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Developing Qualities through Physical Education: a Focus for the Future?

Nigel Green

This article was considered, initially, as a response to a series of articles in *Physical Education Matters*, (spring, summer and autumn 2011) presented by David Kirk, where he alluded to the current uncertainty about and future focus of physical education in the UK. An interrelated reflection on the suitability of selection procedures for PGCE physical education candidates led to the consideration of two key questions.

- What qualities are we trying to develop in young people through physical education?
- What are the essential qualities we are looking for in a teacher of physical education of the future?

The term qualities (physical, social, emotional and cognitive) has been used as it suggests essential attributes, character and a degree of excellence which could provide a potential focus for both the selection of trainee teachers for the future and curriculum physical education. Physical education can provide the vehicle through which essential life skills and physical literacy can be developed, and it could be suggested that, if we are looking for high quality teachers and a curriculum that leads to enhanced physical literacy, then considering essential qualities could provide a supplementary focus for the future development of physical education and the selection of potential teachers of physical education.

Kirk (2010) provided a detailed summary of how physical education has developed over the last century, evolving through the industrial revolution and, in most cases, maintaining a similar structure and practice throughout the last 50 years due to the constraints of timetables, facilities and culture within the profession. He went on to provide evidence that demonstrated how physical education has modified its philosophy and practice from its origins in drill and physical training – linked to health and social control – to the development of the whole child and the academic enhancement of the subject from both a pupil and teacher perspective. Kirk (2010) also provided examples of how the teaching of physical education has been influenced by a combination of government (for example, the National Curriculum, Ofsted and examinations), pedagogical initiatives (for example, Teaching Games for Understanding, Sport Education) and teachers' personal interests over the last century. However, he suggested that the profession has maintained its focus on 'physical education-as-sport-techniques' and a culture of a 'multi-activity model' teaching which has significantly influenced pedagogy within physical education in recent

years. He further contended that this focus could not continue and that physical education needed to clarify its purpose if the subject was to maintain its position within the curriculum.





So what is the focus of physical education? Laker (2001) suggested, '... the educational process has a responsibility to produce rational, effective, socially responsible citizens who can adopt a fulfilling and useful role in their community and society' (p. 4). Therefore, it could be reasoned that physical education, with the support of all other curriculum subjects, should be responsible for the development of rational, effective, socially responsible citizens. The development of the 'whole child', through planned and personalised education experiences, must be a priority.

If this is the focus then, as Laker further alluded, 'a school subject that can contribute to social and personal development, as well as to cognitive and, of course, physical development, is a rarity in the school curriculum. For this reason, we must retain control of our subject and exploit it for the benefit of all' (2001, p.1). If we are to develop physical education in the future, and select teachers for the future, then we need to consider and reflect on our current focus of 'physical education-as-sport-techniques' and the 'multi-activity model'. We should also reflect on how we can synthesise the positive aspects of our current curriculum, with a focus on the essential qualities, in order to develop physically literate young people with the attributes necessary for effectively integrating into society, in the future, and the potential to realise their embodied capability.

Physical education should provide young people with opportunities to learn and practise, not just the pre-requisite skills of games and sports but also the social aspects of co-operation and teamwork, deferred gratification, respect and fair play. These personal and social qualities, linked to the

cognitive and physical ones, provide a focus that can lead or support curriculum planning. Lessons learnt through engaging in varied experiences (such as competitive, co-operative and challenging), in a range of physical activity environments, are essential for developing the essential qualities that are required to prepare young people for an ever-changing future. However, it could be argued that the development of these qualities, or the needs of individuals, has not always underpinned the selection of activities and lesson content within physical education lessons. It has often been the planned curriculum, based on available facilities and staff interests, that has driven student experiences. It could also be claimed that pedagogy has focused on 'sport-techniques' and 'multi-activity models' that have not always taken into account the development of the child *through* physical education. If we are to prepare young people for the future, we need to concentrate more closely on the generic life skills or qualities that can be developed *through* physical education and that will enable young people to function more effectively in their ever-changing world. An emphasis on qualities could provide a synthesis between the curriculum plans and individual needs which would enable the planning of inclusive learning experiences that would be relevant to each individual pupil.

The concept of physical literacy is based on the monist approach to human nature, which stresses the importance of holistic development, and provides a clear rationale for the importance of the development of individuals as a whole. Whitehead (2010) stated that, 'as appropriate to each individual's endowment physical literacy can be described as the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding

to maintain physical activity throughout the lifecourse' (p.5). Concentrating on the development of the personal, social, cognitive and physical qualities of young people through physical education would support pupils' progress in relation to physical literacy throughout the lifecourse. A curriculum that enables each child to explore their capabilities and develop their qualities, through high quality physical experiences, should be the aim of physical educationalists. As Capel and Whitehead (2013) suggest, individuals who have developed their disposition towards being physically literate will be more likely to lead a richer, fuller life. It is, therefore, essential that the curriculum opportunities we provide, and the teachers we select to teach in the future, focus on the essential qualities that will demonstrate and promote physical literacy throughout the lifecourse.

What exactly are these qualities and where do they originate? When reflecting on more recent influences on education, and more specifically in relation to the development of physical education, time was taken to consider Personal Learning and Thinking Skills (QCA, 2007); Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (DCSF, 2007) and Physical Literacy (Whitehead, 2010). Further reflection in relation to Graduate Skills (LJMU, 2011), Army Core Values (Ovey, 2011) and the Alverno College ability-based curriculum (2012) all appeared to support the importance of an emphasis on an individual's development through education based on the four qualities (social, emotional, cognitive and physical). A number of colleagues considered a list of descriptive words that were associated with each of the four qualities to provide a structure and focus that could be used to consider individual development in relation to the qualities (Table 1).

Table 1: qualities (Green, 2012)

PERSONAL	COGNITIVE	SOCIAL	PHYSICAL
Confidence Self-awareness Organisation Initiative Independence Resilience Integrity Passion Loyalty Courage Discipline Engaging Good humour Motivation Inspirational	Knowledge Problem-solving Creative Reflective Analytical Aesthetic appreciation Plan Tactics Strategy Choreography Knowledge Intelligent performance	Leadership Teamwork Communication Empathy Values others Citizenship Interactive Rules Roles Responsibility Respect Global perspective	Fundamentals of movement (agility, balance and co-ordination) Fundamental movement skills (running, jumping, striking etc.) Fit and healthy Competence in a range of activities Actively engaged Comfortable in different environments e.g. water, mountain, gym

These qualities were then shared, along with the developmental process, at a series of conferences (LJMU Teaching and Learning Conference 2012, Edge Hill PE and School Sport Conference 2012 and UCET Conference 2012), where they were discussed with participants and subsequently refined according to endorsements. It was generally accepted that the qualities could provide an additional layer of focus in relation to the planning of physical education lessons and curricula that would support the aim of developing physical literacy in young people and provide for inclusive and personalised learning experiences. The National Curriculum, pupils' previous experiences and available facilities would provide the initial consideration when planning learning. However, the qualities could provide a further focus, in relation to individuals' needs, that would allow for a more direct reflection and personalisation of learning needs. It might also be suggested that the selection procedures for prospective trainee physical education teachers could be concentrated on these generic qualities through appropriate activities that allow these qualities to be deliberated. A modified approach to the teaching of physical education, which includes

an emphasis on developing qualities and physical literacy, could provide a future direction for the subject. As Laker suggested, 'It is an opportune time for physical education to develop and promote a postmodern pedagogy that is inclusive, pluralist, eclectic and empowering for pupils and for teachers' (2001, p.1).

Physical education can, arguably, have a significant impact on the development of young people in preparing them for their future. The skills, values and concepts that are experienced through physical education can provide young people with a rich learning experience that they can draw on and continue to learn from throughout their lives. If physical education can provide the vehicle to promote personal, social, cognitive and physical development and thus help prepare young people for the future, then its value within the curriculum and to society as a whole will be significant. A focus on qualities would allow us to reflect on our current practice within physical education and could also provide us with a framework that would enable us to reflect on the potential of young people considering teaching physical education in the future.

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