoting education as a whole, both in respect of fostering self-esteem and confidence and in nurturing personal skills such as co-operation, problem-solving and communication. Physical recreation takes place out of the school context and is freely chosen by participants. Sport, as physical activity in a competitive setting, is a legitimate element of physical education and may be chosen as a recreational activity by individuals or indeed taken up as a career. It should, however, be only one aspect of physical education and not the predominant physical activity in physical education. (Capel *et al.* (2006) consider an alternative presentation of the similarities and difference in these concepts.)

Q1

Looking back to early forms of physical education

MW: It is interesting to note that the subject we now call physical education in England has, over the years, been known by other names, such as drill or physical training. What are these, why were these names used, what was different about these in comparison to physical education?

SC: This is a good question. The answer will show how physical activity in schools has been related closely to the social situation in the country and will begin to reveal some of the roots of the subject that persist today. Some key historical texts are listed in the further readings if readers would like to get a fuller understanding of the history of physical education in England.

Table 1.1 Activity areas specified in NCPE documents

	Key Stage 1	*Key Stage 2*	*Key Stage 3*	*Key Stage 4*
1992	Five areas of activity: athletic activities, dance, games, gymnastic activities, outdoor and adventurous activities + swimming at Key Stage 1 or Key Stage 2	Six areas of activity: athletic activities, dance, games, gymnastic activities, outdoor and adventurous activities and swimming, if not covered in Key Stage 1	Minimum of four areas of activity: games compulsory + three from athletic activities, dance, gymnastic activities and outdoor and adventurous activities (swimming can be part of some of the above)	At least two activities, from same area of activity or two different areas of activity
1995	Dance, games and gymnastic activities + swimming at Key Stage 1 or Key Stage 2	Five areas of activity: dance activities, games, gymnastic activities, plus two from athletic activities and outdoor and adventurous activities and swimming if not covered in Key Stage 1	Four areas of activity: games compulsory + dance or gymnastic activities and athletic activities, outdoor and adventurous activities or swimming	Two activities from different areas of activity
1999	Dance, games and gymnastic activities + swimming at Key Stage 1 or Key Stage 2	Dance activities, games, gymnastic activities, plus some time for athletic activities and outdoor and adventurous activities and swimming if not covered in Key Stage 1	Games – full unit plus one full unit and two additional half units. One half unit must be dance or gymnastic activities. Games in each year of the Key Stage	Two activities, one of which must be a game
2007	Dance, games and gymnastic activities + swimming at Key Stage 1 or Key Stage 2	Dance activities, games, gymnastic activities, plus some time for athletic activities and outdoor and adventurous activities and swimming if not covered in Key Stage 1	Based on key processes, key concepts and curricular opportunities. Activities selected to ensure these three are addressed	Based on key processes, key concepts and curricular opportunities. Activities selected to ensure these three are addressed

To explain briefly, in the late nineteenth century drill or physical training was adopted in state elementary schools to meet both physical needs of poor health and social needs such as improving discipline to prevent unruly behaviour and encourage obedience. This curriculum area was under the auspices of the Department of Health.

Many schools took a militaristic approach which favoured military drill, comprising marching, parading and standing exercises (leg, arm and trunk movements), carried out in unison, under the command of a teacher. It combined physical exercise with strict discipline for children who could get 'awkward and restless'. Drill could be carried out in the classroom or outside by the whole class or as a larger group activity (see, for example, http://history.powys.org.uk/school/newtown/drill.shtml).

Physical training had a slightly different focus, being very much concerned with fitness, such as muscle strength, joint flexibility, cardiovascular fitness and endurance. Physical training was rigidly organised with the teacher or instructor following directions given in a manual. The term physical training is still used today, particularly in military settings or in relation to preparation for a particular activity or challenge. In these contexts it is designed to meet a specific end with testing, measurement and comparison with others used to challenge and motivate participants.

As well as drill and physical training, callisthenics and gymnastics were also included in some elementary schools in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Swedish gymnastics was also found in some elementary schools before and after the First World War. The nature of this gymnastics was very different to that which we find in today's schools. It comprised set exercises carried out in unison and had a focus on posture and joint flexibility.

The emphases on these different approaches to physical activity varied at different times and in different contexts and circumstances. For example, military drill and physical training were particularly prominent in the period immediately after the Boer War (1899–1902), largely as a result of reports of recruits being medically unfit for service (Bailey and Vamplew, 1999: 19–20). Likewise, there were renewed demands for physical drill and physical training as a result of the First World War and hence they were a staple for boys at this time.

MW: You indicate that this focus on Swedish gymnastics was in elementary schools? What was happening in secondary schools?

SC: Secondary education was not available to all at this time. It was largely the preserve of the wealthy and growing middle classes. Physical education in secondary schools in England started in public schools for boys around the mid-1850s. The focus was on sport, particularly team games such as cricket, fives, football, racquets, rowing and rugby. These sports were designed both for physical and social needs, including developing character traits

such as loyalty, self-control, perseverance, fairness and courage (both moral and physical) and leadership; these together being described as a magnificent preparation for life (see Mangan, 1983). What has been described as a games ethic or cult of athleticism reached a peak around 1914. According to Bailey and Vamplew (1999: 4) 'the mythology of Thomas Arnold's Rugby School, and the hero of Thomas Hughes novel *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, did wonders for the mid-nineteenth-century spirit of Empire'. As a result, sayings such as 'the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton' (often attributed to the Duke of Wellington, but which is probably apocryphal) and clichés such as 'play the game' and 'it's not cricket' became commonplace.

MW: Am I correct in saying that movement work or physical training in elementary schools was directed to promoting health and discipline of the masses, while it was sport that featured at the secondary level as it was believed that this fostered loyalty, courage and leadership; these qualities being needed by the upper classes to fulfil their roles as leaders both nationally and in the British Empire?

SC: Yes. In both cases activity was a means to a specific end. Games also spread from the public schools into grammar schools in the Victoria and Edwardian eras because, as Mangan (1983) argued, concerns for social status and prestige were uppermost. Hence, grammar schools were modelled on the public schools.

With respect to girls the situation was slightly different. By the 1880s and 1890s girls' public schools took up the games ethic in much the same way as boys' schools had done, albeit largely with different games, for example, netball and lacrosse. In addition, the emphasis of these games was different, with the co-operative and therapeutic aspects of play being emphasised as opposed to the more competitive and physically active emphasis of boys' activities. As well as games, Swedish gymnastics was also firmly established in the emerging girls' high schools in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

MW: It would certainly be true to say that overall the way boys and girls experienced physical activity in secondary schools at this time differed significantly. While the traditions of men and women in physical education follow trajectories which have some similarities there are also clear differences. In fact it was the training of physical education teachers in the women's physical education colleges which were established in the latter part of the nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth century that was responsible for the development of what is often described as the female tradition of physical education. Fletcher (1984: 134) went as far as to say 'here is the origin of that split which has been one of the most striking phenomena of recent educational history'. The first physical education colleges for men were not established until the 1930s. Many of those teaching boys were either from a military background or were expert athletes in their own

right. Thus, due to their lack of appropriate training, in the late nineteenth century men were on the periphery of what had been created by women. Women's influence on physical education survived until after the Second World War.

Q2

The name of the subject as physical education was established at the end of the Second World War. This change of name was the result of the responsibility for the subject being moved from the Department of Health to the Department of Education. Physical education was now acknowledged to be firmly part of education. The new perception of the role of physical education as an integral part of overall education created a dilemma for the subject. All previous work in state schools, exemplified in the 1933 syllabus, had been developed mainly with elementary schools in mind, this being directed towards physical fitness and the promotion of discipline. With physical education becoming recognised throughout education, new thinking was needed.

A significant influence on physical education at this time was that, as a result of the introduction of mass secondary schooling in 1945, men joined the profession in large numbers for the first time. They brought with them vastly different experiences of combat and commando training. They introduced developments in the subject such as the physiological approach to gymnastics, strength and stamina training, circuit training and more outdoor activities and, of course, they extended the influence of games/sports. Despite competitive team games and sports being part of British life for a century or so, it was only after the end of the Second World War, and the advent of mass secondary education, that they became established as a substantial part of secondary school physical education programmes. Indeed, they came to dominate and form the core of physical education within a short space of time. While this was resisted by the women, the adoption of the 'private school' model of physical education in the state sector signalled the beginning of sport dominating physical education.

SC: This was surely also the time, at the end of the Second World War, that Rudolf Laban came to England and his system of movement analysis and approach to teaching made an impact on physical education.

MW: Yes indeed Laban's work challenged the approach to physical education, particularly for girls. This was on account of women's training colleges being enthusiastic about Laban's approach, not least as it chimed well with the then current learner-centred philosophy of education. As a result, by the 1960s Swedish gymnastics was challenged in secondary schools by women teachers whose work became strongly influenced by modern educational dance and modern education gymnastics inspired by Rudolph Laban. Work arising from Laban's philosophies was child-centred and based on an understanding of movement comprised of the elements of weight, space, time and flow. According to Fletcher (1984: 98), though the 1933 syllabus

(Great Britain, Board of Education, 1933) had offered more freedom than earlier directives, modern educational dance and gymnastics 'seemed to supply what had long been wanting: a means to develop with older learners the movement training given at the primary stage'. It would be true to say that the decade of the 1960s and the early 1970s saw the most marked difference between physical education for boys and that for girls. Physical education for boys combined sport with aspects of physical training while physical education for girls covered a broader range of activities and was concerned to promote personal attributes such as creativity and independence.

SC: How long did the Laban influence last and what was the cause of its demise?

MW: The Laban influence lasted until the mid-1970s. As the child-centred focus of education lost favour and was replaced by a concern for a more didactic knowledge-focused curriculum, so physical education moved increasingly to an activity-centred focus. Schools began to look to national governing bodies of sports (NGBs) to lead the way in how many of the activities were taught. NGBs were being led mainly by men which, together with the sceptical attitude to Laban's work held by many male teachers, resulted in physical education becoming predominantly games skills based.

SC: So what happened then? How did the curriculum as we know it today develop?

MW: I suggest that from the mid-1970s there has been an ongoing debate as to whether physical education should be activity-centred, with a focus on sport/team games, or whether it should be learner-centred and comprise a wide variety of activities. To some extent men favoured the former approach and women the latter. That there still remains a strong sport ethic in today's physical education for boys and girls can be explained by considering the following changes that occurred, all providing opportunities for men to take the lead.

- State schools amalgamated their boys and girls sections into one institution or became co-educational.
- The male and female physical education departments merged.
- New heads of department were appointed, and these were mostly men.
- The pattern of teaching physical education to mixed sex groups became generally accepted.

There were, of course, some differences between experiences of boys and girls at this stage. For example girls took part in dance and played sports such as netball. Boys had very little opportunity to experience dance, maybe because of lack of training/confidence of male teachers to teach dance and the cultural expectations that dance was not for boys. In addition boys learnt sports such as football and cricket. Notwithstanding some variety, physical education had a clear focus on sport.

SC: While much of physical education remained the same we need to remember that from the 1980s learners in many sixth forms were offered a wider range of activity options in physical education. This development was introduced to enable learners to experience a range of activities from which they would find one they might like to pursue as recreation outside school and/or after they left school. This may have been partly a result of numerous surveys over a period of time which showed the very high drop-out from physical activity after learners left school (starting with the Wolfenden Report, 1960). This introduction may begin to explain why physical education was seen by some as recreation rather than education. Indeed it would seem at this time that physical education for older pupils was a combination of sport and recreation. This was surely the context in which the first NCPE was introduced? How did this new curriculum change the nature of physical education in secondary schools?

The nature of physical education today

MW: I think it is true to say that, perhaps surprisingly, there has been very little change. The pattern of experience in physical education described above seems to have persisted in spite of all the recommendations in the succession of NCPE documents. The reasons for this could include the following:

- The committee appointed to create the initial NCPE Curriculum in 1992 included men and women, traditionalists and innovators, strong sport supporters and those seeing physical education very much as part of education as a whole.
- The outcome of their deliberations were bound to represent a compromise (what might be called a curriculum by committee).
- Subsequent curricula in 1995, 1999 and 2007, while proposed by physical education specialists, had to incorporate directives from non-specialists in government departments.
- The presentation and language of the curricula have been so written that schools had considerable choice in how they reached the aims identified.
- Teachers in schools interpreted the NCPE curriculum in ways that matched school tradition, school facilities and their own beliefs about the nature of PE.
- While overall educational aims were specified, to guide decision making, so were the activities through which these aims could be realised (see Table 1.1).
- Teachers felt secure in that they were delivering activities as required by NCPE and made little change to their school curricula or schemes of work.

SC: This is both surprising and disappointing as in all cases the NCPE curriculum was carefully devised to realise key educational aims: aims that were

common with other subjects; aims that underlined the contribution physical education could make to education, aims, the achievement of which, depended on a broad and balanced curricular programme. These can be set out briefly as follows:

- The underlying aims of the National Curriculum in England (NC) in 1992 were concerned with learners developing knowledge, skills and understanding. In the context of NCPE, effective planning, performance and evaluation in the learning of physical activities should support achieving these aims.
- The underlying aims of the NC in 1995 had a clear inclusive focus, with NCPE being charged to promote: (a) physical activity and healthy lifestyles, (b) positive attitudes to physical activity, and (c) safe practice in ways that catered for all learners.
- The underlying aims of the NC in 1999 again had a focus on equality of opportunity and articulated a requirement to respect the diversity of society. Specifically NCPE was to be delivered in ways that ensured all learners were: (a) acquiring and developing skills, (b) selecting and applying skills tactics and compositional ideas, (c) evaluating and improving performance, and (d) acquiring knowledge and understanding of fitness and health.
- The underlying aims of the NC in 2007 were the promotion of successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens. NCPE should contribute to these ends by fostering competence, performance, creativity and healthy active lifestyles. To achieve these aspirations key processes, range and content, and curricular opportunities are spelled out.

We could argue that all versions of the NCPE curricula have been designed to reinforce the fundamental nature of physical education as presented in the definition of physical education in the first part of this chapter, and to set out a programme that could be seen as physical education rather than sport or recreation. In fact NCPE also described what high-quality physical education should look like. In the 2007 NCPE (CCA, 2007a) the following is proposed:

> A high-quality physical education curriculum enables all students to enjoy and succeed in many kinds of physical activity. They develop a wide range of skills and the ability to use tactics, strategies and compositional ideas to perform successfully. When they are performing, they think about what they are doing, analyse the situation and make decisions. They also reflect on their own and others' performances and find ways to improve them. As a result, they develop the confidence to take part in different physical activities and learn about the value of healthy, active lifestyles. Discovering what they like to do and what their aptitudes are at school, and how and where to get involved in physical activity helps them make informed choices about lifelong physical activity.

> Physical education helps students develop personally and socially. They work as individuals, in groups and in teams, developing concepts of fairness and of personal and social responsibility. They take on different roles and responsibilities, including leadership, coaching and officiating. Through the range of experiences that PE offers, they learn how to be effective in competitive, creative and challenging situations.

Notwithstanding statements such as the above, it appears that what has been planned and designed in successive NCPE to deliver a rich and varied physical education experience has not resulted in many schools moving away from a predominantly sport-based programme.

MW: Two further questions come to mind. These arise from two of the considerations that must have underpinned the creation of an NC in England: being (1) to ensure parity of experience for all learners and (2) to raise the standard of learning for all. Has NCPE resulted in all learners having similar experiences in physical education and has it resulted in better taught physical education, with learners being more successful?

SC: It is difficult to generalise here, however anecdotal evidence would indicate that learners' experiences in physical education throughout England remain as varied in nature and quality as they were prior to 1992. The conclusion would seem to be that NCPE has not had a major impact on physical education in secondary schools.

MW: This is worrying as we have advocated that physical education in any period of history has been designed to meet the needs of the society in that era. It would appear to be the case that despite enormous changes in our society, significant advances in science and technology and vastly different ways that young people interact with each other, physical education has not moved with the times. In what ways has physical education adapted to the current social context, for example to our multicultural society, a rise in obesity, a rise in stress-related illness, a growing underclass of unemployed, the expansion of the media with the examples of high-level sports performers and the availability of personal information and communications technology gizmos?

SC: I agree with you that these social and cultural changes do not seem to have had a major impact on physical education and even where they have, the changes have been minimal and in no way altered the nature of the subject. It would be true to say that, generally, over the last 30 years modest changes have taken place in:

- the attention given to health-related fitness (see Chapter 5);
- the introduction of some new dance forms to cater for those from different ethnic backgrounds;
- the use of hand-held video cameras and interactive whiteboards and other information and communications technologies;

- the use of a wide variety of activities to try to promote participation outside school;
- particular attention to learners with potential in an activity to enable them to reach representative levels;
- some efforts to foster work-related skills such as in sport education.

All these modifications have occurred under the aegis of NCPE and in response to changes in society. However the experiences learners are having in physical education are not very different to those learners were having in 1980s. Is there evidence to show that this is the case?

Q3

MW: Yes. Evidence that games and sports still dominate the curriculum today includes, for example, an analysis by Roberts (1996: 49) of the 1994 Sport England survey that led him to comment that 'team games and other competitive sports were alive and well in England's schools' in the mid-1990s ... nearly all learners were playing team games at school during every year in their school lives'. He concluded 'not that team games had been dropped, but rather they had been joined by other activities in broader sports curricula than the traditional games regime' (p. 50). Likewise, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and DfES (2006: 2) found that, in the nearly 17,000 primary and secondary schools in their 2005–6 *School Sport Survey*, competitive sports such as football and athletics remained popular 'with almost all schools offering them' (DCMS/DfES (2006: 15). The vast majority of schools, for example, offered football, athletics, cricket, netball, hockey, rugby and tennis.

Likewise, Green (2008: 56–7) reported that 'although the curriculum diet has changed over the years, physical education curricula in many countries reflect a good deal of continuity (as well as undeniable changes in the form of a broadening and diversity of activities) in the shape of a continued emphasis on competitive team sports'. This seems to be prevalent not only in England but also in other countries. According to Penney (2006: 565)

> It is ... true to say that there is ... a great deal of continuity in many countries between curricula of the past 30 years or so and those of the present. Although physical education curricula have broadened, they continue to be dominated by sport and, in particular, team games.

SC: Has the introduction of sports colleges in England made a significant impact on the nature of physical education?

MW: While it is impossible to generalise, sports colleges have, in many cases, focused on the elite performers and run physical education curricula with a focus on sport. They have not, in the majority, led a move from a sport focus to a learner-centred focus, which is signalled both in the definition of physical education and in the requirements of the NC overall.

There is much more that could be said about the nature of physical education today and how far it has and should have changed. What is perhaps most worrying is that there has been so little change despite the NCPE and the radical changes in society. Historical traditions/roots and teachers' reluctance to change together with public expectations seem to have left us with a curriculum area that appears to be sport and recreation orientated and for various reasons unable to move with the times.

Q4

SC: These points are ably set out by Kirk (2010) and in Chapter 14. Kirk's prognosis is alarming in that he is of the view that physical education in its current form may not have a future. Some of the possible reasons for lack of change are covered in Chapter 8.

Summary

This chapter opened by looking at the definitions of physical education, recreation and sport, arguing that, while closely related to each other, they are distinctive.

It then continued to look at a brief history of physical education, highlighting when the subject changed and, more importantly why. The importance of considering historical background is set out by Kirk (2010: x) who writes:

> without a historical analysis, we can know only part of our 'webs of significance' [Dening (1993)] ... ignorance of the past means we are trapped in and transfixed by the immediate present. Preoccupation with the here and now might create an impression of being 'up with the pace' in a manner consistent with so much of the frenzied 'innovation' in physical education over the past two decades. A wealth of research literature has revealed, however, that this preoccupation has not brought about real, substantial or desirable change.

This brings us full circle because, as we discussed early in the chapter, although physical education is different from sport and recreation – it is often seen as synonymous with sport (and indeed, in recent years, the term physical education and school sport is often used). On the other hand, a concern to make the physical education curriculum relevant – particularly for older secondary learners, and therefore to widen activities and choices, with taster courses in later years of schooling, has often been seen as recreation. We stress that it is important that readers understand what physical education is and how it differs from sport and recreation (and any other terminology used) to enable deliberate decisions to be made so that the subject is relevant to all learners in all years.

Although the brief history has touched on both primary and secondary education, the focus of much of the chapter has been largely on secondary education. While this is important, it is also necessary to consider what primary physical education should look like to provide a firm foundation for physical education in secondary schools.

Questions for consideration

Q1 Critically discuss the definitions of physical education, recreation and sport as set out in the first part of the chapter. Articulate clearly (a) in what ways physical education is not recreation and (b) the disadvantages of sport being the predominant activity in physical education.

Q2 Fletcher (1984, 134) says 'Divisions in a discipline are common enough, but they are not usually aligned with sex'. She quotes Graham who says 'I find it difficult to conceive of men's/women's geography, mathematics etc.' She continues 'In fact, historically, there is no other subject where the split could have happened as it did in physical education. In this field, where women were leaders, the war brought not only a change of direction but a chance for the men' to take the lead.

What impact does this split have on physical education as we know it today?

Q3 Critically consider in what ways physical education, in your experience, has changed over the last 20 years and suggest modifications that might make it more relevant to today's young people.

Q4 Kirk (2010) describes the current focus of physical education in secondary schools in England as 'physical education as sports-technique'. How far, and why, do you agree with this definition of physical education as it is delivered in secondary schools in England today?

Further reading

Capel, S., Breckon, P. and O'Neill, J. (eds) (2006) *A Practical Guide to Teaching Physical Education in the Secondary School*. London: Routledge.

Chapter 1 includes useful exercises to differentiate between physical education, sport and recreation.

DES (Department of Education and Science) (1991) *Physical Education for Ages 5 to 16*. London: DES.

Chapter 4 includes a valuable discussion on the relationship between physical education and sport.

Fletcher, S. (1984) *Women First: The Female Tradition in English Physical Education 1880–1980*. London: Athlone.

This book looks at the female tradition in physical education through the women's physical education colleges. As Fletcher says 'the history of what has been called the female tradition raises pertinent questions for anyone concerned with the balance of influence between men and women in a mixed society' (p. 156).

Kirk, D. (1992) *Defining Physical Education: The Social Construction of a School Subject in Postwar Britain*. London: Falmer Press.

This text focuses on the social construction of physical education and considers both the defining of physical education and its curriculum history – including games, gymnastics, health, fitness and scientific functionalism.

The following physical education journals should support further reading. There are also

many education journals which contain articles related to relevant topics across education more generally, which are useful to extend debate further. They may also contain physical education specific articles.

- *European Physical Education Review*
- *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*
- *Quest*
- *Physical Education Matters*
- *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*
- *Sport, Education and Society.*