

Physical education

A conversation with Guy Wnuk

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What should students know, understand, and be able to do in physical education at the end of Year 11?

The initial answer may sound rather prosaic, but a successful PE curriculum will ensure that every student has a sound understanding of the rules and regulations of whatever sports they have encountered throughout their whole sporting career in school. The students are not expected to have an expert understanding – though some might – but they should certainly possess a good operational understanding of the different rules of the different sports. That is the formal side of the PE curriculum, and that is arguably more important than the students' actual competence in those sports, because some students have a greater aptitude for sport than others. So you can take students with fewer innate basic skills and still support them to make progress in their learning in something

that they may not be as good at in performance. Knowing the rules and regulations means that they can participate effectively and safely in the different sports and are more likely to continue to participate in sport as they move into adulthood.

At the end of Year 11, you want the students to have retained a certain passion and commitment to the subject, which means that they will still make the effort to contribute fully during their PE lessons. You also want students to have the desire and motivation to continue with whatever sports they have encountered beyond school. The other important aspect is the link to lifelong learning: to have the knowledge and understanding that sport is good for them and it will both prolong and enhance their lives. Finally, you want students to convey that passion and commitment to sport to everybody else, so that when they eventually become parents, they promote an appreciation of physical activity and bring up their children as physically active citizens, not a sedentary generation. Much of it at a general level is about attitude and inculcating a positive disposition towards physical education.

The health aspect to a successful PE curriculum is a fundamental strand which transcends individual sports and students' relative sporting competence. Health is traditionally split into three aspects – physical, emotional and social – and at one level, physical education is part of health education. The role of PE in education for life is important too, from a social perspective. This includes the skillsets you will learn, from cooperating with one another on your team to competing against someone else – individual or team – and the principles of fair play and the etiquette of each sport. Students can take the discipline that sport teaches them beyond the sporting arena. They learn how to regulate themselves in social interactions – sometimes in pressured situations – and can hardwire the learned self-regulation so that they are effectively shaping their character. Finally, the relationship between good physical health and good mental health is well proven, and that is the last important outcome of a well-developed PE curriculum.

Designing the key stage 3 PE curriculum

Beginning at Year 7, the first challenge you face as a subject leader of PE is the inconsistency of your students' prior learning. Some curriculum models will take a traditional approach where students participate in

one sport, and then you move them on to the next sport and the next sport, and you carry on doing that throughout their PE education. Other schools will do a thematic-based approach where they focus on particular outcomes. For example you could be focusing on teamwork, or you might be focusing on predicting the play in a game. A thematic model can chart the students' PE experience from Year 7 all the way through to Year 11. This model is based on research Pearson undertook about skills and employability; it is based on what are predicted to be the top ten occupations in the UK in 2030, with sport and fitness predicted to be third.¹ Imagine your students as young people who, in 2030, would be applying for those occupations and identify the skills they would need to be a successful applicant. You can also consider the top ten jobs in any sphere and what skills your students would require to fill those posts.

Case study: Stratford upon Avon School

The first theme in Year 7 is 'Expectations and Standards'. We follow a traditional model where we play one sport and then move to another sport, mainly because we are a large school and it is logistically easier to follow that model. When you have multiple year groups on the timetable at the same time, it makes sense to follow a sport-by-sport model on a rotational basis. We can have Year 7 doing athletics, cricket, football and handball in their first term. They are the first four blocks and everyone in each sport is focused upon the theme of 'Expectations and Standards'. Then we move to 'Fundamentals and Movement' where our fundamentals would be throwing, catching, and hand-eye coordination. In football, that would constitute foot-eye coordination, performing movements and tasks whilst moving – the very basics of what you would expect a student to do and the foundations of elite performers. The next theme is 'Desire to Improve' and then 'Teamwork'. We build upon the fundamental skills all the way through to the end of Year 7 when we finish with 'Commitment and Fitness'. So it does not matter what sport you are doing, you are going to be following a theme. The idea is that we are developing them as individuals and then ultimately as overall sportspeople. So if a student managed to fulfil every single theme, they would be a pretty good sportsperson, but also, as important, their life

1 www.bit.ly/3C0BuGI

skills and their future would be very much improved. We aim to make them better individuals as well as sportspeople.

So even if you are not great at developing a forward defensive in cricket, you would be a better human being for having studied cricket because there are thematic developments, almost personal developments, integral to being part of a cricket team – being polite to opponents, not gloating when you take a wicket, never contesting the umpire’s decision when you are given out, shaking hands at the end of the match, showing resilience when you get a duck by trying your hardest in your next innings, never ever giving up – and all those types of attitudes towards the sport that are transferable to life. And when they get to Year 11, we look at developing more complex problem-solving skills – Clive Woodward’s thinking correctly under pressure (T-CUP), emotional health, exercising judgement and decision making – things that they need to be good at at that point in their educational career.

The thematic structure is also good for teachers. A newly qualified teacher can become an expert at those themes quite quickly; importantly for NQT development, the discussion in the PE office for that month will be focused on the theme, not the sport. But the NQT can still be developing their skillset in maybe athletics because they are not as proficient in that as they might be in their main sports of, say, hockey and netball. You have to provide new colleagues with CPD in both strands of the PE curriculum.

When it comes to assessment, the students are assessed on their practical skills, but they are also assessed on attitude and cognitive skills. We have clear criteria for the latter. Take Jimmy. He turns up every week with his pristine kit, but he is not the best performer by some margin. He has a brilliant attitude; he arrives promptly for every lesson; he will umpire; he will support his teammates; he puts in 100% effort. And then when the data drop comes, we could give him a really low grade because of his relatively limited ability at sport. Instead, he can be awarded a high grade for his attitude and cognitive skills and get a decent grade overall. It is really important to find a way to challenge everybody and not be elitist.

The themes that are running across what we are doing provide a genuine coherence which underpins this complex range of knowledge, understanding and skills that we are teaching students. It is fundamentally inclusive. We are able to give recognition to a wide range of achievement within any sporting discipline.

If you are a student in a Year 7 class and you have just played football at the end of the autumn term, you may not play football again in school for a year, and you may not even play it then: because of the logistics, you may instead play rugby in autumn term Year 8. So how do you improve in football? The idea is that you ignore the sport and focus upon the theme: if you want to get better, try to improve your sportsmanship in your next sport, which might be completely different. By following this principle, the students are always improving and they know what they can work on to improve.

Teaching skill development (by Nigel Currie)²

The PE curriculum privileges cognitive development. So when you are doing any sort of physical activity, you would be cognisant of what you are doing, analysing the value of that activity and why you are doing it. Teaching how to be cognisant of what you are doing is a key part of the PE curriculum. Explaining how to teach the subject-specific metacognitive processes you want a student to learn illustrates how PE content and pedagogy are inextricably linked.

The aim of a teacher of performance-based physical education is to move a novice student from an isolated skill-based scenario through to a position where they can perform in a strategic fashion; for example, from a start point of how to stop and send a hockey ball to how to select the correct pass under the pressure of a dynamic and competitive game situation.

You need to provide the support that moves a student from a cognitive stage (big-picture understanding of what is required), through an associative phase (trial and error) to arrive at the autonomous destination (able to perform without having to think about how to execute those basic motor skills). Let's take the example of teaching a gymnastic routine.

First of all, the student requires a representation of what a good routine could look like as a final performance. This big-picture stage is crucial; too often in physical education, there is an assumption that students know what an expert performance looks like. In reality, the vast majority of students will not have seen an expert modelling a gymnastic routine, or a driven dribble lay-up in basketball, or the controlling of a short pass and then a reverse stick pass that spreads the play in hockey.

2 Currie, N. "Making Thinking Visible in PE" in Tomsett, J. (2021) "Cognitive Apprenticeship in Action" (Woodbridge: John Catt Educational)

Having seen the potential end point of the learning, the next step is to drill down into the basic elements with explicitly articulated support. An example of teaching the basics would be looking at how you travel within a gymnastic routine. This requires, amongst other elements, the perfecting of a forward roll. Here, modelling and scaffolding become key. In the instance of the forward roll, the scaffolding can actually become physical: a springboard under a gym mat can aid the novice in gaining the momentum required to roll.

As with any scaffolding, physical or verbal, this can be removed as the gymnast moves from apprenticeship towards mastery of the skill. You can use this phase to articulate your thinking as you demonstrate a model forward roll. Through commentary or narration alongside the performance of the skill in focus, you can highlight key technical points, allay fears, and address common misconceptions/errors live. This format of prompts is powerful and explicit in making your thinking visible, allowing the inner expert in you to share and demonstrate to students how to approach the skill in their mind.

This process can be repeated throughout the teaching of the core skills required to compile a gymnastic routine. Procedural supports or interventions can be used to move the student along the gymnastic continuum from novice towards expert.

As the PE student moves from the cognitive towards the associative stage of learning, you can remove the scaffolding – but do not take it away entirely, as they could fall flat on their face (metaphorically and physically). As understanding and ability increases in the basic gymnastic skills with your support, greater emphasis can be applied to the planning/choreography and aesthetics of the gymnastic routine. This will require a revisit to the initial bigger picture of the expertly modelled routine and an increasingly collaborative approach.

Within a typical gymnastics class, you will have a range of aptitudes and experiences, no different to the apprentice car mechanic working alongside a master technician. If harnessed correctly, this social mix can be a great aid to independent learner development.

The design of a gymnastic routine includes 'planning cues' that enable the students to connect the core gymnastic skills in a way that creates the routine that was initially modelled. In the case of students working independently on their gymnastic routine, these prompts are

the required elements of the routine outlined on a whiteboard in the gymnasium. It acts as a heuristic that aids the planning of the routine through a checklist of ingredients. This simple procedural prompt can enable the student, through exploration, to apply their core gymnastic skills in an expert way.

It is crucial in physical education to teach the basic motor skills of something as simple as a forward roll in a way that enables a student to apply their strategic knowledge in a progressively expert fashion under the increasing pressure of performance. In establishing the optimum environment for the successful apprentice in physical education, 'sequencing' is particularly key:

- Begin by articulating the bigger picture of the expert routine prior to the required basic motor skills.
- Refine those gymnastic motor skills and enhance them.
- Perform those skills in a range of routines.

In furnishing the student with your thought processes, procedural heuristics and opportunities for reflection, they can make those gymnastic steps from apprenticeship to mastery, moving from the cognitive stage of learning towards autonomy in performance. This sequence of instruction is applicable to the development of students' cognitive development in a wide range of practical physical activities.

Sports coaches give formative verbal feedback as a matter of course in every lesson. Giving feedback in real time is easier in PE than it is, maybe, in English, where you are waiting for the end of the lesson before the students finish a piece of work for you to mark in your own time. But if a student throws a javelin, you can see if they have an issue with their weight transference and you can coach them through that learning point much more effectively there and then, in the moment. If a child has been taught something, we know whether they have learnt what they have been taught through the things they produce. It is their talk, their written work, the things that they can do. So if a student can talk about and demonstrate live what they have been learning about, they have probably learnt it. It comes back to Christine Counsell and Michael Fordham's great insight: it is the curriculum itself that is the progression model – 'I have taught this; have my classes grasped it? How do I know?'

What support would you like from your senior leader line manager in developing the curriculum?

The first thing to point out to any senior school leader is that PE is not just a practical subject. You have probably met headteachers who think PE is just about kicking a ball. That is an attitude that has hamstrung the subject and it is an attitude that has, unfortunately, driven some curriculum decisions over the years. What we are currently facing, particularly in PE, is the cutting of contact hours from the timetable, because of the pressure that accountability measures exert upon school leaders. But a thematic model offers so much more than just 'kicking a ball': it is derived from sound research evidence published by a range of respected organisations.

One of the challenges for senior leaders is to appreciate the inconsistency of the conditions in which you have to teach PE. If you teach PE, you have to be a classroom practitioner, you have to teach in a sports hall with its terrible acoustics, you have to teach on a field, on astroturf. You might have a lesson with students 50 metres away from you whilst others are a few feet away, and you are giving instructions to both, simultaneously. Mastering your whistle is an essential skill for teaching PE!

And in addition to the obvious opportunities for extracurricular activities, there are myriad other contributions that the PE department makes to a school: facilities management; financial revenue streams; child protection; primary-secondary progression; leadership development. PE departments probably identify the most child protection issues than any other department in school, both in changing rooms and outside. Some of the students who struggle in academic classroom environments do well in PE and then trust the PE teachers, and many will disclose to PE teachers concerns that end up on the child protection referral form.

Well-informed conversations are an opportunity to educate senior leaders on the big picture – the physical education landscape – but also to give them some of that essential detail that is not always considered, such as the fact that a high proportion of child protection concerns come via the PE department. This is about educating the non-expert, and the senior line manager or the headteacher is going to be the non-expert in this case. There will be some headteachers who are very bright, very diligent, but at the back of their minds still thinking – *PE is just kicking*

a ball about. However, having these conversations does mean that PE subject leaders can stake their claim for this subject – why it is important and what pupils will be missing out on if they came to school and there was no PE on offer.

PE background

In 1902, the War Office drew up a syllabus for physical education based on military drill. This remained the basis of PE in schools until 1933, when it then included some gymnastics. In the 1944 Education Act, which ensured free education for all, PE included more team games. The Education Reform Act of 1988 reinforced the position of physical education on a school's curriculum by making it a compulsory subject. And in 1992, the first national curriculum physical education was introduced by the government.

It is worth quoting the purpose of PE from the national curriculum programme of study:

a high-quality physical education curriculum inspires all pupils to succeed and excel in competitive sport and other physically demanding activities. It should provide opportunities for pupils to become physically confident in a way which supports their health and fitness. Opportunities to compete in sport and other activities build character and help to embed values such as fairness and respect.³

The national curriculum for physical education aims to ensure that 'all pupils develop competence to excel in a broad range of physical activities; are physically active for sustained periods of time; engage in competitive sports and activities; lead healthy, active lives'.

Once the importance statements have been revisited, it is helpful for subject leaders and coordinators to discuss and agree with colleagues the reason why their subject, in this case PE, is important for the pupils in their school. One way of doing this is to draw on a quote, in this case from James MacAllister: 'Physically educated persons are those who have learned to arrange their lives in such a way that the habitual

3 www.bit.ly/3yjpflV

physical activities they freely engage in make a distinctive contribution to their wider flourishing.' Or it could be Juvenal's '*sana mens in corpore sano*' ('a healthy mind in a healthy body'). This kind of prompt allows us to formulate our way of stating the importance of the subject. We might agree or disagree with such a statement and in doing so come to a form of words which expresses our view of the importance of this subject, in this school. This moves us away from the territory of 'We teach this subject because of the SATs or GCSEs.' While the external tests and exams are important, they are not the totality of the subject.

Professional communities

Subject associations are important because at the heart of their work is curriculum thinking, development and resources. The subject association for PE is the Association for Physical Education⁴ and any member of staff with responsibility for a subject should be a member of the relevant subject association, and this should be paid for by the school.

Twitter subject communities are important for the development of subject knowledge because there are lively debates about what to teach, how to teach and the kinds of resources that are helpful. For PE, it is worth following the Association for PE on Twitter and the hashtags #primaryPE, #physed and #pe.

LINKS

PE Umbrella – www.peumbrella.com/theumbrellamethod

Five reasons why PE is important in primary schools – www.bit.ly/3fopftk

School Games – www.yourschoolgames.com

Sport England – www.sportengland.org

Youth Sport Trust – www.youthsporttrust.org

The Daily Mile – www.thedailymile.co.uk/research

BBC School Radio Dance – www.bbc.in/3ikomnt

One Dance – www.bit.ly/3fpmZSP

Ten Pieces: Time to Move – www.bbc.in/37j2rqo

afPE Quality Mark for Physical Education & Sport – www.bit.ly/2V9kaOR

4 www.afpe.org.uk/physical-education

An overview of the Stratford upon Avon School key stage 3 PE curriculum

Intent

The PE curriculum will enable students to play a positive role in society by providing them with the knowledge, skills, attributes, and qualifications to become educated citizens and flourish in the future.

Implementation

In PE, we will introduce students to the best that has been thought, said, and done in sport and fitness and help to develop an appreciation of human creativity and achievement. We will follow a theme-based curriculum which will provide meaningful, manageable, and motivational experiences, enabling our students to acquire the knowledge and skills to learn, contribute and lead. We will improve achievement and raise standards by adding value to students based on their prior knowledge and attainment. Sports and activities covered in school will follow: team-based contested games such as football, netball, handball, hockey, rugby; athletic- and gymnastic-based sports; net games such as badminton, table tennis, tennis, volleyball; and striking and fielding games such as cricket and rounders. At various points throughout the year, we will run 'drop down' weeks where we introduce different sports and activities such as lacrosse, American football, orienteering, ultimate and softball. Our students will be assessed on their physical, social, and cognitive skills and attitude throughout their time at SuAS.

Impact

We will know that we have achieved this because we will equip students with the knowledge, skills, and cultural capital they need to succeed in life. We will develop students who are proud of their achievements, their school, and their community. We will add value to the lives our students lead and the results they achieve. Our students will have the skills and motivation to continue with physical activity in their life outside of school and understand the importance of a healthy and active lifestyle.

Year 7	Year 8	Year 9
Expectations & Standards	Technique: Sports specific skills whilst moving	Independence in sport
Fundamentals in movement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Throw/catch, Hand/eye and foot /eye coordination, Perform tasks while moving 	Resilience	Application of technique
Desire to improve	Respect	Training methods. Principles of training
Teamwork	Strategies to overcome opponents	Analysis and improvement
Overcome Opponents	Fitness: power, agility, muscular endurance	Tactics to overcome opponents
Commitment	Intellectual challenge	Communication
Fitness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balance, Speed, Strength, Cardiovascular fitness 	Evaluation of performance	Physical challenge

Three documents for your senior leader line manager to read about PE

1. Spark: How exercise will improve the performance of your brain. Ratey and Hagerman (2010)
2. What is the role of the PE curriculum? Hanna Miller www.bit.ly/2WKtWqV available in Youth Sport Trust Inspire magazine www.bit.ly/3jgublg
3. Association for PE Health Position Paper www.bit.ly/2VwGqIC

Five questions for your senior leader line manager to ask you about PE

1. How do you assess all aspects of PE, including physical, social and cognitive aspects?
2. How do you ensure that students are assessed and graded objectively and comparatively in a predominantly subjective setting?
3. How can PE assessment data fit within the school's chosen system?
4. How can we celebrate and acknowledge the facets of physical education for all students?
5. What are the logistical issues and constraints faced in designing the physical education curriculum? And how can we reasonably overcome these?