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CURRICULUM REFORM AND POLICY COHESION IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Mike Jess & Shirley Gray, UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH, UK

As other chapters in this part reaffirm, physical education (PE) reform brings a number of paradoxes to the fore. Amidst and despite ‘reforms’ PE is invariably still viewed as sport, games or play, and has tended to have “a shadowy, marginal existence in education” (Oslinš & Stolz, 2013, p. 888). Whilst PE has remained a constant feature of most national curricula globally (Puhse & Gerber, 2005), attention has often been drawn to the subject’s low status and perceived failings, resulting in calls for curriculum reform (e.g. Penney & Chandler, 2000). This chapter reflects that research has highlighted a lack of clarity and/or agreement about the nature of the PE curriculum, revealed the limited influence that the profession has at government level (Evans & Davies, 2015), and increasingly drawn attention to ‘external’ stakeholders (mostly from sport and health) setting specific directions for the PE curriculum (see Penney & Mitchell, Chapter 11).

Thus, the interaction between the PE profession and national policy makers and the associated synergies and tensions in respective agendas are now of particular interest to the profession (e.g. Evans, 2013). Alongside this, as Petrie’s chapter (12) discusses, the limited role that teachers play in the curriculum development process has also repeatedly been evidenced.

In an effort to better understand the issue and process of policy coherence, we take a ‘big picture’ view, exploring how the complex relationship between the PE profession and policy makers has shaped, and continues to shape, the nature of PE. Historical and contemporary policy relationships are then positioned as fundamental to the analysis and understanding of the directions pursued in curriculum reforms and the practices that are consequently advanced or inhibited.

We first direct attention to the significance of a historical perspective and discuss how, during much of the twentieth century, physical educators developed a ‘school subject’ with limited government input. This evolutionary process is identified as far from smooth so that by the latter part of the century, as governments began to take more interest in curriculum development, the PE profession was not in a strong position to influence policy direction. Building from this, we scrutinise how recent shifts in conceptual thinking and curriculum initiatives stemming from within the profession have interacted with differing government views on the nature of PE. We identify tensions in policy agendas across government arenas as a key issue in understanding both the processes and outcomes of contemporary curriculum reform in PE. While the chapter reflects research that has been focused particularly on the UK context, the lines of analyses and emergent trends discussed are ones that have international currency. In looking to the future we
direct attention to the need for the profession to be astute in responding to the evidence from historical developments and contemporary policy contexts. We suggest that PE futures will likely be governed by the profession’s ability to create robust but flexible curriculum structures that have the capacity to cope with, negotiate and influence policy landscapes. This stance underpins our recommendations for future curriculum scholarship, research and practice.

The evolving nature of physical education in the twentieth century

PE’s evolution has been complex as events within and beyond the profession have interacted to create a non-linear and often messy trajectory. Whilst observations about physical culture go back to Ancient Greece, Kirk’s (1992) work located in the UK identifies that it was not until the late nineteenth century with the introduction of mass schooling that PE emerged as a ‘school subject’. It is evident, however, that this introduction stemmed more from concerns about the poor physical health and fitness levels of the military rather than claims about how it can contribute to the education of young people in schools (Kirk, 1992). Hence, it is important to acknowledge that both the prominence of ‘other discourses’ in establishing curriculum directions for PE, and curriculum marginality, are historical features of PE.

With governments having limited involvement in curriculum development during much of the twentieth century (Ball, 2008), physical educators had some autonomy to develop the curriculum as best they saw fit (Kirk, 1992). Yet, as an area of study in its relative infancy, PE had a limited ‘intellectual tradition’ (Gard, 2008) which made it difficult to create a cohesive and robust vision for PE as different groups positioned the subject in line with numerous, and sometimes conflicting, interests (Goodson, 1987). As Jewett and Bain (1985) have noted, PE’s engagement with the curriculum process was relatively limited with the result that “the state of the art of physical education curriculum does not permit presentation of several comprehensive, sophisticated, competing theories of physical education” (p. xi). Rather, lack of clarity has been seen as characteristic of PE and a cause of concern for many within the profession. Countering such concern, Kirk (1992) suggested that conflicts should not be seen as “episodes of abnormal chaos punctuating a normal state of calm tranquillity and consensus, but are instead a common and entirely healthy feature of social life” (p. 156). In essence, as an emergent profession, non-linear evolution should be seen as part of the normal development process.

A historical perspective extending through the twentieth century, and considering the second half of the century in particular, illustrates that a lack of linearity characterises curriculum reform in PE. Further, it brings to the fore the ways in which key developments within and external to the profession have had a significant influence on how PE developed. The sections that follow draw upon research that has variously utilised historical, sociological and philosophical perspectives to explore the changing internal and external ‘dynamics’ that have impacted on the focus and direction of curriculum ‘reform’. Key ‘internal’ developments we direct attention to are:

(i) the shift from physical training to physical education;
(ii) scientisation and the multi-activity curriculum approach; and
(iii) a focus on the secondary school years.

We then direct attention to the following parallel ‘external’ developments:

(i) the mind-body dualism and status; and
(ii) increased government intervention.
Throughout, however, we point to the important interplay between internal and external developments.

**Internal developments**

Kirk’s (1992, 2001) research has documented that until the end of the Second World War, PE (or physical training as it was often called) was largely a female profession with a curriculum dominated by Swedish or German gymnastics focused on regimented physical drill. As historical studies have illustrated (Fletcher, 1984), the history of the profession and of curriculum reform in PE are firmly identified as gendered and as inherently related to one another. This line of research also highlights the way in which the respective curriculum histories of PE teacher education and of PE as a school subject are intertwined. Later in the chapter we return to this issue in considering contemporary issues and future directions for curriculum reform.

With the introduction of mass secondary schooling after the Second World War, male teachers began to enter the profession in significant numbers and efforts were made to extend the nature of PE curriculum (Kirk, 1992). However, in various parts of the world, this caused considerable tension. While female physical educationists tended to favour a more aesthetic, creative and progressive movement education approach, the males concentrated on a scientifically oriented movement mastery approach focused on games and sports (Whitson & McIntosh, 1990). This more scientific approach, fitting well with the educational worldview of the time, began to dominate the curriculum and was initially viewed with some optimism in terms of its educational potential (Kirk, 2013). The model, later termed the multi-activity approach (Siedentop, 1982), was underpinned by behaviourist learning theories and characterised by teaching concentrated on technical movements and curriculum design in short 6–8 week ‘blocks’ of lessons focused on specific physical activities, particularly team games (Jess, Atencio & Thorburn, 2011). While this approach gradually extended to include a range of physical activities (e.g. gymnastics, dance, aquatics, etc.), as others have discussed (e.g. Locke, 1992; Penney & Chandler, 2000) the model has continued to set a strong frame for curriculum thinking and notions of ‘reform’.

Towards the end of the century, other curriculum models began to feature as part, albeit a small part, of PE. These included Movement Skill Themes, Humanistic PE, Fitness for Life, Health-Related Activity, Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU) and Sport Education; all of which have variously played a prominent role in subsequent developments internationally. By the end of the century, however, there was some consensus that “the PE curriculum has been structured with a subject matter orientation” and more specifically that “sports, dance and gymnastics units have dominated” (Jewett & Bain, 1985, pp. 32–33). Concurrently, concerns were being raised about the educational worthiness of this approach and of the conceptualisation underlying thinking about the curriculum (Fernandez-Balbao, 1997).

External-internal interplay is particularly evident when we consider the impact that the introduction of compulsory secondary schooling had on the profession, as initial teacher education increasingly focused on the specialist training needed to teach PE across the secondary school years (Kirk, Tinning & Macdonald, 1997). Less attention was given to primary school developments as curriculum projects increasingly concentrated on the secondary years. Some observers suggested that this marginalising of primary PE would result in many children entering secondary school lacking the movement competence, knowledge or motivation to engage in PE (Gallahue, McLenaghan & Luedke, 1975). These concerns were compounded by research reporting few specialist teachers working in primary schools (Physical Education Association, 1987), weaknesses in the quality of teaching (Graber, Locke, Lambdin, & Solmon, 2008), limited initial teacher education (Kerr & Rodgers, 1981) and a general lack of confidence to teach PE...
(Faucette, Nugent, Sallis, & McKenzie, 2002). By the end of the century concerns about the state of primary PE were common in the literature across the world (Hardman & Marshall, 2000) – and they continue to frame curriculum reform in PE (see Petrie, Chapter 12; Penney & Marshall, Chapter 11).

So, with PE initially introduced to the school curriculum on health grounds, mass secondary schooling and the introduction of male teachers in the post-Second World War period saw primary PE being marginalised and a move towards a more scientifically oriented multi-activity approach. However, while curriculum ‘reforms’ were largely framed within this overarching structure, concerns were beginning to be raised about its appropriateness to meet broader educational objectives.

**External developments**

As indicated above, external events concurrently impacted on the evolution of PE in the UK particularly, but also internationally. Drawing on research within and beyond PE we direct attention to two issues that internationally had a particularly significant impact in the post-war period: the positioning of the subject within the overall curriculum and, towards the end of the century, government intervention.

Within the UK, while the subject’s position within the overall curriculum had been a long-standing concern for the profession, this debate was re-ignited to a wider audience in the 1960s when two prominent educational philosophers, Peters (1966) and Hirst (1968), questioned PE’s role in the curriculum. Writing from the Platonic-Cartesian liberal-analytical tradition of philosophy that dominated education thinking in the West, they presented a view of the curriculum that distinguished between mind and body and privileged different intellectual modes of enquiry. Peters (1966, p. 159) considered that games, the dominant feature of the multi-activity curriculum, were non-serious and morally unimportant activities because they lacked “a wide ranging cognitive content” as they were based on “mere know-how”. In contrast, he suggested that the study of science, for example, offered limitless potential for increasing knowledge and for making discerning judgements. PE’s position within this academically inclined curriculum was problematic, and it was with some relief, for some, that PE was later included in the cognitively focused, high-stakes assessment programmes in some countries (Ayers, Sawyer & Dinham, 2004). However, views such as that expressed by Ozoliņš and Stolz (2013), in stating that PE “is concerned with the exercise and development of the body and not the mind, so it is non-cognitive” (p. 849) highlight that while Peters (1983) and Hirst (1993) were later to acknowledge the value of practical activities, the impact of their earlier work has had a lasting effect. PE has repeatedly faced the challenge to justify its academic worth and research internationally continues to highlight this as a prime issue amidst curriculum developments in the senior secondary years (Fitzclarence & Tinning, 1990).

During the 1980s and 1990s, developments in many parts of the world reaffirmed the need for curriculum reform in PE to be acknowledged as inherently tied to wider political and social change (see Chapter 9 by Penney and Chapter 13 by Wilkinson). Policy and curriculum research in education revealed that while governments had taken a ‘hands-off’ approach to curriculum development (Ball, 2008), globalisation, the knowledge economy and performativity were emerging concepts gaining precedence in policy arenas, with profound implications for educational reform. A growing body of research illustrated reforms positioning education within a market ideology focused on attainment and teacher accountability (Day & Smethem, 2009), and increasingly resulting in educational developments being initiated outside the
profession (Webb & Vulliamy, 1999). Educational research internationally further highlighted that long-held social justice goals were often sidelined as moves were made towards an “overriding emphasis on policy making for economic competitiveness” (Ball, 2008, p. 12).

Over time, research has revealed the subtle and sometimes overt impact of this emerging political context on PE curriculum reform. Developments in England highlighted a shift from a situation where PE was of limited interest to policy makers to one in which governments pushed ideologically driven agendas in the context of national curriculum reforms and policy developments spanning education and sport. Acknowledging poor physical activity levels and limited sporting success, a ‘restorationist’ discourse was embedded in a PE national curriculum and in sport policy (Penney & Evans, 1999). John Major, then Prime Minister, promised to “put competitive team games at the heart of school life” (cited in Carney & Armstrong, 1996, p. 69) and set in train policy and structural changes to achieve this. The Youth Sport Trust (YST), founded in 1994 with the aim of developing and implementing PE and sport programmes for young people was central to this traditional sport revival. The YST rapidly came to prominence by supporting the government’s sport policy, articulating the value of school sport (and PE) in relation to whole school improvements and undertaking large-scale national professional development programmes. Conversely, the PE professional associations were reluctant to follow these narrow sporting priorities and were effectively excluded from the national policy discourse (Houlihan & Green, 2006). In a short period of time, this type of government intervention occurred in many countries and saw PE move from being in “a world of its own” (Thorburn & Horrell, 2011, p. 74) to a position amidst the wider world of policy discourse: a position that the profession has found particularly difficult to impact upon (Hardman & Marshall, 2000).

Hence, we can reflect that after the Second World War PE sought to expand its horizons and align itself with broader, ‘more worthy’ educational goals. However, the result of this was that the profession became embroiled in internal and external debates about curriculum structures, primary PE and positioning within the overall curriculum. As governments around the world became more prominent in curriculum development processes, Macdonald and Brooker (1997) identified that the challenge for the profession was to construct curricula that were “sufficiently defensible, rigorous, and relevant within contemporary school cultures to ensure that the subject [or learning area] is positioned as legitimate work” (p. 155). As the new century approached, the manner in which this curriculum challenge was tackled would have an important impact on how the profession would achieve recognition of legitimacy within and beyond education.

Physical education in the twenty-first century: changing thinking, emerging connections

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, a series of events occurred to, once again, influence the direction of ‘reform’ in PE. Reports of an impending global childhood ‘obesity epidemic’ (James, Leach, Kalamara, & Shayeghi, 2001) and increasing recognition of the lifelong benefits from regular physical activity (Paffenbarger, Hyde, Wing, & Hsieh, 1986) helped raise the profile of PE in many countries (Hardman & Marshall, 2005). While the enhanced interest was to be welcomed, the extent to which it would impact on prospects for PE was soon apparent. The context in which PE developments were now placed was characterised by greater complexity as health, sport and education stakeholders became the prominent actors in curriculum matters. As the PE profession tried to move beyond the multi-activity approach, the policy space in which it was operating was more crowded, contested and diverse (Petrie & lisahunter, 2011).
Again, a combination of internal and external developments impacted prospects for curriculum reform and placed PE in both a challenging and potentially precarious position. Key (and again parallel) influences that we identify with the evolution of PE in the early part of the twenty-first century are summarised as:

- Internal: (i) a conceptual shift; (ii) new curriculum models; and (iii) models-based practice, connective specialism and lifelong learning.
- External: (i) sport, health and education agendas; and (ii) ongoing government intervention.

**Internal developments**

The turn of the century saw PE increasingly question its association with positivist views of knowledge and practice, and calls were made for change in response to the emergence of new postmodern theoretical perspectives (Fernandez-Balboa, 1997). A growing number of academics supported the view that the knowledge and practices associated with PE were not fixed entities and that there was a need for learning experiences to be more relevant to the complex needs of young people (Tinning & Fitzclarence, 1994). PE began to negotiate notions of uncertainty and contradiction and explore a curriculum process aimed at developing learners who could “deal with the uncertainty of conflicting and changing knowledge” (Wright, 2004, p. 6). The move from its positivist tradition saw PE engage with principles from interpretive, critical, feminist, poststructuralist and complexity perspectives (see Kirk, Macdonald & O’Sullivan, 2006). Aligned to these conceptual shifts, the research and curriculum reform discourse was being informed by constructivist (Azzarito & Ennis, 2003), situated (Kirk & Kinchin, 2004), critical (Sicilia-Camacho & Brown, 2007), ecological (Hastie & Siedentop, 2006), dynamical systems (Chow et al., 2007) and complexity (Jess, Keay & Carse, 2014) perspectives on learning. Accordingly, participative, interactive and situated learning experiences became a feature of more integrated curriculum, pedagogy and assessment developments that, as Penney discusses in Chapter 9, are as much about pedagogy and assessment issues as they are about curriculum.

As these developments emerged, there was broad acknowledgement that the multi-activity approach offers a limited educational experience (Kirk, 2010). Grounded in behaviourism, the approach attempts to reproduce specific knowledge drawn from different sports and has been criticised for being fragmented and de-contextualised (Siedentop, 1994). In addition, by offering samples of different activities (Cothran, 2001), it has been suggested there is limited opportunity for any sustained engagement to enable transfer of learning across ages, curriculum areas and out-of-school contexts (Penney & Jess, 2004). Therefore, although the multi-activity approach may still dominate in many countries, there have been repeated calls to create more relevant curriculum approaches (Ovens, Hopper & Butler, 2013).

As preceding sections have acknowledged, calls for reform are not new. Sport Education (Siedentop, 1994) and TGfU (Bunker & Thorpe, 1982) are the most notable ‘alternative’ models to counter the dominant curriculum approach. Yet, it is arguably only recently that efforts have been made to overtly integrate these models with new conceptualisations of knowledge and learning (Hastie, 2012). While neither model addresses the entire PE curriculum, both offer an insight into the application of more open-ended, situated and complexity-oriented thinking and opportunities for curriculum reform. Although they have grown in popularity globally and garnered significant research support (e.g. Butler & Griffin, 2010), the ongoing dominance of the multi-activity discourse is highlighted by the fact that these approaches remain at the periphery of many official curriculum reforms.
TGfU proposes that games teaching can be designed to be developmentally appropriate and conditioned to develop tactical awareness. By creating four game categories, i.e. invasion, central net, striking and fielding and target, TGfU sets a context for learners to make decisions about the nature of games, tactics and movement skills. As such, the focus is more on cognitive and affective learning and moves beyond behaviourist instruction focused on movement mastery. Aimed at children in the late primary and secondary school, Sport Education sets out to offer more ‘authentic’ learning experiences, with key features that include sustained teams, ‘blocks’ re-framed as seasons, student roles and structured competition (see Hastie & Mesquita, Chapter 5). Other curriculum models linked to the contemporary thinking noted above have been (and continue to be) introduced and developed. Examples include cooperative learning, place-based learning, critical pedagogy, health optimising PE, Taking Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR) and Cultural Studies. Central to these models is the different physical, cognitive and affective learning intentions aligned with a more holistic vision of PE (Bailey et al., 2009).

From one perspective, these developments signal enhanced engagement in curriculum reform and growing strength in curriculum thinking and research. Yet, as the number of these varied models expands, issues of curriculum cohesion, robustness and flexibility have received renewed attention. Penney (2013) brings these issues into focus by exploring Maton’s (2011) distinction between cumulative and segmented learning. Cumulative learning is characterised by integrated progression and transfer across contexts while segmented learning is seen as “educational practices where learned knowledge is strongly bounded from other knowledges and contexts” (p. 128). This distinction is useful because it draws attention to the weakness of the multi-activity approach and signals the need to develop the knowledge and skills that can be applied across different contexts both now and in the future. Building on this idea of cumulative learning, two ‘curriculum perspectives’ are discussed below that again reflect research developments relevant to our focus on reform: models-based practice (MBP) (e.g. Kirk, 2013) and connective specialism (e.g. Penney, 2008).

While MBP appears to have similarities with the multi-activity approach, it is built on the notion that different forms of PE have the potential to contribute to a range of educational outcomes (Kirk, 2013). Different curriculum models, therefore, are used to create an overarching curriculum that sets out to achieve a range of educational outcomes within local contexts. Teachers can select sequences of models based on learners’ needs and on each model’s capacity to support cumulative learning over time. Quay and Peters (2008) highlighted the possibilities of this approach by connecting fundamental motor skills, creative games making, TGfU, Sport Education and TPSR in a primary PE programme that set out to support children’s skill and fitness, personal and social development and physical activity learning.

In a similar vein, the idea of PE as a connective specialism (Penney & Chandler, 2000) has also received attention. Building on the core knowledge and skills towards which teaching and learning should be directed (Jess et al., 2011), the connected curriculum is seen as the catalyst for experiences that contextualise learning within situated contexts (Rovengo, 2006). Situating learning captures the lived experiences of learners and demonstrates how they can integrate school knowledge with their lives (Kirk & Macdonald, 1998). This connected and situated thinking has also been directed towards lifelong agendas (Green, 2004) in which the curriculum not only engages with lifelong and lifewide learning but also with lifelong physical activity and health (Penney & Jess, 2004). It has been argued that these lifelong agendas will need to be represented consistently as a focal point for curriculum innovation and will have implications for the nature of future learning in PE as it moves beyond the curriculum and the school gates (Penney, Jess, & Thorburn, 2006). However, while there have been some efforts to
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develop a connected curriculum in primary schools (e.g. Jess, 2012), the ongoing dominance of the multi-activity approach has made developments of this nature more difficult in secondary schools (Penney, 2013).

The early twenty-first century has, therefore, seen a shift in thinking about curriculum by researchers, towards initiatives focused on the knowledge and skills connected to a more participative, cumulative and situated vision of school PE as the foundation for lifelong physical activity. However, history clearly shows that an issue for the profession is its capacity to articulate a coherent vision of this new curriculum and to demonstrate the potential that new practices offer across and beyond the classroom.

**External developments**

While PE has taken up more contemporary thinking and practice, as Penney and Mitchell (Chapter 11) discuss, external influences have become more varied and more intense. The increased engagement of health, sport and education actors (Petrie & lisahunter, 2011) aligned with government moves towards greater marketisation, performativity and outsourcing (Williams & Macdonald, 2015) have created a complex policy arena in which PE must now compete. Internationally, therefore, while PE’s position within the curriculum may appear more secure (Thorburn, Jess & Atencio, 2009), as in earlier times, the upturn in fortune arises mostly from increased support and pressure from health and sport (Petrie & lisahunter, 2011). Uncertainty remains about the specific nature of the curriculum as health agendas, particularly obesity and physical inactivity, have become notably influential in some countries (see e.g. Burrows & Ross, 2003; Petrie & lisahunter, 2011), while sport remains a driver for policies in others (e.g. English Department for Education, 2013). Again, we recognise mixed implications for PE. Increased attention bringing other policy agendas and players ‘into’ the PE curriculum space has created more funding opportunities, with many new projects stemming from health and/or sport sources (Evans & Davies, 2015). These interests have, however, been identified as filling a void in terms of input by education departments in the development of PE (Evans, 2004). Therefore, the profession is conscious that this new-found prominence arises from an engagement with ‘other’ political agendas being pursued in schools and, as such, has the potential to promote a profession and curriculum that is “positioned instrumentally as cure-alls for a range of social and private ills” (Burrows & Ross, 2003, p. 15).

Within this context, the economic recession has seen rapid changes in education systems as governments of different political persuasions adopt neoliberal agendas to address the prevailing socio-economic conditions (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). These developments have seen a re-focusing on the instrumental goals of education (Macdonald, 2011) as performativity agendas emphasising accountability, measurement and inspection become more common. The reality for many PE teachers engaging with curriculum reform is that their deliberations are framed by pressure to produce evidence of raised standards that meet performative outcomes (Montague, 2012) and teaching and learning agendas focused on ‘cost effective’ curriculum and pedagogies. Connecting this agenda with sport and/or health agendas could see PE programmes moving towards a focus on the identification of ‘gifted and talented’ performers, the measurement of body mass index and/or the ‘improvement’ of teaching techniques to create more cost-effective curriculum (Evans & Davies, 2015).

Aligned with this neoliberal thinking, policy development has also led to new forms of funding and governance in which profit and non-profit making organisations have become
more involved in the delivery of schooling, initial teacher education and continuing professional development (Harris, Cale & Musson, 2011). Consequently, the private sector has become more involved in public service activities normally associated with the state (Ball, 2012). As Penney and Mitchell discuss further (Chapter 11), the curriculum, and curriculum reform, have now become part of an open market in which teachers may no longer be the main providers of PE. In particular, as researchers have identified, primary teachers’ lack of confidence to teach PE (Morgan & Bourke, 2008) has seen outsourcing provision become an attractive ‘reform’ solution to combat the persistent shortfalls of primary PE (Griggs, 2008). However, as outsourcing becomes more apparent, attention has been drawn to the possible long-term de-professionalisation of PE (Macdonald, 2011) and the re-framing of both political and professional visions of what the curriculum may become (Penney, Petrie & Fellows, 2014; see Chapter 11 by Penney & Mitchell).

As these neoliberal concepts around ‘use-value’ have begun to take hold, they have re-awakened the long-standing concerns about the status of PE (McCullick, 2014). Evans (2013) has suggested that these approaches to governance, organisation and delivery are already changing the nature of PE. With more ‘interested parties’ influencing the direction of school PE, the profession needs to find a clear voice within this crowded and contested space. Furthermore, our own experience shows it is critical that this voice spans political and professional arenas, and addresses curriculum reform with the understanding that there is a need for policy coherence across school and university sectors. In recent years, we have been fortunate in Scotland to go some way towards achieving such coherence in our primary PE work. With support from government agencies, we were able to work with key stakeholders in our efforts to reorient the primary PE curriculum (Jess et al., 2011) whilst simultaneously developing in-depth professional learning focused on the development of ‘a profession’ with the skills and knowledge to deliver this curriculum vision (Carse, 2015). While successful at a number of levels, this experience has also helped us recognise the dynamic nature of the policy arena and the precarious, fluid and often short-lived relationships within this context. Consequently, amidst these emerging internal and external dynamics, we acknowledge clear challenges for the stance the profession takes in relation to shifting patterns of provision and, perhaps more critically, the control of the PE discourses (Penney et al., 2014).

Implications for practice and future directions
As we consider the future, we recognise the progress the PE profession has made over the last 60–70 years. Both the historical and contemporary contexts contribute to experiences of, and prospects for, curriculum reform. While there may be ongoing concerns about the multi-activity approach and the marginalisation of primary PE, recent developments suggest new ways of thinking are beginning to align with contemporary curriculum models that articulate with a range of educational benefits (Bailey et al., 2009). Importantly, we see some progress towards overarching frameworks focusing on the integration of these new models (Kirk, 2013) and better connections of experiences across and beyond the school (Rovengo, 2006). We therefore suggest that the profession is starting to make notable progress in its quest to create curriculum frameworks that are educationally sound, robust and flexible enough to adapt to ever-changing political agendas and also act as the foundation to underpin these official texts.

We also acknowledge that the last 30 years has seen the profession interacting with a growing list of policy actors, mostly from outside the traditional education arena. While these interactions
have helped elevate PE's position within many schools, they raise questions about the future ownership of PE curriculum reform, particularly when reports highlight limited involvement from the education sector in debates, developments and funding. Hence, while some progress has been made, if the profession is to engage productively with these external policy actors, a key challenge will be to effectively negotiate and influence events in the crowded policy arena. In saying this we acknowledge that finding a ‘policy voice’ may be a long-term project involving close collaboration between teachers, professional associations and universities, and requiring new ways of thinking about policy and curriculum (Penney, 2013). From a curriculum perspective, we agree with Kirk (2010) that universities will have a key role to play as catalysts in creating and developing the context for innovation as “it is only universities that provide the spaces for the critical intellectual work required to inform our judgements about public education, pedagogy and curriculum” (p. 141). As such, universities “will be the seedbeds for curriculum reform of physical education teachers’ education” (p. 144) and “ideal hubs for the organisation of networks and partnerships” (p. 145). However, while universities may be key to curriculum reform and teacher education, we believe it is ‘positive and powerful’ professional associations that will be critical in raising professional standards, increasing credibility and transparency among the public and also becoming the ‘policy voice’ of the profession in its negotiations within the complex policy arena (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). Therefore, while we acknowledge that the synergy between the PE profession and policy stakeholders will continue to be a dynamic and messy process, we suggest that the emergence of educationally oriented initiatives within the profession has the potential to present PE as a more contemporary and adaptable subject with the capacity to make a valuable and sustained contribution to education across the globe.

**Summary of key findings**

- PE was introduced to the school curriculum in the late nineteenth century based on health concerns rather than its educational value.
- The dominant mind-body dualist view influencing education in western societies has resulted in PE consistently seeking to justify its presence in the curriculum.
- Throughout most of the twentieth century, governments had limited engagement in curriculum matters and the PE profession was able to create its own vision for the subject.
- In the latter part of the twentieth century, the multi-activity approach dominated PE and continues to do so in many countries. However, concerns are regularly voiced about the nature of this approach, particularly its educational value and positivist delivery method.
- Recently, holistic, participative, interactive and situated curriculum and pedagogy initiatives have been developed by the PE profession.
- With government involvement now more common, the policy landscape has become more crowded as the health, sport and education sectors vie to influence the nature of PE curriculum.
- Governments’ focus on neoliberal ‘use-value’ has re-awoken concerns about the status of PE.
- As a relatively new subject area, given the political constraints and the issues of status and positioning, the PE profession’s gradual and non-linear progress towards a robust educationally justifiable subject area is to be expected.
- The stance the PE profession takes in relation to shifting patterns of curriculum reform and provision will have a significant impact on the profession’s ability to influence PE futures.
Curriculum reform and policy cohesion

Reflective questions for discussion

1. How should PE address the concerns about the ‘one-size-fits-all’ multi-activity approach that continues to dominate practice in many countries?
2. How should the PE profession approach the task of articulating a rationale to connect with contemporary educational agendas?
3. How should PE position itself in relation to health and sport agendas?
4. What actions should the PE profession take to become a more influential ‘player’ in crowded policy arenas?

References

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