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Exploring and comparing physical education across the four nations of the UK

What? This infographic highlights some key findings from our research which explored the curriculum messages that currently shape how physical education (PE) is conceptualised in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Who? It's for teachers, pre-service teachers and teacher educators interested in learning about and from the PE curricula across the four nations of the UK – what curricula do, and how they might be challenged and developed for the future.

Why? Understanding the messages conveyed in curriculum tells us something about how PE might be enacted across the four nations of the UK. Exploring the similarities and differences between the UK curricula has the potential to stimulate dialogue, debate and build capacity so that the collective voice of teachers might contribute to future PE curricula and pedagogies.



MESSAGES CONVEYED ABOUT PE ACROSS AND THROUGH THE UK PE CURRICULA

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

PE conceptualised as physical activity for enjoyment and holistic wellbeing (involving the physical, mental, social, and emotional).



PUBLIC HEALTH

PE conceptualised as physical health promotion with physical behaviours, activity, and exercise as medicine.



PERFORMANCE

PE conceptualised as motor competency with a focus on developing ability, fitness and sports skills for performance.



CITIZENSHIP

PE conceptualised as a process for imparting values and ethics, teaching skills for life, and encouraging inclusivity and responsibility for self and others.



PEDAGOGY

PE conceptualised as teaching and assessment for reflection, criticality, inclusion, and personalisation to different learning preferences.

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SOME KEY FINDINGS



Except for the curriculum in England, all the curricula refer to how health is variously understood within PE. For more on this, see the third infographic of this series.



In all the countries, except for Wales, there is a focus on performance, where learning motor skills and engaging in competitive sports are key features of each curriculum. This focus is a consistent theme in England from Key Stage 1 (ages 5-7) to Key Stage 4 (ages 14-16), although it varies in Northern Ireland and Scotland as pupils progress through school.



In Wales, there is a strong focus in the curriculum on teacher pedagogy - with reference to leadership, cooperation and engaging with pedagogical principles and practices.



With the exception of Wales, little was said about pedagogy within the UK curricula, suggesting instead that pedagogical decisions should be left to the “professional judgement of teachers”.



WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YOU?



Different meanings around what PE is and who it is for, have the potential to influence how you teach and, therefore, the learning experiences of your pupils.



REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

Consider your context and your pupils.

In all the countries, except for Wales, curricula convey the persistent message that a key aim for PE is to develop pupils' sports skills and performance.

- Why does this way of thinking about (and doing) PE persist?
- Who does this benefit and who does it not benefit?
- If this way of thinking about (and doing) PE in the Welsh curriculum does not dominate, what could - or does - PE look like in Wales (and why)?
- What could PE look like in your context - for (all of) your pupils?
- Where are their opportunities in your context to 'do' PE differently? Consider that the opportunities might be situated in:

- Pedagogy
- Curriculum
- People and relationships (teachers, pupils, parents)
- Space (community, buildings, rooms)
- Equipment



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