

SITUATION AND SUSTAINABILITY OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This paper draws from a number of international and national surveys of the situation of physical education in schools and will report on the worldwide situation of school physical education as well as developments since the Physical Education World Summit held in November 1999 in Berlin. The data generated from the surveys provide an indication of patterns and trends in school physical education in countries and regions across the world. The evidence indicates that positive developments and policy rhetoric are juxtaposed with adverse practice shortcomings. Thus, the overall scenario is one of 'mixed messages' with intimations that national and/or regional governments have committed themselves through legislation to making provision for physical education but some have been either slow or reticent in translating this into action through actual implementation and assurance of quality of delivery. Essentially, the situation especially in economically under-developed and developing regions has changed little since the 1999 Berlin Physical Education Summit. Continuing concerns embrace: insufficient curriculum time allocation, inappropriate curricula, perceived inferior subject status, insufficient competent qualified and/or inadequately trained teachers (particularly in primary schools), inadequate provision of facilities and equipment and teaching materials frequently associated with under-funding, large class sizes and, in some countries, inadequate provision or awareness of pathway links to wider community programmes and facilities outside of schools as well as barriers to full and equitable gender and disability inclusion. However, current intergovernmental agencies' initiatives (e.g. UNESCO (advocacy) and European Parliament (2007 Resolution) have placed physical education on the political agenda. With inter-governmental commitments to policy principles and action advocacy, a secure and sustainable future for physical education appears to be realisable. The paper concludes with suggestions for securing that sustainability.

Key Words: Physical education, Global situation, Advocacy, Sustainability

OKULLARDA BEDEN EĞİTİMİNİN DURUMU VE SÜREKLİLİĞİ: KÜRESEL BİR YAKLAŞIM

ÖZ

Bu makalede, okullarda beden eğitiminin durumunu araştıran ulusal ve uluslararası araştırmalar incelenerek, Kasım 1999'da Berlin'de düzenlenen Beden Eğitimi Dünya Zirvesi (Physical Education World Summit) 'nden günümüze okul beden eğitiminin dünya genelindeki durumu hakkında rapor verilecektir. Araştırmalardan elde edilen veriler dünyadaki ülkelerde ve bölgelerde okul beden eğitimindeki modellerin ve yönelimlerin göstergelerini sağlamaktadır. Kanıtlar, olumlu gelişmelerin ve politik retorik, bu olumluluğa ters uygulamalardaki noksanlıklarla yan yana durduğunu göstermektedir. Nitekim, içtenliklerin ve aynı zamanda 'karışık mesajlar'ın da yer aldığı bütünlüklü senaryo, ulusal ve/veya bölgesel hükümetlerin yasalar yoluyla beden eğitimi için gerekli koşulları sağlama görevini üstlendiklerini fakat, bazılarının doğru yürütme ve kaliteli bir dağıtım güvencesi yoluyla doğru uygulamaların gerçekleştirilebilmesi konusunda yavaş yavaş sessiz kaldıklarını işaret etmektedir. Esas itibarıyla, 1999 Berlin Beden Eğitimi Zirvesi'nden bu yana, okul beden eğitiminin durumunda, özellikle ekonomik olarak az gelişmiş olan ve gelişmekte olan bölgelerde çok az bir değişiklik olmuştur. Var olmaya devam eden endişeler şunları kapsamaktadır: eğitim programına ayrılan yetersiz süre, uygun olmayan eğitim programı, beden eğitiminin algılanan düşük statüsü, yetersiz nitelikli ve/veya yeterli derecede eğitilmemiş öğretmenler (özellikle ilköğretim okullarında), sıklıkla yetersiz bütçe ve büyük sınıflarla ilişkilendirilen yetersiz tesis, araç-gereç ve öğretim materyalleri, bazı ülkelerde, okul dışındaki geniş toplum programlarına ve tesislerle kurulacak ilişkilere yönelik bir farkındalık eksikliği ve toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği ve engelli öğrencilerin tam katılımını sağlama yönündeki engeller. Fakat, şu anki ülkeler arası kurumların girişimleri (örneğin UNESCO (taftarlık) ve Avrupa Parlamentosu (2007 Kararlılık) beden eğitimi politik gündeme almışlardır. Politik ilkeleri ve eylem taftarlılığını üstlenen ülkeler arası kurumlar ile birlikte beden eğitimi için güvenli ve sürekli bir gelecek gerçekleştirilebilir görünmektedir. Makale, bu sürekliliğin sağlanması için sunulan önerilerle son bulmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Beden eğitimi, Küresel durum, Savunu, Süreklilik

INTRODUCTION

This paper provides an overview of some aspects of the global situation of physical education in schools with specific references to status, curriculum (time allocation, aims and content), and resources (teaching personnel and facilities and equipment); it concludes with suggestions for future sustainability. The intentions are

to challenge some orthodoxies, in order to provoke thought, and to suggest some directions to sustain a secure future for physical education in schools as a life-style-enhancing enterprise.

The story of Physical Education across the world contains a rich tapestry of influences and developments, which

have evolved from individual and/or 'local' institutional initiatives with distinctive identities. These initiatives have variously shaped, or contributed to shaping, national systems either through assimilation or adaptation. Taking evolutionary developments into account, it is unsurprising that different and various forms of structures and practices are evident. Diversity, therefore, is a worldwide characteristic but there are elements of congruence in physical education concepts and practice. The congruence is seen in advocacy as a source of positive developmental characteristics from early childhood, through adolescence to late teen-age and now, when it is perceived to be a lifelong process, throughout adulthood, epitomised in the notion of the 'physically educated person'. Thus, the perceived role of physical education has expanded over the years. Ostensibly as a school subject granted a 'broad brush' scope and potential, physical education is in a relatively unique and indispensable position with some kind of responsibility in some way and somehow addressing many contemporary issues with its perceived distinctive features within the educational process with characteristics not offered by any other learning or school experience.

The distinctive profile is well summed up in the November 2007 European Parliament's *Resolution on the Role of Sport in Education* (2007/2086NI). The preamble to the *Resolution* alludes to physical education as "the only school subject, which seeks to prepare children for a healthy lifestyle and focuses on their overall physical and mental development, as well as imparting important social values such as

fairness, self-discipline, solidarity, team spirit, tolerance and fair play..." and together with sport is deemed to be "among the most important tools of social integration". The preamble also recognises a decrease in "the number of PE lessons... in the past decade" across Europe in both primary and secondary schools, that there are divergences in provision of facilities and equipment between the Member States and that physical education teacher training programmes differ widely with "an increasingly widespread practice whereby PE is taught in school by teachers with inadequate specialist training". There is also recognition that "there is no appropriate coordination aimed at reconciling school and out-of-school sporting activities, and at making better use of existing establishments, and that the link between them varies from one Member State to another". My own research bears testimony to these inadequacies and I turn to these now.

The data, on which this section of the paper is based, are drawn from the *Final Report* (Hardman and Marshall, 2008) of the second Physical Education World-wide Survey. A multi-method/pluralistic approach was adopted for the Survey with analysis of a range of sources comprising globally and regionally as well as on-line disseminated questionnaires, national surveys, continental regional and national PE-related projects, case studies and a comprehensive literature review. Specifically the various questionnaire surveys collected data on:

- national level policy and practice-related issues in school physical education (legal status, responsible authority, curriculum time allocation and examination status)

- the physical education curriculum (aims, themes, content, evaluation and monitoring)
- resources (human and material)
- gender and disability equity issues
- the physical education environment (school subject and physical education teacher status; and pathway links to physical education activity in out-of-school settings)
- issues (school physical education-related concerns or problems)
- 'Best Practice' exemplars in school physical education

The questionnaires' generated data provide an indication of patterns and trends and any caution in interpretation is to some extent alleviated by forms of triangulation embracing the range of questionnaire samples' sets, interviews, the review of research-related literature and experts' observations. Such forms of triangulation serve to underpin the questionnaire-generated data and bring a higher degree of validity and reliability to the content of the study.

The Situation of Physical Education in Schools

"Lack of policies for national PE; programme is elaborated but not totally carried out (and is in) need of some changes, it is not updated; Directors in PE are not specialists; government contributions are not enough; lack of infrastructure; lack of materials, resources, facilities and maintenance: there is not the appropriate environment for teaching; lack of time for teaching—the time assigned in the curriculum is too short to reach the objectives; (there is) a national policy (but) the government does

not take care of it; there are laws but they are not followed..." (PE Teachers, Venezuela).

Within general education systems, a majority of countries (89% primary schools; 87% secondary schools) have legal requirements for physical education in schools. Together with countries where there is no compulsory requirement for physical education but where it is generally practised, this figure rises to 95% (in the European region, it is all countries). Required physical education provision during compulsory schooling years varies across regions and countries according to age or year stage of attendance. Overall the average number of years during which physical education is taught in schools is 12 (range 8-14) with a 73% cluster of 11 and 12 years. The start-end years' continuum and associated access to physical education are significant for individual development and sustained participation in physical activity. The early years are important in developing fundamental motor skills and providing opportunities for optimal development of physical capacities during the crucial years of growth and maturation. The significance of school finishing age centres on tracking physical activity engagement from adolescence to adulthood. When access to physical education programmes ends at an earlier age, pupils are vulnerable to disengaging from physical activity with a consequence that they do not continue with it in later life and there may be insufficient time to embed either the skills or the habits for regular engagement in physical activity throughout the full lifespan.

Despite official commitment to entitlement of access to physical education in schools either through state legislation or as a matter of general practice, such provision is far from being assured, particularly in contexts of localised implementation of the curriculum. The international surveys undertaken over the last decade infer that almost 79% of countries (in Europe 89%; in Asia and North America only 33%) adhere to implementation regulations and delivery. The global percentage figure, however, is distorted by comparatively smaller sample sizes' data from the Central/Latin America and Middle East regions and a high proportion of European nation's positive responses); they can, and do, differ from school to school in the majority of countries. Conversely, globally in 21% of countries, physical education is not actually being implemented in accordance with legal obligations or expectations. This proportion rises to 33% in Central and Latin America and the Middle East, 40% in Africa, and 67% in Asia and North America; in Europe only 11% of countries allege a shortfall in implementation. The disparities are seen in illustrations of non-compliance from across the world, especially so where responsibility lies with local districts or schools and are, therefore, subject to local interpretations:

- **Canada (Quebec)**

Schools have "autonomy to adapt to the needs of their settings...but some use it to limit PE time to the minimum and act against the efforts to legitimize PE programs on the curriculum" (Rivard and Beaudoin, 2005, pp.154-155).

- **Spain**

"Compulsory physical education lessons in the final school years are replaced by optional lessons despite governmental level indicators of required physical education throughout the years of compulsory education" (PE Professor)

- **USA (Illinois)**

"Our State has a daily PE requirement but many districts do not enforce this and the state does nothing" (PE Teacher)

The 'gap' between official policy and regulations and actual practice is geographically widespread and pervasive factors contributing to it are seen in devolvement of responsibilities for curriculum implementation, loss of time allocation in some cases because time is taken up by other competing prioritised subjects, lower importance of school physical education in general, lack of official assessment, financial constraints, diversion of resources elsewhere, inadequate material resources, deficiencies in numbers of properly qualified personnel and attitudes of significant individuals such as head teachers. Additionally, exemption from physical education classes, granted on presentation of a medical certificate from compulsory physical education classes, is only acknowledged by a few countries. Such exemption practice on medical grounds is recognisably widespread throughout the world, thus perhaps as undermining its status within the curriculum. An issue here is that exemption is rarely sought, if ever, from other curricular subjects except, perhaps, for religious education classes in some countries. Moreover, survey evidence suggests that physical education lessons

are more likely to be cancelled than other curriculum subjects.

Physical Education Subject and Teacher Status

Legal and perceived actual status of physical education and its teachers is a contentious issue. Data indicate that equal subject legal status is claimed in 76% (86% in 2000) of countries. Africa, where only 20% of countries indicate equal legal status of subjects, represents a marked contrast with Europe's 91%. Regional data indicate that across all regions except Europe, in practice physical education is considered to have lower status than other subjects. Notably in the Middle East and North American regions, all countries/states indicate that physical education's actual status is perceived to be lower than that of other school subjects. High proportions of perceived lower status of physical education are also seen in Africa (80%), Asia (75%) and Central and Latin America (67%), whilst in Europe lower subject status is reported in less than one third (30%) of countries. There are geographically widespread exemplars of the perceived lower status of physical education:

- **Brazil**

"The discipline does not enjoy much prestige among students in the formal education environment. This is despite the fact that...it is compulsory...; lack of interest and monotonously repetitive classes (are) factors that contribute to this resistance" (Costa and Tubino, 2005, p.143)

- **China**

"Compared with other curriculum subjects...PE has a relatively low status.

Schools easily cancel it, and substitute literature and mathematics instead" (Yao and Jin, 2005, p.176)

- **Kuwait**

"Family not understanding the importance of PE for student; the school administration not supporting PE lessons/subject); parents don't given enough attention to PE lessons; the school board has no interest in PE lessons because the grade does not count in the final examination certificate (thus) parents don't encourage their children to take part in all PE lessons" (PE Teachers, Kuwait)

- **Luxembourg**

"Legally PE is part of the national curriculum. In practice, PE is perceived as not important; it is just playtime, time off from serious school subjects. Thus, in theory it has the same status but other subject teachers believe themselves more important, PE comes always after academic lessons. When teachers have problems to finish the programmes of French for example they cut PE lessons" (PE Teacher)

- **New Zealand**

Despite physical education's equal weighting as other curriculum subject areas in secondary schools "traditional academic subjects are still frequently perceived as being much more important" (Thomson and Emerson, 2005, p.486)

In 28% of countries, it is believed that physical education teachers do not enjoy the same status as other subject teachers, but there are regional differences. In Central and Latin America, Asia and Europe, over two-thirds indicate that physi-

cal education teachers have the same status as other subject teachers; however, in Africa, North America and the Middle East the situation is reversed and in a majority of countries, there are indications of lower status accorded to physical education teachers when compared with other subject teachers as exemplified in Ghana and South Korea:

- **Ghana**

“Since PE is somewhat marginalised, its teachers do not enjoy the same respect as teachers of compulsory academic subjects...The status of most PE teachers, particularly in suburbs and villages, leaves much to be desired. It is often argued that they lack professionalism in the way they go about their job” (Amamah and Kwaw, 2005, p.321).

- **South Korea**

PE teachers’ pay/work is worse than their colleagues in other subjects. Physical educators earn the same salaries as other subject teachers. However, unlike (them) they perform multiple responsibilities alongside teaching, like coaching, counselling and running intramural sports activities... They are often not viewed as ‘real’ teachers, but as custodians who

simply ‘roll the ball out’” (Kang and You, 2005, p.581)

Frequency of cancellation of lessons is one indicator of subject status. Evidence indicates that the low status and esteem of the subject are detrimental to its position: in many countries (44%), physical education lessons are cancelled more often than other so called academic subjects; 41% of countries indicated that physical education was the same as all other subjects when it came to cancellation; and 5% indicated physical education was less likely to be cancelled than other subjects, with 10% indicating that it was never cancelled (Table 1).

Apart from its attributed low subject status as of little educational value etc., other reasons for the cancellation of physical education include: government financial cuts; insufficient numbers of qualified physical education teachers; adverse weather conditions; the use of the dedicated physical education lesson space for examinations; preparation for examinations; concerts; school ceremonial occasions such as celebratory prize giving; out-of-school trips; religious or spiritual exercises as at festive times; and use as dining areas.

Table 1. Cancellation frequency of physical education lessons (%): 2008

Global/Region	More Often	Same	Less Often	Never
Global	44	41	5	10
Africa	80	-	-	20
Asia	50	-	50	-
Central/Latin America	67	33	-	-
Europe	27	64	9	-
Middle East	67	33	-	-
North America	50	-	-	50

Physical Education Curriculum Time Allocation

The issue of time allocation is generally complicated not only by localised control of curricula but also by practices of offering options or electives, which provide opportunities for additional engagement in physical education and/or school sport activity. The data for some countries need to be treated cautiously because they do include additional optional or elective lesson hours and, thus, provide some distortion of the actual situation in at least some schools in those countries where additional opportunities exist. However, data triangulation produces a scenario of policy prescription or guidelines not actually being implemented in practice for a variety of reasons. A couple of European examples illustrate the point:

- **Austria**

School autonomy prescribed by national Law 283/2003 produces variations and PE can give way to other subjects; the allocation of 3-4 lessons in secondary schools has been effectively reduced to 2 in lower secondary and 1 in upper secondary levels (Grössing et al. 2005; Dallermassl and Stadler, 2008)

- **Bulgaria**

“Some reductions are occurring as a result of increased time allocation to foreign language studies, furthermore, there are variations on the duration of lessons because they are determined by school staff, hence some schools offer less PE lesson minutes per week than others” (PE Lecturer)

There are numerous examples of gaps between recommendations or prescriptions and actual time allocated to

physical education classes in other regions of the world, examples of which are seen in Nigeria (non-adherence is partly related to negative pupils’ and some teachers’ attitudes and to general lack of teacher and head-teacher interest) and the United States (State mandates are flexibly applied with evidence of waivers and reductions introduced without prior discussion or warning):

- **Nigeria**

“Theoretically, five weekly lessons... are recommended for elementary and secondary schools...Unfortunately, however, at neither level is the weekly workload really adhered to” (Salokun, 2005, p.501)

- **USA**

“Some school districts offer ‘waivers’ for PE if involved with a Marching Band; others offer waivers if the student participates in 2 sport seasons out of 4 after the freshman year. One High School credit is given for PE if the student meets this requirement” (PE Teacher).

Over the years, surveys’ findings have revealed variations in the amounts prescribed or expected time allocated to physical education (and actually delivered). The situation is exacerbated by time allocated to other subjects and in some countries is deteriorating where recent educational reforms have resulted in physical education teaching time decreases as observed in geographically distanced countries in different socio-cultural and economic settings:

- **Ghana**

“Numerous attempts have been made to reduce the number of periods... the local situation determines actual practice.

The timetable slots exist on paper. However, about 30% of schools use them for other subjects areas or...as free periods” (Ammah and Kwaw, 2005, p.316)

- **Ireland**

“PE is being squeezed out of the education system by more and more compulsory academic courses, which hold little benefit compared to PE” (PE Teacher)

- **Taiwan**

“Mergence of PE with health education has led to the reduction in the teaching time of physical activities (and) the time allocated to PE (is) affected (by an increase in) the teaching time of English... and new subjects (e.g. computer and dialects) (have been) introduced into the curriculum” (PE Teacher)

The allocated amount of physical education curriculum time can be determined from policy and/or curriculum documents but local levels of actual control of curriculum time allocation give rise to variations between schools and, therefore, difficulties in specifying definitive figures for a country or region. However, some general tendencies can be identified. During the primary school phase years, there is an average **100** minutes (in 2000, the average was **116** minutes) with a range of 30–250 minutes; in secondary schools, there is an average of **102** minutes (in 2000, it was **143** minutes) with a range of 30–250 minutes per week. There are some clearly discernible regional differences in time allocation: European Union countries **109** minutes (range of 30–240 minutes) with clusters around 60 and 90 minutes in primary/basic schools and **101** minutes (range 45–240 minutes) with a cluster around 90 minutes in secondary

and high schools (notably, figures in 2000 were higher with an average of **121 minutes** in primary schools and **117 minutes** in secondary schools, thus representing a perceived reduction in curriculum time allocation in the period 2000–2007); Central and South America (including Caribbean countries) **73** minutes in primary schools and **87** minutes in secondary schools. There is a gradual ‘tailing off’ in upper secondary (high) schools (post 16+ years) in several countries and optional courses become more evident.

The Physical Education Curriculum

Educational reforms in some countries and responses to concepts of healthy well-being related to active life styles and a perceived obesity epidemic have ushered in, or are resulting in, change in physical education curricula. Links between physical education and health education and with personal and social development are occurring in some countries. New activities are being incorporated into some programmes (fitness-based activities such as aerobics and jazz gymnastics and popular culture ‘excitement’ activities such as snow-boarding and in-line skating etc.). Also evident, is increasing attention devoted to quality physical education concepts and programmes. Nonetheless, despite such developments, there is evidence to suggest that there is a continuing pre-disposition towards competitive sports-dominated, performance-related activity programmes. Such orientation runs counter to societal trends outside of school and raises issues surrounding meaning and relevance to young people as well as quality issues of programmes provided.

a) Physical Education Curriculum

Aims: Examination of the thematic aims of curricula suggests that physical education is primarily concerned with development of motor skills and refinement of sport-specific skills (35% in primary schools and 33% in secondary schools respectively). This tendency is encapsulated in Australian and South Korean commentaries:

“In reality, most PE teachers (in Australia) still give preferential treatment to those outcomes related to developing concepts and skills for physical activity. Accordingly, social learning and fair play education, probably receive less explicit focus than motor skills, sports and fitness” (Tinning, 2005, p.58)

In South Korea “PE strongly focuses on sport skills rather than health promotion and the affective domain. Most physical educators still have a traditional perspective that the subject’s basic role is to develop motor skills in a variety of sports” (Kang and You, 2005, p.583)

Aims linked to broader lifelong educational outcomes such as promotion of health-related fitness (17% of primary and 18% of secondary schools’ curricula) and active lifestyles (12% and 14% of primary and secondary schools respectively) as well as recognition of physical education’s contributory role in personal and social (21% and 23% of primary and secondary schools’ curricula respectively) but less so of moral (4% and 3% of primary and secondary schools’ physical education curricula respectively) development are apparent.

b) Physical Education Curriculum

Activity Areas: According to ‘official’ documents, many countries commit to a

‘broad and balanced’ range of curricular activities’ opportunities and at one level, this would appear to be reflected in practice with the range of different activities taught within many physical education programmes. In descending order team and individual games (collectively) are most commonly taught and are followed by track and field athletics, gymnastics, dance, swimming, outdoor adventure activities and ‘others’. However, international surveys’ data challenge the extent to which breadth and balance are provided. Examination of activity areas time allocation across the world reveals how, in practice, competitive sport activities dominate the physical activity experiences of pupils globally thus, underpinning the thesis of a performance sport discourse in which there is, in both primary and secondary schools, a predominantly Games (team and individual) orientation followed by Track and Field Athletics and Gymnastics. These three activity areas account for 77% and 79% of physical education curriculum content in primary and secondary schools respectively (see table 2). As table 2 also demonstrates, collectively, swimming, dance and outdoor adventure activities are accorded only 18% of activity time allocation at primary level and only 13% at secondary level.

The competitive sports scenario is typified by a Nigerian example:

“Emphasis in PE leans rather towards developing athletes for state, national and international competitions. So right from elementary school, competition and winning are the elements stressed in PE classes. The idea of participation in order to make new friends or develop sportsmanship and moral ‘uprightness’ is rather remote in the Nigerian context” (Salokun, 2005, p.507)

Table 2. Activity Area Curriculum Time Allocation in Primary and Secondary Schools (%)

Activity Area	Primary Schools %	Secondary Schools %
Games	41	43
Gymnastics	18	14
Track & Field Athletics	18	22
Swimming	6	5
Dance	7	4
Outdoor Adventure Activities	5	4
Other	7	8

c) Physical Education Curriculum Relevance and Delivery Quality Issues: The issue of relevance of physical education curricula in a context of recent societal values' and norms' changes is becoming significant in an increasing number of countries. An emerging theme not apparent in previous surveys are references to pupils no longer seeing the significance of physical education as a school subject: the traditional content of physical education and/or sports activity has little relevance to their life-style context. This is epitomised in a Slovenian teacher's observation that there is an

"inappropriate curriculum for PE in elementary and secondary school. Curriculum is not realistic and in many parts has nothing together with practice".

The experiences acquired from unwilling engagement in competitive sport are not personally or socially meaningful – they are a 'turn-off':

- **England**

"40% of girls drop out of sport by the age of 18 with girls as young as 7 being put off the idea of sport for good. 20% of girls have no regular sport at all during or outside school hours. Some girls cite embarrassment about their bodies, ability or kit to be worn as reasons for non-partici-

pation. Busting a gut on a frozen hockey pitch whilst being frequently hit on the legs by a piece of wood is not conducive to participation motivation, nor are embarrassment about their bodies, their ability or the kit they have to wear (Bee, 2003)

- **Tunisia**

"Students seem to be decreasingly motivated to take part in SPE (Sport and Physical Education) in its current form. This is clearly expressed by the high number of students who stay away from PE lessons, and by the increasing number of dispensations" (Zouabi, 2005, p.674).

Examples testifying to negative experiences and impacts, lack of commitment to teaching and pedagogical and didactical inadequacies in some countries are abundant. Media headlines in the USA refer to:

"So just how bad is your child's gym class? PE programs often poorly run, provide few health benefits" (The Associated Press, Jan. 17, 2005)

and

"Experts Dissatisfied With PE Classes" (The Associated Press, Jan. 17, 2005)

The failure of teachers to provide meaningful experiences is underpinned by individuals' commentaries on physical education in schools:

- **Scotland**

A Scottish individual recounts his experience of spending his “teenage years dreading games, shivering on rugby fields and subject to all manner of rebuke for my ineptitude at the game from staff and schoolmates. In my final week at school I finally confronted my physical education teacher and challenged him as to why I’d been made to endure this torture. “Well son”, he replied, “at least you know now that you can’t play rugby, and that’s what we call an education” (Anon, cited in Kay, 2005)

- **USA**

A Lansing State Journal reporter records that his “school gym class experience was one long, drawn-out horror show”...with teachers showing no interest in him as he did not belong to the athletically gifted; they were “too busy lavishing all of their positive energy on the gifted jocks”. The only form of attention received was “never-ending shouts of emasculating and degrading insults at my every effort” (and) gym class was responsible for many agonizing and demoralizing moments of my life” (Ford, 2003)

The scenario of a discrepancy between what the school offers and what the pupils are looking for regarding sports-related activities is not untypical in many countries. Such a situation is underpinned by repeated teachers’ and officials’ references to young students no longer seeing the relevance or significance of physical education as a school subject. The overall situation is not only seen in content of curricula but also in structures related to extra-curricular activity and emphasis on school sport. In some countries, these structures, like curriculum activity orienta-

tion, may be counter to, or not aligned with, the lifestyle needs and demands, trends and tendencies of young people in out-of-school settings. Collectively, the experiences acquired from unwilling engagement in competitive sport-related physical education are a ‘turn-off’. For many boys and girls, a programme, which serves to reinforce achievement-orientated competition performance sport limits participatory options rather than expands horizons and is contrary to trends and tendencies in out-of-school settings amongst young people, does not provide essential meaningful experiences: the McNab (1999) cited “joyless experience” (p.2) persists! It would appear that this goes beyond those who have traditionally been either put off by, or not enjoyed, physical education. In some instances, there appears to be a much deeper rejection of physical education as a legitimate school activity.

Physical Education Resources

a) Teaching Personnel: A majority of countries have generalist (71%) and/or specialist (67%) teachers for physical education in primary schools, whereas in secondary schools, specialist teachers predominate (98%). Concerns regarding inadequacies of teaching personnel for physical education classes, and especially so in the primary school phase, are persistent. The following illustrations may not be typical within each country, but they do indicate some problematic issues, which are replicated in other countries.

- **Austria**

“...In primary schools teachers are not trained well – they often just go for a week or do German or mathematics instead of PE” (PE Teacher)

- **Ghana**

“There is a lack of qualified personnel to teach the subject... PE teachers at the basic level are non-specialists... who have received training for two or more subject areas... The resulting problem (is) ‘half-baked’ PE graduates. They have only a scant grasp of the subject. Such teachers are not effective PE staff. They tend to infect pupils, staff and heads with their lack of interest” (Ammah and Kwaw, 2005, p.315)

- **Malta**

“There is still a large number of unqualified people who hold teaching posts... who do not know what they are doing” (PE Lecturer)

- **Nepal**

“Physical education teachers are not very well trained. There are very less PE teachers in schools in Nepal” (PE Lecturer)

b) Facilities and Equipment: A pervasive feature of concern, and particularly so in economically underdeveloped and developing countries, is quality and quantity of provision of facilities and equipment because level of provision can detrimentally affect quality of physical education programmes. Over a third (37%) of countries indicate relative dissatisfaction with the quality of facilities with around a third (34%) deeming the quality of facilities as “adequate”. Regionally, it is not surprising to see that quality of facilities is generally regarded as lower in economically developing regions (Africa, 60%; Central/Latin America 67%; and Asia 59%). Nevertheless, in spite of the apparent shortfalls in quality and quantity of facilities, encouragingly these proportional figures compare more favourably with those reported

in Worldwide Survey I, in which globally and regionally, a majority of countries indicated inadequate provision: globally 69%; Central/Latin America 100%; Africa and Asia 93%; Middle East 73%; North America 62%; and Europe 61%. Worldwide, there is fairly equitable distribution across the continuum of equipment quality descriptors from “excellent” to “inadequate”, although more than a third of countries regard equipment provision as “below average”/“inadequate”. Regional data indicate that in the three regions (Africa, Asia, and Central/Latin America), which largely comprise economically underdeveloped or developing countries, there is a majority of countries with “below average”/“inadequate” provision. At best (32%) of countries surveyed there is an indication that the quantity of facilities is sufficient. Collectively, 50% of countries indicate that the quantity provided is “limited”/“insufficient” with only 18% indicating “above average”/“excellent”. Regionally, in Africa (66%), Asia (53%), Central/Latin America (87%) and Middle East (57%) a majority of countries regard facilities as “limited”/“insufficient”. Only in North America is the quantity of facilities assessed as “sufficient” or “above average”. Consistent with the quantity of facilities, data suggest that at best 35% of countries surveyed indicate that equipment is “sufficient”, whilst collectively 43% indicate that supply of equipment is “limited”/“insufficient” compared with 22% indicating “extensive”/“above average”). Regionally, there is consistency with data on quantity of facilities: considerable shortages of equipment in Central/Latin America countries (78%); and substantial shortages in Africa (62%) Middle East (57%) and Asia (53%). Only

the North American region has a positive assessment of equipment supply.

Sustainable Future Directions

A fundamental question is what should be done to secure a sustainable future for school physical education and sport? One answer is to accept the situation for what it is and suffer the consequences. The other is to confront the situation and address available options to help resolve some of the problems not only in Europe but also globally. Whatever the direction for resolution, there is little point in 'fiddling' whilst physical education in particular 'burns'.

Since the 1999 Berlin first Physical Education Summit there has been an array of advocacy and initiatives by an numerous international and national agencies and institutions, epitomised in *Communiqués, Recommendations and Resolutions, Position, Declaration and Commitment Statements* as well as the dedicated 2004 *European Year of Sport through Education* and 2005 United Nations' *Year of Sport and Physical Education, Conferences and Seminars*. Collectively, they are demonstrative of broad-spread political will and indicative of an international consensus that issues surrounding physical education in schools deserve serious consideration in problem resolution. Result has been implementation of positive programmes and good practices in physical education in countries and regions across the world with a number of measures to optimise the quality of physical education provision and so enhance the experiences of children in schools. The evidence suggests that national and, where relevant, regional governments have committed

themselves through legislation to making provision for physical education but some have been either slow or reticent in translating this into action through actual implementation and assurance of quality of delivery. Generally, the 2005-2008 PE Worldwide Survey "reality check" reveals several areas of continuing concern:

- continuing deficiencies in curriculum time allocation and actual implementation as well as a failure to strictly apply legislation on school physical education provision, subject status, material, human and financial resources
- considerable widespread inadequacies in facility and equipment supply, especially in economically developing (though not exclusively so) countries; a related issue in the facility-equipment concern is insufficient funding
- disquiet about teacher supply and quality embracing insufficiency in numbers and inadequacy of appropriately qualified physical education/sport teachers
- relevance and quality of the physical education curriculum, especially in countries where there is a sustained pre-disposition towards sports competition and performance-related activities dominated by Games, Gymnastics and Track & Field Athletics
- whilst some improvements in inclusion (related to gender and disability) policy and practice can be identified since the Berlin Physical Education Summit, barriers to equal provision and access opportunities for all still remain
- falling fitness standards of young people and high youth drop-out rates from physical/sporting activity engagement, exacerbated in some countries by insufficient and/or inadequate school-

community co-ordination physical activity participation pathway links.

In essence, the situation especially in economically under-developed and developing regions has changed little since the 1999 Berlin Physical Education Summit and it is clear that children are being denied the opportunities that will transform their lives in too many schools in too many countries. Such denial of opportunities is inconsistent with the policy principles of the 1978 UNESCO *Charter for Sport and Physical Education* and 1975 (revised in 2001) revised Council of Europe *Sport for All Charter* as well as the well-intentioned interest-vested groups' *Declaration and Commitment Statements*. Positive developments and policy rhetoric are juxtaposed with adverse practice shortcomings. Thus, the overall scenario is one of 'mixed messages'. Almost nine years on from the Berlin PE World Summit, the situation now is typified by little change in some countries and regions and by positive developments, stabilisation and relative decline in others. As Maude de Boer-Buqiccio (2002) (the then Council of Europe Deputy Secretary General) observed at the *Informal Meeting of Ministers with Responsibility for Sport* in Warsaw, "the crux of the issue is that there is too much of a gap between the promise and the reality" (p.2); policy and practice do not always add up!

The European Parliament 2007 *Resolution* represents a significant step forward in policy guidance in the domain of physical education. The *Resolution* in accord with accepted (though scientifically unproven) orthodoxy implies that physical education has the propensity to make significant and distinctive contributions to children, schools and wider society:

respect for the body, integrated development of mind and body, understanding of physical activity in health promotion, psycho-social development (self-esteem and self-confidence), social and cognitive development and academic achievement, socialisation and social (tolerance and respect for others, co-operation and cohesion, leadership, team spirit, antidote to anti-social behaviour) skills and aesthetic, spiritual, emotional and moral (fair play, character building) development, a panacea for resolution of the obesity epidemic, inactivity crisis and sedentary lifestyles, enhancement of quality of life etc. Two fundamental questions arise here.

1. Should PE be held accountable for any or all of educational outcomes or benefits it claims or is claimed on its behalf?
2. How can physical education deliver all that is claimed in its name?!

Relevant to both questions is a list of associated questions. For example: how is it possible to impact on children's obesity with only one or two 30-minute physical education lessons a week?; how can we develop a broad range of movement skills in large class sizes of 30 or more students, who the physical educator may see for less than 36 hours a year?; is even an hour of daily physical education enough?; and with the knowledge that the intensity, duration, and frequency of physical activity do more than anything to immediately impact on student health, how can we successfully help students experience the joy of movement in physical education classes while urging them to meet target heart rates? Maybe it is an issue of 'changing minds' and, thereby, 'winning bodies'! We need to juxtapose advocacy rhetoric with scientific evidence.

Whilst the perceived importance of physical activity for persons of all ages has been well documented, the importance of physical education for the development of life-long physical activity habits and health promotion and the importance of participation in physical education in the development of social skills needed by our society, as well as the importance of physical education in the development of cognitive function have not been well researched or understood or articulated beyond the community of physical educators. The attention devoted to increasing levels of obesity and the association with physical inactivity might appear to bode well for physical education but this association may prove to be a mixed blessing because arguably there is a risk of ignoring many of the most beneficial outcomes of quality physical education if the subject matter is reduced to simply being a means to countering the obesity problem. It is tempting for physical educators to see their subject matter as the solution to children's obesity. After all, if children do nothing else, most of them at least get some regular physical activity during some 10-12 years of required school physical education. Unfortunately, while some physical activity may be better than none, the physical education profession alone cannot solve the obesity crisis. This is not to suggest that physical educators should not try to stimulate young people's activity engagement, and help them to understand the value of physical activity and healthy eating. Inactive lifestyles and unhealthy diets, left ignored by families, communities, media, and some kind of legislation, mean that the best efforts of the physical education profession to turn the tide of obesity will not succeed.

For socialisation into physical activity engagement, the school physical education curriculum and its delivery need to be conceptually and contextually re-appraised. The widespread practice in physical education curricula to provide experiences, which merely serve to reinforce achievement-orientated competition performance sport, is a narrow and unjustifiable conception of the role of physical education. In this context, it is unsurprising that pupil interest in physical education declines throughout the school years and youngsters become less active in later school years. For many boys and girls, such programmes do not provide personally meaningful and socially relevant experiences and they limit participatory options rather than expand horizons and thus, are contrary to trends and tendencies in out-of-school settings amongst young people. If physical education is to play a valued useful role in the promotion of active lifestyles, it must move beyond interpretations of activity based upon performance criteria: its current frame of reference should be widened. In some countries, its content has little relevance to young people's life-style context and there are considerable discrepancies between what occurs in physical education lessons and what is going on outside and beyond the school. The preservation of physical education in its old state is not the way to proceed; it is time to move into the 21st century! Engagement needs to be relevant and meaningful to sustain regular and habitual participation in, and out of and beyond school. In the light of available scientific evidence, individual needs and societal trends, inactivity levels and sedentary lifestyles patterns and circumstantially associated

rising levels of obesity, consideration of the re-conceptualisation and reconstruction of physical education is essential. If children are to be moved from 'play stations' to play-grounds' (Balkenende, 2005), any re-conceptualisation of physical education, which contributes to the creation of the 'physically educated' or 'physically literate' person, does need to be accompanied by improvements to raise the quality of teaching and learning processes as well as that of associated teacher educational preparation or training. Recent pedagogical and didactical developments have consequences for physical education teacher education both at initial and in-service/continuing professional development training levels. Wherever appropriate, physical education delivery can benefit from re-orientation towards placing more responsibility on students for their learning with the managerial responsibility of the teacher progressively transferred to pupils and so enhance pupil involvement. Reflective practitioners will translate into reflective students! Re-conceptualisation needs to be seen in the context of life-long participation in physical activity and should include inter-related strategies to embrace the formulation of quality programmes, which provide meaningful experiences and, which attract young people to the joy and pleasure of physical activity and so foster an 'active life-style' philosophy with a focus on relevance and understanding. Initial and in-service training/further professional development should properly address pedagogical and didactical developments and social and cultural shifts and so help to enhance the physical education experience of children. This is particularly important in primary/elementary

schools, preparation for which is often 'generalist' rather than specialist. Any reshaping, however, may well need to recognise local and cultural diversities, traditions as well as different social and economic conditions.

The nature and quality of delivery of the school physical education curriculum is fundamental to the future not only of the subject in schools but also to the future of active life-styles over the full life-span for the two are inextricably entwined. Advocates have to ensure that physical education can justifiably claim a higher status, be worthy of improved time allocations and appropriate personnel, financial and material resources. If physical educators want to make an impact on enhancing activity levels in order to improve health, then some current practices should be abandoned because they do not appear to work for many children. Instead, if physical educators are serious about physical activity for health promotion, then nutrition and physical literacy should be central strategies and they should work closely with families, wider school, education and health, (sport) communities. Additionally, radical changes to pedagogy would be required, especially when trying to meet challenges embedded in the rhetoric of meeting the individual needs of each child but all "need to acquire knowledge, understanding and behavioural skills to ensure physical activity becomes a regular part of their daily life" (Fairclough and Stratton, 2005). The challenges should not ignore relevant scholarly research, which, in recent years has made significant progress in unravelling some of the 'mysteries' of learning and socialisation processes in different and various cultural and cross-cultural contexts.

If policy-makers, decision-takers, administrators and practitioners are to continue to be persuaded of an essential presence of physical education in schools' curricula, commitment to re-conceptualisation, reconstruction and delivery of a relevant quality curriculum by appropriately qualified teaching personnel will in themselves be insufficient. Sustained application of political skills and argument of the case at local, through national, to international levels are required. The value of communication to ALL components of society, teachers, parents, and government officials cannot be over-estimated. The growing body of medical and other scientific research evidence and positive statements support a potentially compelling case for physical education in providing life-long benefits directly related to preventing disease and to maintaining an enhanced quality of life, but further and more robust research is required. The existing accumulated evidence needs to be presented clearly and concisely and in a language that can be understood to convince all 'enterprise' partners and significant others that physical education is, indeed, an authentic and indispensable sphere of activity. To this end, as both inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations have recognised, goals will be better served by effective partnerships with shared responsibilities of all vested interested agencies and institutions involved in policies and their implementation. The principle of partnerships embracing multi-sectoral policies is an essential feature of the policy framework of the World Health Organisation's (2004) *Global strategy on diet, physical activity and health* as well as the European Parliament's 2007 *Resolution*.

A school's role extends to encouraging young people to continue participation in physical activity, through the provision of links and co-ordinated opportunities for all young people at all levels and by developing partnerships with the wider community to extend and improve the opportunities available for them to remain physically active. Hence, there is a need for wider community-based partnerships. With only two hours per week time allocation (in many countries, it is frequently less), physical education cannot itself satisfy physical activity needs of young people or address activity shortfalls let alone achieve other significant outcomes. Bridges do need to be built, especially to stimulate young people to participate in physical activity during their leisure time. Many children are not made aware of, and how to negotiate, the multifarious pathways to out-of-school and beyond school opportunities. As one French teacher put it there is "not enough co-operation between schools and sport organisations", an observation underlined by almost two-thirds of European countries indicating lack of links between school physical education and the wider community.

Physical Education Teacher Education programmes should address these facilitation and intermediary roles of the physical education teacher. Thus, at the very least, their professional preparation should embrace familiarisation with pathways for participation in wider community multi-sector provision and the achievement of personal excellence. Support is fundamental to the realisation of such ideals. It can be achieved through the collaborative, co-operative partnership approach involving other professionals and

committed, dedicated and properly mentored volunteer individual and group enthusiasts. Personnel functioning in partner institutions should have appropriate skills and competences, which might be acquired through some special training.

Despite mixed research findings messages and/or insufficient empirically-based longitudinal evidence, it is widely acknowledged that physical activity can positively influence physical and psychosocial health and hence, is important at all stages in the life-cycle from childhood to old age. Therefore, it seems logical to suggest that socialisation into, and through physical activity, should occur from 'womb' to 'tomb' i.e. a physical education over the full life span. If physical education is to sustain its presence both in formal and informal educational and socio-cultural settings, and continue to have a positive role as an instrument of socialisation, then issues have to be confronted. Education in general, and physical education in particular, should respond to the needs of optimally developing individuals' capabilities and provide opportunities for personal fulfilment and social interactions, essential in human co-existence. With the knowledge that educational experiences have a propensity to facilitate and help enhancement of life-span welfare and well-being, physical education should be focally involved with the process of personal fulfilment in the future. Protagonists argue that physical education is an essential element of education and has an indispensable role in the upbringing and education of people. It is worth remembering, however, that it is not the activity, but the reason for taking part that sustains participation. I would add that its role embraces the often over-

looked intrinsic value of the 'sheer joy of participation in physical/sporting activity'.

Concluding Comments

Curriculum time allocation is an important issue in the provision of quality physical education. Notably, in the European Parliament's *Resolution*, is the call on Member States to make physical education compulsory in primary and secondary schools with a guaranteed principle of at least three physical education lessons per week. EUPEA recommends daily physical education in the early years of schooling (elementary grades, up to 11 or 12 years of age and 3 hours (180 minutes) per week in post-elementary (secondary/high schools) grades. In the United States, the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) recommends a minimum of 150 minutes per week for physical education in elementary schools and 225 minutes per week for middle and high school students. *Recommendations* by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers on 30 April 2003 included a significant reference to physical education time allocation: an agreement to "move towards a compulsory legal minimum of 180 minutes weekly, in three periods, with schools endeavouring to go beyond this minimum where this is possible" (Council of Europe, Committee of Ministers, 2003) and a call for one hour of daily physical activity in or out of school settings (Hardman, 2008).

The European Parliament's Resolution very clearly establishes physical education on the political agenda. It is an agenda, which UNESCO is also actively pursuing as it attempts to formulate quality physical education policy principles,

which can be suitably adapted by Member States to 'local' circumstances and conditions. With such inter-governmental commitments to policy principles and action advocacy, a secure and sustainable future for physical education appears to be realisable.

Maintenance of monitoring of developments in physical education across the world is an imperative. The Council of Europe's 2003 *Recommendations*, the UNESCO 'Round Table' *Communiqué* and the WHO *Global Strategy* have advocated regular reviews of the situation of physical education in each country. The Council of Europe referred to the introduction of provision for a pan-European survey on physical education policies and practices every five years as a priority! (Bureau of the Committee for the Development of Sport, 2002a; 2002b; Council of Europe, Committee of Ministers, 2004). With such reviews in mind, UNESCO has initiated a 5-year pilot phase with the University of Worcester, UK as a *Monitoring Advisory Centre* to assist in monitoring developments in school physical education and sports programmes of Member States. To this end, the University of Worcester's Physical Education Monitoring Centre, acting as a kind of 'Clearing House', is developing a worldwide institutional network of national Centres, which will provide annual update reports on developments and undertake regular monitoring surveys. This 'watching brief' mechanism will gauge whether "promises" are being converted into "reality" and so contribute to countering potential threats and securing a safe future for physical education in schools. Otherwise with the Council of Europe Deputy Secretary General's inti-

mation of a gap between "promise" and "reality", there is a real danger that inter-governmental agencies' *Recommendations* and *Resolutions* will remain more "promise" than "reality" in too many countries across the world and compliance with international and national Charters will continue to remain compromised (Hardman and Marshall, 2005) just as responses to the various *Declaration* and *Commitment Statements* will remain as conceptual ideals (Hardman and Marshall, 2008).

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