

Assumptions and connections between competitive games and the NCPE remain consistent regardless of political changes.

Changing Government, changing attitudes: Shifting policy of competition within the Primary National Curriculum for Physical Education in England.

INTRODUCTION

- Concerns remain over the curriculum offering a narrow selection of competitive sports to engage young people in PE and sport (Green, 2008).
- The National Curriculum for Physical Education (NCPE) as a document is one of interest, because it identifies the essential knowledge and skills needed within the subject (DfE, 2013). As Penney and Evans (1999) explained it contained views and directives relating to what it meant to be physically educated, along with the behaviours, attitudes, and identities the curriculum should promote in schools.
- Penney (2008) recognised a lack of political neutrality within PE, with successive Governments driving agendas linking to social policy (Houlihan and Green, 2006), citizenship (Bailey, 2005) and health (Tinning, 2010).
- Previous research has identified differing political views within education according to the party, with the Conservatives promoting traditional discourses of standards, beliefs, individualism, and competition (Evans et al, 1993) and Labour representing broader social policy objectives in relation to PE (Houlihan and Green, 2006).

METHODS

- An analysis of the three successive Primary NCPE, using a critical discourse analysis, based upon the methods used by Lehane (2017).
- A specific focus on the discourse of competition.
- Use of a Bourdiesian lens to interpret competition policy change.

RESULTS

- Table 1 identifies the frequency of word counts within each document. Variants of the word 'compete' featured highly within the 2013 NCPE, despite it being the shortest document, followed by the 1999 document, whilst the word 'games' featured strongly within the 1999 version, followed by the 1989 NCPE.
- The word clouds show a shift in reoccurring words from 1989 where 'physical', children, 'develop' featured to a focus towards 'activities', 'skills' in 1999 and 'activities', 'range' in 2013.
- Within the field of PE, games remains an enduring feature (Table 2).
- Consecutive Governments held similar beliefs around the capital that children gain from competing in sports, e.g., physical and personal skills, and character development (Table 3).
- Each Government consistently upheld assumptions that competing promotes honesty and fair play, whilst being an enjoyable learning experience.

DISCUSSION

- Competition has remained a consistent and dominant feature of each successive Primary NCPE regardless of Governing political party, linked to the development of physical capital.
- Its has been unquestioned by consecutive Governments from across the political spectrum with the role of competition being used as 'policy magic' by successive political parties.
- Government Ministers have confused the purpose of the subject, presenting it as a solution to address the lack of sporting success on an international platform (Flintoff, 2003).
- This confusion over the field of PE has led to competitive sport and games driving and influencing the content of the NCPE.

Table 1: Word counts and frequency of selected words within the 1989, 1999 and 2013 NCPE.

| Discourse | 1989 NCPE | 1999 NCPE | 2013 NCPE |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Compet* plus variants i.e. compete, competition, competing. | 5 | 7 | 9 |
| Games | 5 | 7 | 2 |
| Team | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| Sport | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Overall word count | 1230 | 1685 | 490 |

Word Cloud 1: 1989 Primary NCPE



Word Cloud 2: 1999 Primary NCPE



Word Cloud 3: 2013 Primary NCPE



Table 2: Key discourses in the field of PE as described by the successive Primary NCPEs.

| 1989 | 1999 | 2013 |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Physical recreation | PE | Health and Fitness |
| PE and physical activity | Importance of PE | Physically active |
| Games | Games | Competitive sport |
| Teaching and learning | Teaching and Learning | Team Games |

Table 3: The development of discourses relating to capital across the three Primary NCPEs

| 1989 | 1999 | 2013 |
|--|---|---|
| Physical skills | Physical skills | Physical skills |
| Knowledge | Knowledge and creativity | Knowledge |
| Attitudes: self-confidence, self-esteem. | Attitudes: collaboration, confidence, positive attitudes towards physical activity. | Attitudes: physical confidence |
| Values: honesty, fair play. | Values: respect | Values: build character, fairness, respect. |

References

- Bailey, R. (2005) 'Evaluating the relationship between physical education, sport and social inclusion', *Educational Review*, 57(1), pp. 71-99. doi:10.1080/0013191042000274196.
- Department for Education (DfE). (2013b) National Curriculum in England: framework for key stages 1 to 4. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4/the-national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4> (Accessed: 1st July 2022).
- Evans, J., Penney, D. and Bryant, A. (1993) 'Improving the quality of physical education? The education reform act, 1988, and physical education in England and Wales', *Quest*, 45(3), pp. 321-338. doi: 10.1080/00336297.1993.10484091.
- Flintoff, A. (2003) 'The school sport co-ordinator programme: changing the role of the physical education teacher?', *Sport, Education and Society*, 8(2), pp. 231-250.
- Green, K. (2008) 'Policy and Physical Education', in *Understanding Physical Education*. SAGE Publications: London, pp. 23-45.
- Houlihan, B. and Green, M. (2006) 'The changing status of school sport and physical education: Explaining policy change', *Sport, Education and Society*, 11(1), pp. 73-92. doi: 10.1080/13573320500453495.
- Lehane, T. (2017) "'SEN's completely different now": critical discourse analysis of three "Codes of Practice for Special Educational Needs" (1994, 2001, 2015)", *Educational Review*, 69(1), pp. 51-67. doi: 10.1080/00131911.2016.1237478.
- Penney, D. and Evans, J. (1999) *Politics, Policy and Practice in Physical Education*. London: Routledge.
- Penney, D. (2008) 'Playing a political game and playing for position: Policy and curriculum development in health and physical education', *European Physical Education Review*, 14(1), pp. 33-49. doi: 10.1177/1356336X07085708.
- Tinning, R. (2010) *Pedagogy and Human Movement: Theory, Practice, Research*. London: Routledge.