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A comparative analysis of discourses shaping physical education provision within and across the UK:

Context to the study

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Context to the study

- We carried out an analysis of the key curriculum documentation for PE across all four UK nations (Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales) to identify those discourses that shape how PE is conceptualized in each
- The following slides provide some useful information about these curricula for those unfamiliar with the UK PE contexts.

Key Stages/Levels

England	Northern Ireland	Scotland
Key Stage 1 – ages 5-7 Key Stage 2 – ages 7-11 Key Stage 3 – ages 11-14 Key Stage 4 – ages 14-16	Key Stage 1 – ages 6-8 Key Stage 2 – ages 8-11 Key Stage 3 – ages 11-14 Key Stage 4 – ages 14-16	Early (pre-school to P1) – ages 3-4 First (lower primary) – ages 5-8 Second (upper-primary) – ages 9-11 Third/Fourth (lower secondary) – ages 12-14.

The Northern Ireland PE curriculum

The current Northern Ireland curriculum was introduced in 2007, the main objectives of which are to develop young people as an individual and as a contributor to society, the economy and the environment. These objectives give shape to the curriculum in Northern Ireland, including the PE curriculum, which is also influenced by the core element 'Learning for Life and Work'. Within this framework, PE is an Area of Learning where it is suggested that all pupils should experience a sense of fun, enjoyment and achievement through a variety of progressively challenging and innovative activities. In a broad and balanced programme, pupils should develop knowledge, understanding and skills for PE, learning, life and work (CCEA, 2007). As they progress through school, pupils should understand and appreciate the benefits of physical activity and the relationship between physical activity and good health.

The English PE curriculum

The National Curriculum for PE (NCPE) in England outlines the purpose of study along with four overarching aims that apply across all key stages. The purpose of study is defined as being to inspire all pupils to 'succeed and excel in competitive sport and other physically demanding activities'; to 'provide opportunities for pupils to become physically confident in a way which supports their health and fitness'; and to provide students with the opportunities to 'compete in sport and other activities build character and help to embed values such as fairness and respect' (DfE, 2014, p.260). There is alignment between the purpose of study and the four overarching aims detailed within the NCPE which are 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 and, lead healthy, active lives (DfE, 2014, p.260).

The Scottish PE curriculum

The current curriculum in Scotland, Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), was introduced in 2010. It has a focus on the development of four key capacities: successful learners, responsible citizens, confident individuals and effective contributors (Scottish Government, 2004). Within this curriculum, PE is situated in the curricular area of health and wellbeing (HWB) (Scottish Government, 2009a). Teachers are presented with a framework of 'experiences and outcomes' to guide their planning (Scottish Government, 2009b). In PE, teachers are guided by experiences and outcomes from two areas of the curriculum, the HWB curriculum and the PE curriculum. In 2014, teachers were offered additional curriculum guidance in the form of Significant Aspects of Learning (SALs). They include: physical competencies, cognitive skills, physical fitness and personal qualities (Scottish Government, 2014). In 2017, Benchmarks for PE were published (Scottish Government, 2017). This document specifically focuses on supporting assessment and progression in learning, explicitly linking the experiences and outcomes, SALs and Benchmarks in a list with increasing complexity across five developmental levels: early (pre-school to P1), first (lower primary), second (upper-primary) and third/fourth (lower secondary).

The Welsh PE curriculum

The Welsh education system is currently undergoing a number of significant transformations. In 2020, a new curriculum was published, intended to guide curriculum planning, pedagogy and assessment in Wales by 2022. The new curriculum framework is underpinned by four purposes, namely that pupils will become: ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives; enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work; ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world; and healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society (Welsh Government, 2020). One of the main implications of this new curriculum for PE in Wales is that it has been integrated into the broader HWB Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE). Thus, for the first time in Wales, PE no longer has its own curriculum but is one of a number of subject areas that (may) inform the delivery of the new HWB AoLE. In this learning area, there are five Statements of 'What Matters' (SWM) which act as the foundations from which teachers in Wales are able to generate their own curricula, unique to the cultural context of the school and pupils.

The Welsh PE curriculum

The five SWM are:

1. Developing physical health and well-being has lifelong benefits
2. How we process and respond to our experiences affects our mental and emotional well-being
3. Our decision-making impacts on the quality of our lives and the lives of others
4. How we engage with social influences shapes who we are and affects our health and well-being
5. Healthy relationships are fundamental to our well-being

Analysed documents

England:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Physical education programmes of study: Key Stages 1-4, National curriculum in England (Department for Education (DfE), 2014).
Northern Ireland:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Key Stage 1 and 2 Statutory Requirements for PE (Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), 2007).The Statutory Curriculum at Key Stage 3 and the Key Stage 3 Statutory Requirements in Physical Education (CCEA, 2007).The KS4 Physical Education Non-Statutory Guidance (CCEA, 2008).
Scotland:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Curriculum for Excellence: Health and Wellbeing - Principles and Practice (Scottish Government, 2009).Curriculum for Excellence: Health and Wellbeing –experiences and outcomes (Scottish Government, 2009).The Benchmarks for PE (Scottish Government, 2017).
Wales:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The New Curriculum for Wales Guidance (Welsh Government, 2020).