

9 Competition and co-operation in physical education

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Introduction

Despite the commitment to physical education through its inclusion as a foundation subject in the National Curriculum, debates are ongoing about what the priorities and content of the subject should be. These debates include concerns about the relative importance of competition and co-operation in the physical education curriculum. In fact, at times the place of competition in schools has been at the centre of many fierce and sometimes acrimonious debates. The debate over the emphasis that should be placed on competition and co-operation is unlikely to become less prominent in the years to come. Hence, there is a need to identify some of the issues which are raised by this debate.

This chapter begins by introducing the terms 'competition' and 'co-operation' as related to teaching and learning in physical education. Some of the recent influences on the debate about competition and co-operation are identified and consideration is given to some of the reasons why this issue remains central today. The dominance of competition in teaching physical education is then examined, focusing on some of the positive and negative aspects of competition and co-operation in primary and secondary physical education. In the last part of the chapter consideration is given to how competitive and co-operative approaches to learning can be incorporated into physical education.

This chapter does not aim to answer questions. Instead it allows readers to reflect on some of the tensions that the debate might raise and to develop their own philosophy on the inclusion of competition and co-operation in the teaching of physical education. It is recognised that this debate touches on the personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils and as such deserves added consideration when reflecting on the values that may be conveyed to learners in physical education.

Competition and co-operation defined

Competition may be defined in a number of ways. However, it is useful to note that the Latin derivation of the word (*competere*) means to strive together or 'to come together' (Sherif 1978; Siedentop 1994). Sherif suggested that

Competition consists of activities directed more or less consistently toward meeting a standard or achieving a goal in which performance by a person or by his group is compared and evaluated relative to that of selected other persons or groups.

(Sherif 1978: 82)

This definition looks only at competition against others, either individually or in groups. However, competition can also be against self, time or the environment, as the definition by Weinberg and Gould emphasised: 'The goal is to beat someone else, everyone else or an externally referenced target' (Weinberg and Gould 1995: 131). It is the outcome or product which is recognised by others that is implied in the term 'competition' and which provides the key to its meaning.

In contrast, co-operation can be viewed as the means or the process through which the learner interacts with others to achieve agreed goals. This process is one which, by definition, must mean working, learning or playing with others (Lavin 1989, Watson 1984, Weinberg and Gould 1995). In fact, the *Chambers Concise Dictionary* (1991: 225) defined co-operation as 'working together'. Orlick described co-operation in physical activities as being:

directly related to communication, cohesiveness, trust, and the development of positive social-interaction skills. Through co-operative ventures, children learn to share, to empathise with others, to be concerned with others' feelings, and to work to get along better. The players in the game must help one another by working together as a unit – each player being a necessary part of that unit, with a contribution to make – and leaving no one out of the action to sit around waiting for a chance to play. The fact that children work together toward a common end, rather than against one another, immediately turns destructive responses into helpful ones: players feel that they are an accepted part of the game, and thus feel totally involved. The result is a sense of gaining, not losing.

(Orlick 1979: 6–7)

The next section looks at some of the recent influences on the debate about competition and co-operation.

Recent influences on the debate about competition and co-operation

Pollard (1988: 111) referred to a 'moral panic' which he suggested began in the summer of 1986 following the decision of a Bristol infant school to organise a non-competitive sports day for their children. Concerns were raised in the press and by politicians that the 'traditional' values associated with participation in competitive sport were being eroded. At this time physical education teachers were accused of following a child-centred progressive approach to teaching

(Evans and Penney 1996, Leaman 1988, Pollard 1988). Shortly after this, the National Curriculum through the Education Reform Act (ERA 1988) was introduced by a Conservative government led by Margaret Thatcher, which had been in office since 1979. That government promoted a competitive market ethos and meritocracy. Hence, the term 'competition' became part of the language of education as well as of business and industry.

In the early stages of the development of the National Curriculum for Physical Education (NCPE), introduced in 1992 (Department of Education and Science (DES)/Welsh Office (WO) 1992), there was explicit consideration of competition and co-operation. In 1989 Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) (DES 1989a: 1) identified the development of an appreciation of the concept of honest competition as one of the aims of physical education. The National Curriculum Physical Education Working Group (NCPEWG), established to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Science and the Secretary of State for Wales on the content of the NCPE, acknowledged in their interim report the two sides of the debate relating to the place of competition in physical education:

There are those who have argued . . . that competitive physical activities provided through sport 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.

(DES/WO 1991: 7)

The NCPEWG accepted neither of these views. But why? Certainly, they did not consider either position to reflect accurately what was currently occurring in schools.

In the first NCPE (DES/WO 1992), the obligation for schools to provide opportunities for pupils to be engaged in competitive and co-operative activities was identified in the non-statutory guidance. The National Curriculum Council (NCC) suggested that 'the development of interaction skills occurs when pupils increasingly . . . work co-operatively in groups; work competitively against others; help and are helped by others' (NCC 1992: D5). It also suggested that physical education could contribute to personal and social development by encouraging, for example, 'an ability to work co-operatively with others by being a member of a team or group; a competitive spirit by deciding on the most appropriate order in a relay race' (ibid.: G6). The commitment to competition and co-operation was also apparent from the criteria used by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) to judge the quality of learning in physical education within the NCPE: 'The quality of pupils' learning in physical education is judged by the extent to which pupils . . . work co-operatively as well as competitively, sharing ideas and testing their skills' (DFE 1993: 43).

Learning in competitive and co-operative contexts has since continued to be a feature of developments in NCPE. The revised NCPE emphasised the development of positive attitudes by teaching pupils 'to observe the conventions of

fair play, honest competition and good sporting behaviour as individual participants, team members and spectators' (DFE/WO 1995: 2). This development was seen to occur largely through teaching competitive team games at each Key Stage. The End of Key Stage Descriptions identified aspects of competition and co-operation, for example, at Key Stage (KS) 3 pupils were to demonstrate that they 'appreciate strengths and limitations in performance and use this information in co-operative team work as well as outwit the opposition in competition' (DFE/WO 1995: 11).

In the revised NCPE for 2000 competition and co-operation are both included, although reference to them is not as overt as in previous documents. For example, the importance of physical education includes the provision of '... opportunities for pupils to be creative, competitive and to face up to different challenges as individuals and in groups and teams. . . . Pupils learn how to think in different ways to suit a wide variety of creative, competitive and challenging activities' (Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) /Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) 1999: 15).

The dominance of competition in teaching physical education

Despite competition and co-operation both being highlighted in recent physical education curriculum documents in England, competition seems to be prioritised, at least in secondary schools. This is partly as a result of the dominance of competitive team games in the physical education curriculum in secondary schools (evidence of this dominance is given in Chapter 7 of this book). There has been considerable pressure for emphasis to be placed on competition, and particularly competitive team games. Strong pressure has come from politicians concerned with the performance of national sports teams and with the perceived character-building effects of participation in competitive team games. That debate is pursued further in Chapter 8. Another strong influence is the value placed on competition by many secondary physical education teachers who have been successful in, or gained high levels of satisfaction from, their own competitive experiences. They have benefited from competitive experiences, therefore can see the value that competition can bring to a learning environment. Shearsmith suggested that:

the world of sport and our society have fostered the dominance of competitive practices in physical education and games. Physical education teachers have themselves been the so called beneficiaries of this system . . . gained the enjoyment/satisfaction that is intrinsic to good performance, but I have often felt this to be less than satisfactory if it has not been coupled with the success of being a winner in a competitive situation.

(Shearsmith 1993: 39)

There is, therefore, a need to recognise that others, including many primary teachers who are expected to teach physical education as well as all other

Table 9.1 Some positive and negative aspects of competition and co-operation in physical education

<i>Positive aspects of a competitive approach</i>	<i>Negative aspects of a competitive approach</i>
acts as a motivator to increase learning potential or to improve performance	does not nurture the self concept of all children
encourages children to try their best	may be demotivating to some pupils through failing to succeed
is enjoyable and satisfying	results in some pupils being perceived as 'failures'
brings about a feeling of well-being	may promote anxiety and stress through fear of failure
produces excellence	may not take account of all the pupils' potential
allows children to learn about winning and losing	can be elitist
works in harmony with the natural competitive instincts of children	focuses on the product rather than the process of learning
encourages social acceptance	favours boys rather than girls
is cathartic	could drive pupils to cheat
helps pupils to deal with competition they may meet in the adult world of work and leisure	may prevent co-operative or sympathetic behaviour
builds 'character' (e.g. loyalty, inner strength, belief in oneself, commitment and discipline)	may encourage aggressive and other anti-social behaviours
allows pupils to recognise their abilities, social strengths and weaknesses	may provide a route for developing anti-social behaviour between rival groups within a school
develops an ability to co-operate with others	can be divisive, reinforcing social divisions
provides a focus for measuring the success of, and marketing, a school	could cause tensions between rival schools
<i>Positive aspects of a co-operative approach</i>	<i>Negative aspects of a co-operative approach</i>
motivates through being non-threatening and challenging	may not be developmental and challenging for all unless taught well
promotes learning in a non-threatening manner	appeals more to girls than boys
promotes the process of learning rather than the product	teachers who emphasise co-operation may be considered 'soft'
encourages all to participate	may not be supported by school hierarchy
utilises a democratic process	
prepares pupils for life	
enables pupils to develop the ability to learn to work in groups or teams	
develops less aggressive tendencies	
is child-centred rather than subject centred	
emphasises the importance/meaningfulness of the social context in which the learner acts	
provides a unique context in which pupils can learn and demonstrate new social skills.	

curriculum subjects, may have found competition within their experience of physical education to be a negative and indeed unwelcome aspect of the subject. They may value and prioritise a co-operative approach to learning.

Positive and negative aspects of competition and co-operation

In the next section of the chapter some of the positive and negative aspects of competition and co-operation in physical education are examined more closely. These are summarised in Table 9.1.

Other positive and negative aspects have been highlighted indirectly in comparisons between competition and co-operation. For example, Johnson and Johnson (1975) considered the differences in interpersonal processes between competitive and co-operative classes. These are summarised in Table 9.2.

It is possible to expand these lists, and readers are encouraged to identify other positive and negative aspects of competition and co-operation. However, it is useful to develop a few of these points. Some of the positive and negative aspects of competition and co-operation are identified next. These have been grouped into four themes. No definite conclusions are drawn; instead, readers are invited to reflect on the issues that are raised.

Motivation

Motivation 'consists of internal processes and external incentives which spur us on to satisfy some need' (Child 1997: 44). Head noted that schools 'often

Table 9.2 Differences in interpersonal processes between competitive and co-operative classes

<i>Competitive</i>	<i>Co-operative</i>
low interaction	high interaction
mutual dislike	mutual liking
no or misleading communication	effective communication
low trust	high trust
low mutual influence	high mutual influence
low acceptance and support	high acceptance and support
no utilisation of resources of other pupils	high utilisation of resources of other pupils
attempts to mislead and obstruct others	high sharing and helping
emotional involvement of some pupils (the winners)	high emotional involvement of all pupils
low co-ordination of effort	high co-ordination of effort
division of labour not possible	division of labour possible
low divergent and risk taking thinking	high divergent risk-taking thinking
high comparison of self versus others	no comparison of self versus others

employ a system of rewards and prizes in the belief that competition will act to motivate the learners' (Head 1996: 64). However, the link between competition and motivation is complex. Competition may be motivating to some, whereas it may be demotivating to others. Likewise, some competition may be motivating, but excessive competition may become demotivating. On the other hand, co-operation may be motivating for some and not for others. Thus, both competition and co-operation have the potential to motivate and to demotivate. In this section some of the reasons for competition and co-operation being motivating or demotivating are considered briefly.

Part of the purpose of physical education is to nurture the self concept of all children. DES (1989a: 2) identified the development of self-esteem as one of the aims of physical education, to be achieved through the acquisition of physical competence and poise and the development of self confidence through understanding one's own capabilities and limitations. Those who favour the co-operative approach to learning stress that it enables pupils to feel positive and not feel threatened by what might be termed the 'conventional notion of competition' in a physical education environment and therefore is motivating. Results of research by Mitchell and Chandler suggested that 'student perceptions of non-threatening and challenging environments are powerful constructs as the strongest predictors of high levels of intrinsic motivation' (Mitchell and Chandler 1996: 48).

On the other hand, it has been suggested that emphasis on competition in physical education lessons works in harmony with the natural, competitive instincts of children, and therefore is motivating to pupils. According to some commentators, not to encourage children's involvement in competition is to subvert their true instincts (see, for example, Pollard 1988: 109). However, one key question is what type of competition, or what is the nature of competition that is motivating for children? The type of competition which is motivating is likely to be different for children of different ages and developmental stages.

HMI (DES 1989a: 11) said that competition occurs first against self ('how many times can I...?', 'how far can I...?'). Likewise, Needham suggested that in relation to young children 'any competition that exists should be with oneself rather than with others - "Is this the best I can do?" rather than "Is mine better than anyone else's?"' (Needham 1994: 158). The competition with/against self considered appropriate for young children was seen by Murdoch as motivating to them:

Early forms of competition are more ones of having a standard or yardstick against which to measure oneself, rather than as competition in the adult sense. Each testing moment is an event in itself and a chance to test oneself, for example, 'Race you to the corner!'. Essentially they are concerned with self-mastery and bettering their own performance rather than in the beating of someone else. . . . Young children are motivated to mastery, of themselves and the objects they are playing with.

(Murdoch 1996: 35)

It is only at later stages of development that competition occurs 'against a

friend ("who can catch the most times?", "who can hit a target?") and then with a friend against others' (DES 1989a: 11). In contexts where competition is against others there are winners and losers. Reaffirmation of confidence in oneself as an acceptable and worthy person is awarded to winners, whereas losers are denied such self-validation.

The NCPEWG recognised 'the public nature of success and failure in physical education' to be a distinct feature of physical education that would 'demand particular thought and consideration' (DES/WO 1990: 17). To be shown to be less physically able in the highly visible and public forum of physical education may be demotivating and lead to the formation of a negative self-concept. This may occur in competition against others, but it may also occur when the competition is against self, e.g. competition may be against self to achieve a better time in a 100 metre run, but it becomes comparative when a number of people undertake the run at the same time. Williams considered this issue in relation to the wide range of physical development of pupils at KS2 at any one time

given the public nature of the child's achievements in physical education, compared with other subjects where one's shortcomings can be concealed more easily, it is all too easy for the child who is less mature physically to be discouraged by relative failure when compared with more mature peers.

(Williams 1996a: 64)

Children respond quickly and with great enthusiasm to challenges, but those who do not do as well as others quickly stop and learn to recognise that they are not as able as their peers. For example, Arnold (1968) suggested that primary children respond well to challenges when they are asked 'who can jump the highest?', rather than 'jump as high as you can'. He commented that this rivalry encourages speedy learning. However, the obvious concern with this form of competition is about those who do not jump the highest. What is the impact on them? Teachers need to be aware of the development of individual pupils as well as their diversity of ability. They also need to bear in mind that some pupils may not be as able at that time but they may well be better at another time. The problem is that the children do not know this, so their self-esteem can be damaged by such challenges.

The formation of a negative self-concept can be highly damaging as pupils can easily come to perceive themselves as 'useless'. A self perception of 'uselessness' can perpetuate what Merton (1968) described as a 'self-fulfilling' prophecy whereby persons believing themselves to be hopeless causes act upon the belief by considering that it would be a waste of time to expend any effort on the activity and consequently contribute further to the likelihood of failure. The initial negative self perception can therefore give rise to a spiralling process of under-achievement.

The consequences of negative perceptions are particularly alarming when one considers that this perception of oneself as 'useless at physical education' may result in a general demotivation and lack of effort/willingness to engage regularly

in physical activity/recreation, exercise and sport in contexts other than a physical education lesson. Shearsmith proposed that:

one possible consequence (of the dominance of competitive practices and the conveyance of a message that the degree of enjoyment/satisfaction experienced is closely associated without the degree of success achieved in competitive situations) may be that the unsuccessful have felt themselves to have no positive role to play in physical education and games and have considered physical activity to be inappropriate for them.

(Shearsmith 1993: 39)

This has potential negative consequences post-school. Pupils are more likely to continue to be motivated to participate in physical activity post-school if they have enjoyed their experiences at school (see, for example, White and Coakley 1986). Individuals who do not participate in physical activity are denied the positive health benefits which research has shown to follow from a sufficient level of regular involvement in appropriate forms of physical activity (HEA 1998a, Sallis and Patrick 1994).

Emphasis on the outcome (product) or the means of achieving (process)

A process-based curriculum is one which focuses on learning as 'an active process based on the interests and unfolding mental development of each child' (Child 1997: 436). The child and his or her development are prioritised. This type of curriculum has sometimes been called 'child-centred education' and was a guiding principle of education in the 1960s and 1970s. However, 'the 1960s and 1970s professional ideology of child-centredness' has gradually been supplanted (Pollard and Tann 1993: 25). One result of this may be less emphasis on process-based models of learning and greater emphasis on the product.

A product-based curriculum emphasises the ends (competitive achievement, results, winning and winners) rather than the means (the process of learning) (Hellison and Templin 1991: 47). In physical education the product includes 'Specification of the ideal technique, breaking down the skill into its component parts, recognition of its spatial, temporal and force characteristics . . . as central for the learning/teaching process' (Connell 1989: 104). There is emphasis on testing pupils to see if they have mastered the skill and hence if they have reached the objectives. Therefore, summative assessment is important.

Focus on the product can distract pupils from thinking about the skills being practised. This was a concern expressed by HMI: 'Concentration on this [the competitive] element can distract pupils from thinking about the skills being practised and so can impede learning. The major emphasis for young children should be on sharing and working together' (DES 1989a: 11, parentheses added). Connell highlighted this point when she asked 'Where is the learner in motor learning?' (Connell 1989: 104). It also prevents co-operative approaches to work

being emphasised. This is a disadvantage because many areas of employment require people who are able to work/co-operate with others. The importance of a co-operative approach to learning for the sake of our industrial future was emphasised by Hutchinson, who suggested that 'to educate for an interdependent and ecologically sustainable future implies doing it through co-operative group work rather than individualistically competitive learning environments' (Hutchinson 1996: 206).

It has been suggested that the change to a focus on the product rather than the process of education may partly be a result of the emphasis on the market in education (Evans *et al.* 1996: 7). The market/capitalist economy, as found in contemporary Britain, is based on competition. Encouraging competition is 'a key element of the individualism that underpins free-market capitalism and consumerism' (Evans and Davies 1988: 14) and 'competition is regarded as being a necessity both for economic growth and for the smooth running of our capitalist system' (Pollard 1988: 121). Competition in school, and particularly in physical education, is considered by some to prepare children for their place in society. Children learn the value of competition. They can be motivated by achievement in a way that will enable them to make a valuable contribution to British society. Thus, competition in schools is 'legitimated as preparing children for the cut and thrust of their future lives' (Pollard 1988: 121).

This focus on competition can result in pressure being placed on some physical education teachers to produce winning school teams; to emphasise competition and competitive team games in physical education lessons; and to focus on a product-based physical education curriculum. In such a climate, emphasis on co-operation in lessons and on a process-based curriculum could be seen negatively by the school hierarchy.

The effects of competition and co-operation on moral and social development/behaviour

The suggestion that competition is character-building and purges participants of antisocial and immoral tendencies has been promoted for a long time. For example, Dean Farrar (1889) suggested that 'even from your games you may learn some of those true qualities which will help you to do your duty bravely and happily in life' (quoted in Simon and Bradley 1975: 148). It has been supported in the NCPE through the statement that 'pupils can learn to appreciate the concepts of fairplay, honest competition and good sporting behaviour' (e.g. DES/WO 1990, 1992; DfE/WO 1995). Harrison supported the view that 'Competitive games . . . allow teachers to positively enhance the moral and social development of individuals' (Harrison 1998: 5).

However, positive 'character-building' outcomes of competition do not occur naturally. In addition, some authors have suggested that not all competition is character-building. Intense competition can lead individuals to attach value to personal achievement and winning and, sometimes, unacceptable forms of behaviour can result. These forms of behaviour may include cheating, reluctance

to share and to assist others, hoping for the failure of others in order to enhance their own chances of victory, failure to empathise with others and to be concerned with others' feelings (e.g. Pollard 1988, Sherif 1973).

Harrison suggested that whether or not character-building occurs is 'entirely reliant upon the manner in which the activity is taught. It is this which will make it have a positive effect' (Harrison 1998: 5). Child illustrated this when he emphasised that in classes

in which specific qualities or abilities are regarded as being of more value than others in absolute terms . . . the stress is often on achievements rather than on the effort which children may have made; the ethos is often competitive rather than co-operative; the success of some children is made possible only at the cost of the relative failure of others. The overall effect is to marginalise some children while the work of others is praised and regarded as setting a standard to which other children should aspire.

(Child 1997: 98)

Fox suggested that 'the predominance of competitive team sport in the curriculum makes it unnecessarily difficult for teachers to help many youngsters experience a sense of personal improvement and fulfilment' (Fox 1992b: 51), which is linked to motivation (see earlier).

Thus, emphasis in physical education on competitive achievement may result in some children learning to regard themselves unfavourably, or to resent and oppose the values being emphasised. However, it is possible for a climate to be created in which

many different qualities are valued and where children are encouraged to challenge themselves to improve their own performance. . . . One of the ways of establishing such a climate is to encourage children to evaluate their own work and to set their own personal goals.

(Pollard and Tann 1993: 70)

Lavin emphasised that 'studies . . . have pointed to the conclusion that children who learn co-operatively – compared with those who learn competitively or independently – learn better, feel better about themselves and work better with each other' (Lavin 1989: 181). He suggested that co-operative learning groups can play a significant role in developing team success, but that care has to be taken as to how the group is structured and the nature of the task. He stated that 'it involves creating "positive interdependence", structuring childrens interactions so that each depends on and is accountable to the others' (ibid.: 181).

Some authors (e.g. Duda and Huston 1995, Duda, Olson and Templin 1991) found that response to competition was linked to the goal orientations of the person. People who had a task orientation to learning (when the task or learning goal is important and success is defined as personal improvement) were more likely to endorse fair play in sport. On the other hand, people who had an ego

orientation (when the ego or performance is important and success is defined as outperforming others) were more likely to adopt unfair or illegal means of achieving their goals.

Reaction of boys and girls to competitive and co-operative activities

Gill (1993) suggested that there are gender differences in the response to competitive processes. This was supported by Eccles and Harold (1991), who found quite strong differences in attitudes of boys and girls to sport. They suggested that although these differences emerged at a very young age they were the result of gender socialisation rather than natural differences in aptitude. Further, 'the evidence is that a sense of competition works more effectively with boys than girls' (Head 1996: 64). This was supported by Carlson (1995), who reported that one negative factor in perceptions of girls who felt alienated in gym class was excess competition. Likewise, Browne (1992) reported that one reason that girls do not choose physical education is that it is too competitive. In addition, Tannehill *et al.* (1994) suggested that physical education, with its characteristic emphasis on competitive games, is often discrepant with the values and interests of female pupils, who may be less interested in aggressive confrontations and more inclined to seek opportunities to learn, participate, co-operate and enjoy activity.

In a study of the influence of the physical education learning environment, Mitchell and Chandler (1996) found that boys scored significantly higher than girls on intrinsic motivation, perceived competitiveness and perceived organisation. They scored significantly lower on perceived threat. This led Mitchell and Chandler to suggest that challenging and non-threatening environments are particularly important for girls. They also suggested that teachers should be aware of potential gender differences in the way pupils perceive the learning environment and recognise that some teaching strategies may be particularly applicable to girls.

On the other hand, Hastie (1998) found that girls enjoyed the competitive aspect of a sport education unit. Further, Salisbury and Jackson suggested that 'there are many boys who hate the humiliating, pressurising climate of team games but who would enjoy getting involved in personal challenges' (Salisbury and Jackson 1996: 214). They recognised that traditional team games have a place in the physical education curriculum but suggested that there should be an expansion of co-operative games which can cater for the diversity of interests of boys and girls. In an attempt to improve teaching in physical education there is a view that activities should be taught in mixed groups. But do mixed activities work? (This issue is discussed further in Chapter 2.)

Competition versus or and co-operation?

There are positive and negative aspects of both competition and co-operation, a few of which have been identified. However, as with many issues, there are no clear, easy answers. Neither competition or co-operation is good or bad (Arnold

1968, Martens 1978, Stein 1988); nor is the physical education curriculum based on one to the exclusion of the other. Physical education involves learning in physical skill contexts which are both competitive and non-competitive. Competition and co-operation are not mutually exclusive; they coexist within the physical education curriculum. Both competition and co-operation are integral aspects of learning in all aspects of physical education. Likewise, competition does not preclude co-operation; for example, in competitive team games players need to work together co-operatively as a team to perform successfully and to beat the other team. A precondition of playing a competitive game is to work co-operatively with opponents in order to play according to the same rules. A pupil trying to better the distance that he or she can throw a ball or the time that he or she can balance in a handstand is competing against self. Likewise, activities considered to be co-operative such as outdoor and adventurous activities may have a competitive element, e.g. against self or the environment.

Child provided a relevant synopsis of the debate on competition and co-operation:

Research into the relative merits of co-operative and competitive methods in class has not been particularly illuminating. To begin with, we have the dilemma of encouraging both co-operation and competition within the same teaching systems. The only generalisation which emerges from the mass of research is that in none of the studies does competition yield more effective learning than co-operation. Nevertheless, the one thing that seems certain is that both devices are valid motivators. Provided the level of competitive antagonism is not too high, performance appears to be improved. Where the stakes are very high, children opt out or resort to cheating. . . . The matter of social motives such as dependence, affiliation and desire for approval also have a great deal to do with encouraging children to participate in co-operative ventures.

(Child 1997: 61)

Finally, Murdoch emphasised that

after playing an after school football match, the children cannot remember the score to tell their parents. The game, participation and having fun are more important than the score or the winning or losing. Competition is intrinsic to many physical education activities. In striving for achievement in these situations the way in which success and failure are defined and the way in which the child attributes the reasons for that success or failure can either sustain the child's interest and participation or cause them to withdraw.

(Murdoch 1996: 35)

Competition and co-operation in physical education are both important. However, the positive aspects of competition and co-operation do not happen

by chance; they have to be planned deliberately in specific aspects of the physical education curriculum; units of work or lessons.

Conclusion

It is evident that the debate about competition and co-operation in physical education is one that is likely to remain contentious. Society, through our politicians, local councillors, parents, sporting agencies and others will continue to exert a range of pressures on physical education, including pressure to emphasise the competitive aspects of physical education. Therefore, it is important that physical education teachers are able to articulate the value and place of competition and co-operation in the physical education curriculum.

Barrow and Millburn highlighted that:

An interesting question remains: how is it that in a world that is highly competitive, with schools that are in fact in competition, and in the absence of any overriding reason why they should not be, educationalists none the less creep around as if there was nothing to discuss, since this obviously unpleasant practice is foreign to us?

(Barrow and Milburn 1990: 59)

Questions for reflection

- 1 Reflect on your primary and secondary school education. From the earliest age note when you were aware that you were in competition with others in your school or from other schools (at this stage try to consider more than just a physical education context). From these notes, can you identify your feelings about being involved in competitive situations? Were you always successful? How did you respond to winning and losing? How did your 'opponents' respond? Did your attitude towards competition and competitive situations change over time from primary to secondary school? For example, did you find that at some point you rejected the idea of competition or did you enjoy competition throughout your time at school? Compare your responses with those of another student teacher. Is how you experienced the notion of competition and your perception of its positive or negative effect the same as or different from that of another physical education teacher? Indeed, it is highly likely that your views will be different from other people, but do you choose to socialise with people who, like you, have enjoyed a positive experience of learning physical education and in particular respond well to competition in many of its forms? What does this mean for you as a physical education teacher?
- 2 Are children likely to deal with competitive learning at KS1? Is this the best time to be developing these traits or should there be other aspects that need to be learnt before competitiveness? Should the emphasis given to

- competition and co-operation in the physical education curriculum change with the age of pupils and, if so, how?
- 3 All too often competitive approaches in physical education are related to games and athletics and co-operative approaches are related to outdoor and adventurous activities, the development of group sequences in gymnastics or group work in dance. What value is there in introducing an element of personal goal-setting in activities such as gymnastics and outdoor and adventurous activities, which, as Gill (1993) suggested, is a positive use of the competitive approach to learning?

Further reading

Orlick, T. (1979) *The Co-operative Sports and Games Book: Challenge Without Competition*, London: Writers and Readers Publishing Co-operative.

The *British Journal of Physical Education* (now the *British Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*) had a specialist section for the Primary age phase entitled *Primary Focus*. This journal regularly supplied competitive and co-operative ideas that have been successfully tried out by teachers of KS1 and KS2 pupils.

10 Working with the community: a necessary evil or a positive change of direction?

Mike Waring and Peter Warburton

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to raise a number of issues associated with the topical and somewhat uncertain relationship between physical education and the 'community'. This relationship means different things to the diverse range of agents and agencies (all of which are considered to be working collaboratively); however, it is not the purpose of this chapter to provide the reader with the 'way it should be'. Instead, an outline of the context and the nature of the key issues is highlighted. In taking such an approach it is possible to appreciate the principles behind the political and subsequently the practical agenda. By grasping an understanding of the relationship between the political and practical agenda it should be possible to develop practice to address, and so direct, this agenda for physical education teaching and teachers so that it becomes an educative process rather than a political product. The reader should be able to identify the political climate in which physical education is presently being manipulated by a sporting agenda. Having established the broad framework, some of the wider issues and implications associated with this political agenda and policy framework are explored relative to key national initiatives in schools and the community. It is the structure and consequent nature of the impact of these initiatives (independently and together) that are important as it is through them that the agenda is set and the place and role of physical education is determined.

The political climate in which physical education now exists

Warburton (1999) commented on the potentially alarming lack of coherence in vision and policy of different government departments in spite of the fact that central to the Labour government's rhetoric and its manifesto is the development of sport in schools and the determination to enhance the status of sport at both local and national level. Central government, not only the present Labour but also the previous Conservative administration, has recognised the potential for physical education in schools to service its political agenda. Consequently the development of policy has had a political 'games' rationale