

**An Investigation of the Physical Education Curriculum in Irish
Primary Schools and of the Factors Which Impede Its Full
Implementation**

By

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INTRODUCTION

SITUATING THE WORK

This work is a study of physical education in Irish primary schools and of the factors which impeded the implementation of the physical education curriculum. In this introduction the background to the work will be outlined, the rationale for the work will be explained and an overview of the work will conclude the chapter.

Background to the Study

This research project was carried out on physical education in the Irish primary school. It focuses on the implementation of the physical education curriculum and examines the factors which have inhibited implementation. As a primary school teacher, the researcher was aware that in physical education there appeared to be a significant gap between the theory as set out in the curriculum handbook and the reality of what was happening in schools. It was the researcher's perception of this gap between policy and practice which prompted the researcher to investigate the circumstances and factors which might have contributed to this situation. The research was conducted at this particular time because of the recent launch of the Revised Primary School Curriculum in 1999. The physical education element of this curriculum is due for introduction in 2004.

Rationale for the study

The rationale for the study is twofold. On a general level the study is intended to focus attention on an aspect of the Irish primary school curriculum which the researcher considers to be of considerable importance in the context of children's holistic development, to provide insight into this particular area and to extend the body of research literature on

this subject which currently exists. The study focuses on the implementation of the physical education curriculum in primary schools with a view to identifying factors which inhibit implementation, preventing policy from becoming practice.

Specifically, however, the rationale for the study is

- to present a rationale for physical education in primary school;
- to research the level of implementation of the 1971 physical education curriculum in Irish primary schools;
- to identify factors which inhibited the implementation of this physical education curriculum;
- to compare the 1971 physical education curriculum and the 1999 physical education curriculum with a view to understanding the evolution of this new curriculum and to identifying if the impediments have been addressed;
- to investigate the present situation and the extent of the influence of these inhibiting factors in schools today;
- to formulate a set of recommendations to help improve the level of implementation of the 1999 revised physical education curriculum in primary schools.

Relevance at this time

This research was conducted at this particular time because the researcher considered it to be particularly appropriate. The Revised Primary School Curriculum was launched in 1999, presenting opportunities for change and renewal in primary schools. The culmination of many years of development and planning, it involved all the partners and interests in primary education. This revised curriculum encompassed the philosophical thrust of *Curaclam na Bunscoile 1971*, reflected the thinking and aspirations of the National

Convention on Education (1994), the White Paper on Education 1995 and the Education Act 1998 and incorporated current educational thinking and current pedagogical best-practices. Phasing the curriculum in over five years was proposed with the physical education curriculum due for implementation in 2004. This study, it is hoped can highlight the major impediments which have impeded the implementation of the 1971 curriculum, and help to identify how implementation of the 1999 curriculum could be more successful.

Overview of the Study

In all there are 6 chapters in the complete account of the work. This section has introduced the work, traced its background, presented its rationale and shown its relevance at this time. Chapter one presents a rationale for including physical education in primary schools outlining the many benefits a structured physical education programme has for the developing child. In Chapter two the literature relating to the implementation of the 1971 physical education curriculum in Irish primary schools, is reviewed, illustrating the persistent impediments to implementation. The two physical education curricula from 1971 and 1999 are compared and similarities and differences highlighted in Chapter three. Chapter four outlines the design of the empirical research component, the methodology of the research and the collection of the raw data. An analysis of the findings is undertaken in Chapter five detailing the results of the research. Finally in Chapter six the conclusions are discussed and recommendations are presented.

CHAPTER 1

THE RATIONALE FOR PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOL

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter the rationale for including physical education in the primary school curriculum is considered. The chapter is set out in six sections and this first section 1.1 explains the format of the chapter. Section 1.2 begins with an exploration of the nature of physical education at primary school level and the differences between physical education and sport. In Section 1.3 the benefits of physical education in the physical development of the child are analysed including the health benefits related to it. Then in Section 1.4, the contribution that physical education can make to the personal development of the child is examined encompassing the various aspects of the growing self. The social development of the child through physical education is delineated in the next section - Section 1.5. This includes working with and appreciating the efforts of others in a social context. The next section, 1.6, deals with the cognitive development of the child through physical education. This includes the understanding and appreciation of skills and the development of the intellect through physical activities. Section 1.7 examines the theory of multiple intelligences as a rationale for including physical education in primary education. Finally, Section 1.8 delineates the conclusions which can be drawn from the research.

The primary school experience is designed to nurture the child in all dimensions of his or her development - spiritual, moral, cognitive, emotional, aesthetic, social and

physical. It involves the education of the whole child and to consider the education of the “whole child” is to acknowledge the need for mental, personal, social and physical development. The general aims of primary education are to enable the child to realise his/her potential as a unique individual, to enable the child to develop as a social being and to prepare the child for lifelong learning,¹. This involves educating both body and mind. Physical education, it is argued, can play a key role in promoting these aims. It offers children an opportunity to develop and express themselves physically and to cultivate the ideal of 'mens sana in corpore sano'. The 1971 Curriculum acknowledged the importance of physical education when it stated that physical education "is an integral part of the educational process, without which the education of the child is incomplete"² Children should be offered a physical education curriculum which is accessible to all and designed to enable pupils of different abilities, cultural backgrounds and gender to benefit and fulfil their potential.

1.2 The Nature of Physical Education in Primary Schools

When considering the rationale for physical education in primary schools it is important to recognise that physical education has often been seen as not just qualitatively different from other subjects in the curriculum but also marginal or peripheral. Physical education has suffered a status problem in the hierarchy of school subjects where it is often placed lower in the league of priorities. In the school curriculum, it is often viewed as an option rather than a core subject, a peripheral subject compared with the academic subjects which form the core of the educational process. One could argue that physical education's continuing presence in the school curriculum implies that it has passed the test

of time and established itself officially. Yet it appears that, the time and resource allocation devoted to physical education, compared to other subjects, may not support this. One of the problems for physical education may be that it is perceived as a body based subject in an education system which privileges intellectual achievement³. The physical dimension of physical education can sometimes be viewed as a negative feature because of the traditional privileging of intellectual knowledge in education. However, it can be argued that it is precisely because of this different feature that physical education should be essential within the education of young children as it is the only subject which nurtures the physical dimension of the child.

The very title 'physical education' may have limited the development of this subject within the education process. In schools physical education has suffered from confusion about its nature, components and relationship with associated activities such as sport. In the past, physical education has followed the simple principle of seeking to produce healthy young bodies as suitable containers for the healthy young minds that were being developed in the classroom⁴. These bodies were often developed through regulated militaristic drills. Physical education has evolved considerably from the days of drill when nothing more than the movement of the human body, usually in time and line with other bodies, was required.

Physical education today can offer valuable opportunities for education in physical, social, intellectual and personal development. Schools as institutions concerned with educating the whole person should appreciate the contribution physical education has to offer in the education of the child. Arnold has defined physical education “as that integral part of the educational process which enhances and harmonises the physical, intellectual, social and emotional aspects of an individuals personality chiefly through directed physical activity”⁵. Logsdon has declared that “to be meaningful in the education of the learner physical education must provide experiences that improve his/her ability to move, that engage his/her thought processes and that contribute positively to a developing value system and to the esteem in which the child regards himself/herself”⁶.

These definitions view physical education as more than developing the physical dimension of the person. It is a process which contributes to health, well being, self-esteem and the individual development of the person. It is an integral part of the total education process that has as its aim the development of physically, mentally, emotionally and socially developed human beings through the medium of specially selected physical activities. It is an area of general education that contributes to the total development of the child, primarily through physical activities.

Physical Education and Sport

Physical Education and sport although they may appear similar are not synonymous. The relationship between physical education and sport is complex. Sport is formalised physical activity involving challenges or competitions against oneself, others or

the sporting environment, with an emphasis on winning. It covers a range of physical activities in which children and adults may participate. It begins in play and develops through games and competitions. The Department of Education and Science in Britain defined sport as follows, "Sport is the term applied to a range of physical activities where emphasis is on participation and competition".⁷ Different sporting activities can and do contribute to learning but the learning is not the central issue. Competition and winning are the key concerns in sport.

Physical education, on the other hand, is a process of learning, the context being mainly physical. The focus is on the child and his or her development rather than on the activity itself. The Department of Education & Science emphasises this distinction by stating, "in physical education the emphasis is on learning in a mainly physical context. The purpose of the learning is to develop specific knowledge, skills and understanding and to promote physical development and competence".⁸ The learning may promote participation in sport.

It could be argued that in many schools the physical education curriculum has been supplanted by sport for various reasons. The balance and diversity of experience has been replaced by a narrow focus on competitive games which require less facilities, equipment, organisation and teacher expertise. Given the public nature of a child's performance in physical education, compared with other subjects where one's shortcomings can be more easily concealed, it is all too easy for the child who is less mature physically to be discouraged by relative failure when compared with more mature peers. A physical

education curriculum which over-emphasises competition against others, rather than one's own previous personal best will not meet the needs of all children. To avoid such a situation it is important, therefore, to distinguish between sport and physical education. The needs of every child need to be met in physical education not just the needs of the highly skilled or highly competitive.

Physical Education in Primary School

Arnold identifies three dimensions in physical education through which physical activity can contribute to the educational process.⁹ These dimensions are education in movement, education through movement and education about movement.¹⁰ These dimensions can provide a rationale for the inclusion of physical education in the curriculum. The relative balance of these dimensions will depend on the dominant educational philosophy within the system and the school.

Education in movement is education in the experience of physical activity. It involves learning how to engage in physical activities efficiently and effectively and is underpinned by a belief that such activities are themselves intrinsically worthwhile. It can only take place through active participation and the experience of doing the activity. By taking part in activities the child can experience movement activities and develop mastery of a range of physical skills. In this way physical education is, concerned with the range and quality of the human motor performance for its own sake. As Williams states, "young people enjoy movement for its own sake and delight in mastering physical skills".¹¹ This dimension could be referred to as education in the 'content' of physical education.

Education through movement refers to the use of physical education as a vehicle for promoting educational ends which are not an intrinsic part of the activity. This might be seen as education in the 'context' of physical education. It encompasses the social, moral and aesthetic aspects of education. Physical education expands its function as an educational tool by focusing on more than just the physical. It provides ways of learning through physical activities to develop social, moral and personal values like tolerance, fairness, self concept and a concern for others. As participants in physical education children may be afforded the opportunity to clarify values and challenge attitudes. Williams acknowledges this dimension when she declares that in physical education "Children can learn to share, work co-operatively and to respect others".¹² In this way activities can become an arena for character formation. The child can experience opportunities of working alone, with a partner, as a member of a group and with the teacher. For primary school children, physical education can provide great scope for cross curricular activities. The presence of the same teacher all day for all subjects in the primary school means that maths concepts, language activities and health based issues can be interwoven in the fabric of the physical education activity. Communication skills, estimating and measurement skills, language development and health promotion can all be explored and nurtured during physical education.

The third dimension, 'education about movement' deals with the appreciation and understanding of rules, concepts, tactics and other procedures involved in physical performance. It is concerned with conceptual understanding of what an activity is about

and the intelligent performance of the activity. As well as developing physical skills in physical education children can be encouraged to develop a conceptual grasp of the nature of the activity and of the strategies to be utilised. The 'Understanding and Appreciating' strand unit of the Revised Primary School Curriculum 1999 in physical education is an example of the education about movement where physical activity and mental processes work as one to accomplish a goal.¹³

These three dimensions education in movement, education through movement and education about movement form an integrated approach to learning in physical education. Physical education is more than just physical activity to promote physical development. It should not be viewed as just an opportunity to "let off steam" or as a break from the work of school. To view it in such a way is to reduce physical education to a subject that is fundamentally 'recreational' rather than 'educational'. Through a balanced physical education curriculum the physical, personal, moral and social development of the child can all be nurtured. However, it is not simply enough to expose children to physical activities and hope that these beneficial outcomes will automatically occur. The curriculum must be planned to include these as objectives, which are implemented through appropriate activities to promote the physical, personal, social and cognitive development of each child.

1.3 Physical Development

Physical education can play a central role in physical development in childhood. By its nature physical education is concerned primarily with the physical development of the child. Indeed the factor which distinguishes physical education from all other curricular areas is its primary focus on the physical experience.¹⁴ Physical education in schools can provide children with the opportunity to develop themselves physically, to enjoy the physical experiences which the human body can provide and to foster a positive lifelong attitude to physical activity. If the school is to cater for the “holistic” development of the child it must provide for education of the physical. As Schilling has stated, “schools are not just places which educate the minds of young people, they are also implicated in monitoring and shaping the bodies of young people”.¹⁵

Young children engage in physical activity which contributes to their physical development. Childhood is a key stage in this physical development. The primary school can play a vital role in the development of physical competencies and the enhancement of physical skills. These formative years represent a critical period in laying the foundations of childrens physical competency. Sleaf 1986 has asserted that “by the time a child reaches the end of the primary cycle a significant proportion of his or her mental and physical potential has already been mastered and a child who has not mastered physical skill may well be disadvantaged for the rest of his or her life”.¹⁶ Children need time to explore, experiment and practice in order to realise their capabilities. For young children many actions regarded as simple or taken for granted by older people represent a considerable challenge. They should be given opportunities to practice and consolidate

these actions. They enjoy repetition and the sense of security and success which it provides. As they develop they modify and adapt movements and refine their skills. They enjoy the structured situations which are provided to enable them to adapt and refine their skills.¹⁷

A quality physical education programme can help the child to develop gross motor skills, fine motor skills and locomotor skills. Physical education activities are concerned with developing the children's physical control, co-ordination, mobility, awareness of space and increasing their physical confidence. The Council on Physical Education for Children has stated that "Optimal development of the musculoskeletal and cardio-respiratory systems is enhanced through children's regular involvement in planned programmes designed by professional educators to maximise movement, skill development through sequenced instruction".¹⁸ By conducting regular vigorous physical education programmes and helping children become skilful in a variety of movement forms proficiency and quality of movement is improved. Welton stresses that "It is impossible to overestimate the importance which satisfactory motor development and motor skill acquisition has upon a child's ability to learn".¹⁹ Furthermore, the early establishment of movement skills facilitates the acquisition of more complex skills introduced later. Sleaf has noted that "It is vital that an abundance of successful motor responses are achieved early in life so as to establish the readiness necessary for subsequent experiences".²⁰ It also allows children to feel competent in movement which motivates them to be more physically active in their leisure time. Such development should not be left to chance or to the choice of the children themselves.²¹

Physical education in school can provide a valuable opportunity for young people to develop motor skills and improve muscle tone and control. It can develop physical awareness, skills and competence and contribute to healthy growth and physical development. The revised Primary Curriculum 1999 acknowledges this when it says that “The physical education curriculum seeks to satisfy the physical needs of the child through a consistent and comprehensive experience of movement and play that challenges the child to realise his or her individual physical potential.”²²

There are also significant health and physical benefits that derive from a quality physical education programme. There is little doubt that children can learn about and acquire beneficial lifestyle behaviours through quality physical education programmes. As young people grow and mature, it is essential that they understand, develop and refine the motor skills necessary to successfully and enjoyably participate in various forms of physical activity. By developing physical competence pupils learn to move efficiently, effectively and safely.²³ Modern day living tends to offer fewer opportunities to develop physical skills and there is growing evidence to suggest that young children are becoming increasingly sedentary with the over-reliance on motorised transport and the increasing influence of T.V., videos and computers. In the Irish context, Broderick & Shiel have commented that “The relatively sedentary lifestyles of Irish primary school children and their generally low engagement in physical activity are matters of concern”.²⁴

Opportunities for informal physical play outside school can be limited by physical circumstances, safety concerns, or by changing social behaviour patterns. Many parents

are reluctant to allow their children to play outside. The contribution physical education can make to the physical development of children in these conditions is considerable. It can offer a structured and sequenced programme to develop children physically.

Participation in physical exercise plays a significant role in the development of bone tissue, muscle growth and physique. Muscle tone is achieved by regular and constant movement repetitions of the muscles and bone density is maintained by putting stress on the bones during movement.²⁵ Regular, developmentally appropriate physical education lessons can contribute to healthy physical development in primary school children. Physical education programmes in primary schools have resulted in a wide range of positive outcomes including increased aerobic capacity or performance, muscular strength, endurance and flexibility.²⁶

On entry into school children will exhibit varying degrees of physical competence but all children will need frequent and regular opportunities for physical activity in order to learn, to satisfy their need to be active and in some cases to compensate for restricted living conditions. If children are denied the opportunity for physical development they are likely to suffer from psychomotor retardation, clumsiness and spatial deficiencies.²⁷ Failure to capitalise on this optimum period for learning may lead to long-term under-performance or even alienation from physical activity. By introducing children to developmentally appropriate, theoretically based programmes in physical education they learn the principles and skills necessary for implementing and maintaining a physically active life. This education is integral to the child's development and it has the potential to improve short term fitness (flexibility, cardiovascular endurance, muscular endurance,

muscular strength and body composition) while establishing a basis for the maintenance of fitness through life.²⁸

Health

Much of the research on children's health, fitness and activity levels in the past decade has led to a degree of concern about the low levels of habitual physical activity in young people's lives and the implications this may have for their immediate and future health. There is convincing evidence that appropriate physical activity during adult life confers some protection from coronary heart disease, counters obesity, reduces high blood pressure, retards osteoporosis, improves mental well being and reduces the incidence of some cancers.²⁹ Evidence also indicates that adult physical activity patterns have their origins in childhood.³⁰ Therefore, encouraging children to adopt and sustain physically active lifestyles may have significant long-term health benefits. In the USA the Surgeon General's Report 1996 called school based physical education "the most widely available resource for promoting physical activity among young people"³¹ and recommended that "every effort should be made to encourage schools to require daily physical education in each grade and to promote physical activities that can be enjoyed throughout life"³².

Arnold argues that sustained vigorous activities benefit six major systems of the body - skeletomuscular system, neuromuscular system, cardio-vascular system, respiratory system, digestive system, excretory system.³³ The promotion of physically active children helps maintain the healthy functioning of these systems which are essential for the healthy functioning of the body.

However, Armstrong in England has noted that many children seldom experience the intensity and duration of activity that are believed to promote health-related outcomes.³⁴ In Ireland, Watson has revealed similar findings.³⁵ Fitness in Irish primary school children was low. He also detailed low levels of aerobic fitness and flexibility, poor posture and high levels of body fat. Targeting children through structured health-enhancing physical education programmes would appear to be a sound approach given that health behaviours and physical activity patterns tend to be established in childhood and persist into adult life.

Children should be introduced to the principles of regular physical activity and recreational activities at an early age. Schools can develop and encourage positive attitudes towards physical exercise, providing opportunities to learn physical skills and to perform physical activities.

Obesity

Active participation in physical education increases energy expenditure and helps control excessive food intake and body fat levels. Significant reductions in percent body fat have been noted in studies examining the effect of physical education programmes on the body fat levels of both boys and girls.³⁶ This is particularly important because studies examining societal trends have shown substantial increases in obesity among adults and children. Results of unpublished research for the North/South Food Consumption Study

concluded that over half of Irish people are officially overweight.³⁷ This study also showed that the proportion of Irish people who are clinically obese has increased by 7%, to 18% in the last 10 years.³⁸ This confirmed Watson's findings in 1990 of high levels of body fat among national school children.³⁹

A successfully implemented well devised physical education curriculum can lead to a sense of well being and a feeling of confidence for each individual child involved. The importance of sound physical development through physical education was emphasised by Sharp when he concluded that, "Without the opportunity to develop physically, the child's whole personality may be affected as children's emotional well being is closely linked to their view of themselves as physical beings".⁴⁰

1.4 Personal Development

Physical education can also be a vehicle for developing positive personal qualities. Arnold has stated that "Physical education aims to affect and modify advantageously the development of personality through the medium of physical activity".⁴¹ It may help to promote a more positive concept of self especially for children who do not excel academically. Through the development of physical confidence, physical education helps to establish self esteem and helps pupils to cope with success and failure in co-operative and competitive activities.⁴² A properly planned physical programme can help develop commitment, integrity, fairness, enthusiasm, concern for others, appreciation of quality and empathy. The focus is on the development of self-awareness and personal fulfilment through the medium of movement. Gruber has defined self-esteem as "the value we place

on ourselves and our self image”⁴³ In his quantitative review of over 100 studies Gruber concluded that “directed play and physical education programs contribute to the development of self-esteem in elementary school children”.⁴⁴ This research also concluded that the greatest gain in self esteem was found in those children with the greatest need for improvement.⁴⁵

The importance of self-esteem in childhood is obvious in Lee’s assertion that early definitions of self may become self-perpetuating and determine future behaviour and patterns of social interaction.⁴⁶ How children perceive themselves can affect the way they interpret and interact with the external world. Len Almond has suggested that the educational value “in the context of physical education is concerned with removing the distortions to a person’s self-respect created by significant others”.⁴⁷

The physical education environment can be used to enrich young people’s experiences by providing a wide range of challenges. Salter argues that physical education promotes personal growth in children by enabling them to become more independent, nurturing self confidence and self esteem, promoting tolerance, perseverance and patience, developing effective communications and appreciating the strengths and weaknesses of oneself and others.⁴⁸ Through involvement in activities children can learn to cope with situations involving - frustration, tension, enthusiasm, disappointment, competition and pressure. Qualities of perseverance, concentration, commitment and discipline can also be explored.

A very important part of the child's personal development is that of developing a sense of morally acceptable behaviour and building character. It has long been a tenet of physical education that it has a major role to play in the development of character.⁴⁹

Physical education activities can become a context to develop character and sportsmanship. It is a perfect medium to teach these qualities because they are often part of the activity itself taking place in real-life meaningful situations and producing learning and growth promoting opportunities for the child. Commenting on the importance of character in relation to physical education and sport Slade has reported that "parents were more concerned with the development of character in their children than with their physical development".⁵⁰ In a well organised, modern physical education programme, the students can emerge not only with knowledge and skills that will allow them to live a long and healthy life but with the character skills that every parent wishes their children to possess.

Physical education can be personally enhancing if sportsmanlike striving is valued above the desire to win at all costs. Bredemeier and colleagues have shown that physical education can contribute to the development of moral judgement and sportsmanship.⁵¹ They showed that a physical education environment can be used to promote levels of moral reasoning but that it is necessary to have a deliberate strategy to do so.⁵² If moral development is an explicit objective of a physical education programme, it is possible to arrange things to provide a valuable setting for the transmission of moral values. Children can be helped to approach ethical issues which they will meet in their everyday lives and which will help them develop a personal value system.

Like adults, children experience stress in their daily lives. Physical activity is a positive method for coping with stress. According to the International Society for Sports Psychology “aerobic activity reduces anxiety, depression, tension and stress”.⁵³ Physical activity in school can provide outlets for stress and anxiety in a safe and controlled environment.

1.5 Social Development

The ‘education through movement’ aspect of physical education provides many opportunities for social development. The foundations for an understanding of life in the social world begin to make their presence felt more strongly during the period of mid-childhood.⁵⁴ Physical education provides children with the opportunity to learn social skills, provides a context for socialising and also helps to socialise children into healthy activities. Purposeful physical activities can form a context for friendships and community. O’Sullivan stresses that the potential for physical activity to contribute to the development of such social networks should not be underestimated.⁵⁵ Physical education provides a context in which there are opportunities for interpersonal competences to be acquired, appreciated and shaped as a result of interaction with others. Almond has identified three key features in developing relationships in physical education - social learning and relationships, respecting others and developing a sense of belonging.⁵⁶

Social learning and relationships involves learning to work with others, co-operating with others on tasks, sharing and planning, establishing reciprocity with others and learning with and from others. Respecting others involves considering and caring

about others, trusting and respecting them, learning to be fair and tolerant and being sensitive to others. Finally, developing a sense of belonging involves feeling part of a group or a team including the rewards and responsibilities that come with belonging.

Schools can provide a context for exploring attitudes and values. Many aspects of physical education involve working with others toward a common goal. Involvement in team games poses complex social problems for children. Games present opportunities to explore roles which are enacted according to the expectations of other participants. Other lessons involve sharing equipment, playing co-operatively, accepting success and failure, coping with competition, playing by the rules and accepting others and their limitations. These experiences in a controlled atmosphere provide children with opportunities to develop life-skills in a safe environment. Dance and outdoor activities may encourage teamwork, leadership and co-operation in young children. Physical education provides living experiences where social interaction is encouraged and developed. Through active participation individuals can learn to perceive and respond to the world in social settings as individuals and as members of a group.

The physical education environment can provide an arena for developing socialising skills because of the live decision-provoking situations it engenders. Participation in games, sports and play seems to be related to the children learning to fit into their society by learning social expectations. Children observe each others behaviour and reactions, discover how friendships are made and gradually become aware of evolving relationships. It has often been noted that motor skill is often a great asset to the child in

winning acceptance within groups.⁵⁷ These activities also enhance the child's social mobility which may effect such long term endeavours as educational aspiration and achievement. Furthermore through participation and appropriate instruction in physical activities, moral ideas and attitudes concerning fair play are shaped. As Dauer and Pangrazi have stated "The physical education setting should be a laboratory in group living".⁵⁸ Physical education may also promote a lifelong participation in physical activity. The child's primary school physical experience may be positively related to physical activity outside of schools. O'Sullivan has noted that, the Irish primary school plays an important role in children's socialisation into activity both within and outside the formal school curriculum.⁵⁹ Physical education experience was also observed in this study to be positively associated with social integration and the child's perception of the physical self. The research attests to the importance of the primary school physical education experience in the socialisation of children into active lifestyles, in the development of social skills and in providing a context for socialising for young children.

1.6 Cognitive Development

Physical education can also contribute to cognitive development. Many studies have shown the benefits of physical activity to children's cognitive development. Shephard 1997 concluded that when a substantial proportion of curricular time was allocated to physical activity, learning seemed to proceed more rapidly per unit of classroom time, so that academic performance matched and sometimes even exceeded that of control students.⁶⁰ Biddle 1995 concluded that for some aspects of cognitive functioning, exercise is associated with small to modest beneficial effects.⁶¹ Tan in 1997

concluded that there was more than an elementary level of support for the link between physical education, motor movement skill learning and its correlations with cognitive development.⁶²

Thinking, reasoning, observing, planning and judging are as vital to success in a physical context as in any other. In physical education the learner is encouraged to make decisions. Physical education can be a context for helping the learner develop the ability to make reasoned and wise choices so that he can adjust his role appropriately as his social and physical surroundings change. Physical education can contribute to the development of problem solving.⁶³ During physical education lessons children can be encouraged to think about what they are going to do, what they have done and how they can do it better. They may learn to understand rules and tactics and to identify and appreciate specific elements of performance as a participant and as a spectator.

Physical education has also been associated with improved academic performance in schools. Physical activity can “increase vigor and promote clear thinking”.⁶⁴ In addition research on daily physical education has shown that “involvement in physical activity can positively affect grade scores of students in primary schools”.⁶⁵ Regular physical activity makes children more alert and energetic which improves their capacity to learn.⁶⁶

The Department of Education and Science in Britain has stated that “Physical education is achieved through the combination of physical activity with the mental

processes of making decisions, selecting, refining, judging, shaping, adjusting and adapting".⁶⁷ In physical education children can go beyond engagement in physical activities and learn to appreciate and learn from their involvement in the activities. Engagement, appreciation and reflection are important processes which can promote cognitive development in children.

1.7 Multiple Intelligence Theory

The work of Howard Gardner and the theory of "Multiple Intelligences" has encouraged many educationalists to view physical education in a new light. Gardner in 1983 argued that human beings possess varied kinds of mental strengths or intelligences.⁶⁸ However, the linguistic and the mathematical/logical were the only two kinds of intelligence that the educational system encouraged, while it tended to neglect other forms of intelligence. The theory of multiple intelligence claims that human beings possess at least 8 types of mental functioning or intelligence. These intelligences work together in concert depending on the nature and the context of the problem to be solved. Each of these intelligences have their own set of abilities that can be observed and nurtured. The rate at which intelligences develop and the extent to which they do so are determined by a complex interaction of environmental and cultural nurturing factors as well as by the child's genetic endowment. Indeed Multiple Intelligence theory values nurture as much as and probably more than nature in accounting for the development of intelligences.

Gardner identified "bodily kinaesthetic intelligence" as one of his original seven intelligences (now extended to 8) which all people have to varying degrees. Bodily

kinaesthetic intelligence or physical intelligence refers to the level of development of a persons physical abilities in movement, balance, agility and grace. Bodily kinaesthetic intelligence involves two components: masterful co-ordination of one's bodily movements and the ability to manipulate objects in a skilled manner.⁶⁹ The language and operation of bodily kinaesthetic intelligence is all related to physical movement. In schools it involves such things as drama, mime, dance gesture and physical exercise. Gardner challenges the notion that what we do with our bodies is somehow less privileged, less special than those problem solving routines which use abstract symbolic systems.⁷⁰ He argues that bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence is as valid as any other form of intelligence and as such it should form a legitimate way of knowing, learning and experiencing the world. Each individuals physical intelligence should be valued and nurtured to the same extent as any other intelligence.

1.8 Conclusions

Physical education should form an integral part of primary education and can make an essential contribution to the overall development of the child. It provides education for the child in and through movement. In physical education, children can develop motor skills, improve fitness and develop healthy physical habits. Children can learn to relate to and communicate with each other and to develop self-esteem and confidence. They are encouraged to develop initiative and decision making skills and to acquire positive attitudes towards physical activities. Physical education can help children to make informed decisions concerning a healthy lifestyle, to lead full, active and healthy lives. It is generally accepted that schools provide one of the few opportunities to address the full

range of individuals in a population and so school curriculum time is the one of the few places where children can be guaranteed a physical education. However, physical, personal and social education are too important to be left to an intuitive uncoordinated approach which assumes that such things will somehow just happen as part of the hidden curriculum of the school. If areas such as physical, personal and social development are to be more than possible by-products of a child's education they must be consciously planned for and experiences must be structured in such a way that qualities to be promoted are acquired by the child. Physical education can provide such an environment. It is during these critical, irreplaceable formative years that the fundamentals in physical competence, motor skills, attitudes and self-concept are established. If the opportunities are missed at this point, it may be increasingly more difficult for the child to enhance physical capabilities or to make up for the deficiencies as he or she grows older.

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CHAPTER 2

PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN IRISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS 1971-1999

- REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND RESEARCH

2.1 Introduction

In 1971 a new curriculum, *Curaclam na Bunscoile* (Primary School Curriculum), was officially introduced in Irish Primary Schools. It was intended to be child centred, placing the child at the heart of the educational process. It aimed to cater for "the full and harmonious development of each child"¹, by recognising individual differences and catering for them. Designed on the principle of "flexibility"² it envisaged greater freedom for schools in adapting the curriculum to the needs of the children. The range of subjects was broadened and the new curriculum included physical education as a separate distinct subject. This physical education programme was a radical departure from the drill-orientated system which had prevailed since the Belmore Report 1898. It stated that physical education could make a valuable contribution to the holistic development of the child as well as his or her organic well-being. It also recognised that physical education should have an important place in a balanced school curriculum. The aims of this new physical education curriculum were "to promote the organic well being of the child, to develop a suitable range of motor skills, to help him adapt himself to his immediate environment and to cultivate desirable social attitudes"³. The opportunity of expressing himself/herself in physical activity was seen as an essential aspect of the growth of each child's personality and character. The implementation of this child centred programme

presented a significant challenge to the primary school teaching profession. Such a fundamental change in core philosophy would necessitate changes in attitudes, skills and school organisation to accommodate the new approaches.

In this chapter, the degree of implementation of the new physical education curriculum is investigated and the factors which impeded its introduction are identified. Section 2.1 sets out the general evaluations of the 1971 Primary School Curriculum by the various organisations involved in its implementation. In Section 2.2 the surveys and studies which deal specifically with the physical education section of the curriculum are presented illustrating the aspects of physical education investigated in each one. Section 2.3 examines the evaluations of the new curriculum focusing on the degree of implementation of the physical education component. Having established the degree of success of implementation, the following sections deal with the factors highlighted which have impeded the implementation of the physical education curriculum in primary schools. Section 2.4 deals with the persistent recurring factors which have impeded the implementation; syllabus, facilities, equipment, time allocation, teacher, class size, confidence and expertise and some other minor issues which need to be addressed. The final Section, 2.5 deals with the conclusions which can be drawn from the research.

2.2 General Evaluations of the 1971 Curriculum

To emphasise that the changes which were involved in the 1971 Primary School Curriculum were neither “final nor definitive,”⁴ its authors stated that “research and regular evaluation”⁵ would be necessary if the curriculum was to keep pace with changing

conditions. The new curriculum was evaluated from the point of view of implementation and attainment of its aims and objectives on a number of occasions. Information about the extent of implementation and attainment in physical education can be found in a number of surveys and studies by various bodies and individuals.

The evaluations were carried out by organisations with vested interests in the curriculum such as the Department of Education and the Irish National Teachers Organisation and also by individuals conducting educational research. These studies and surveys varied considerably in their focus, range, sampling and approach. The first of these evaluations began in 1974 and continued over the lifetime of the 1971 Curriculum. The following represents an overview of the range of studies which have dealt with physical education in relation to its progress in the schools. These general curriculum evaluations were conducted by:

- ❖ Inspectorate at Department of Education 1974 (unpublished but details to be found in Sr. Marion Walsh's research).⁶
- ❖ Conference of Convent Primary Schools 1975.⁷
- ❖ Irish National Teachers Organisation 1976.⁸
- ❖ P. Fontes & T. Kellaghan - Educational Research Centre Drumcondra for Department of Education 1977.⁹
- ❖ Sr. Marion Walsh unpublished M. Litt Thesis Trinity College Dublin 1980.¹⁰
- ❖ Irish National Teachers Organisation 1986.¹¹
- ❖ A. Burke and P. Fontes 1986.¹²
- ❖ Department of Education Curriculum Unit 1987.¹³

- ❖ Primary Review Body 1990.¹⁴
- ❖ Review Body on the Primary Curriculum 1990¹⁵
- ❖ National Education Convention 1994¹⁶
- ❖ Irish National Teachers Organisation 1996.¹⁷

Although these were general evaluations of the whole curriculum they still contain pertinent information on the physical education component itself. Each study made a valid contribution to the knowledge and understanding of the process of implementation of the physical education component of this new curriculum. This chapter aims to give a succinct account and appraisal of the key aspects relating to physical education contained in these studies. Table 2.1 illustrates the general evaluations undertaken.

TABLE 2.1

EVALUATIONS OF THE 1971 PRIMARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM

DATE	EVALUATION TITLE	DETAILS
1974	Evaluation by the Inspectorate (unpublished)	Questionnaire to each inspector about implementation of New Curriculum
1975	Evaluation of the New Curriculum for Primary Schools by Conference of Convent Primary Schools in Ireland	Questionnaire to all teachers in Convent Primary Schools.
1976	Primary School Curriculum Curriculum Questionnaire Analysis by the INTO	Questionnaire to all INTO members in schools.
1977	The New Primary School Curriculum: Its implementation and effects by Fontes & Kellaghan for the Department of Education	Questionnaire to sample of Principals – (to include staff consultation in each school).
1980	A Study of the Implementation of the 1971 Curriculum for Irish Primary Schools by Sister Marian Walsh	Questionnaire to random sample of 30 Co. Wicklow primary schools on the implementation of the Primary School Curriculum
1986	Educational Beliefs and Practices of Sixth Class Teachers in Irish Primary Schools by Burke, A. and Fontes, P.	Questionnaire to 6 th class teachers in Dublin to investigate their educational beliefs and teaching practices
1986	“Primary Curriculum Survey” Review of the Primary Curriculum by the INTO	Questionnaire to random sample of INTO members.
1987	The Implementation of the Principles of the Primary School Curriculum by Department of Education	Questionnaire to teachers and inspectors
1990	Report of the Primary Review Body	Review of the Primary Education System
1990	Report of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum	Review of the Primary Curriculum
1994	Report on the National Education Convention	An independent forum for the partners in education to discuss and influence education policy in Ireland.
1996	Primary School Curriculum An Evolutionary Process by INTO	Questionnaire to random sample of 1,000 Primary School teachers.

2.3 Specific Evaluations of the Physical Education Curriculum

As well as these general curriculum evaluations there were studies and surveys carried out specifically on the physical education component of the new curriculum. Many of these were educational research projects undertaken as part of a post-graduate degree programmes but some were surveys taken by individuals with a particular interest in physical education. These sources which focused specifically on physical education included:

- ❖ Michael Cotter's unpublished M. Ed Thesis on the implementation of the 1971 Physical Education Curriculum in 1978.¹⁸
- ❖ Noel Keating's survey of sixth class teachers about school sports in 1982.¹⁹
- ❖ Jimmy Deenihan's survey of physical education in Irish primary and special schools 1990.²⁰
- ❖ Brigid Shelley's unpublished M. Ed Thesis on Implementation of the Physical Education Curriculum in 1993.²¹
- ❖ Bernadette Cotter's unpublished M. Ed Thesis on Teacher Understanding and Confidence in Physical Education in 1997.²²
- ❖ Patrick Duffy's unpublished Ph. D. Dissertation on State Policy on School Physical Education in Ireland²³

Some of these studies focused on the implementation of the physical education curriculum in general while others dealt with particular aspects of physical education in

primary schools. The following table delineates the studies which focused exclusively on the physical education curriculum in Irish Primary Schools.

TABLE 2.2

**INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH STUDIES AND SURVEYS OF
PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN IRISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

DATE	STUDY TITLE	DETAILS
1978	An Investigation into the teaching of Physical Education in National Schools in the Republic of Ireland by Michael Cotter.	Questionnaire to a stratified sample of 10% of Irish Schools
1982	An overview of in school and out of school sports programme for Irish children aged 6-12 yrs by Noel Keating	Questionnaire to 6 th class teacher in Dublin attending physical education inservice training.
1990	Physical Education in Irish Primary and Special Schools in Results of a survey by Jimmy Deenihan T.D.	Questionnaire to principals in primary and special schools in the Republic of Ireland.
1993	An Evaluation of the Implementation of the Physical Education Curriculum in Irish Primary Schools by Brigid Shelley	Questionnaire to teachers about their implementation of physical education in Primary School.
1997	Teacher's Understanding and Confidence in teaching Physical Education in Irish Primary Schools by Bernadette Cotter	Questionnaire to teachers about their level of Understanding and Confidence in teaching physical education.
1997	State Policy on School Physical Education in Ireland with special reference to the period 1960 - 1996 by Patrick Duffy	Ph. D. Dissertation Study on Physical Education in Irish Schools.

2.4 An Examination of the Degree of Implementation of the Physical Education Curriculum

The provision of a progressive physical education curriculum does not necessarily guarantee the successful implementation of a broad and balanced physical education programme. The written curriculum can be regarded as a guideline to the general learning which the schools will facilitate. However, there are other variables or factors which may influence or inhibit the implementation of the physical education curriculum. An examination of the evaluations as to how the new physical education curriculum approaches were adopted in schools, highlights the degree of implementation and the factors which may have inhibited implementation.

Following the introduction of the 1971 Curaclam na Bunscoile, evaluations were carried out to gauge its implementation and perceived effects. In these general evaluations, the main aims were to determine the extent of agreement with the rationale of the new approach, the extent of implementation of the new programme, the perceived academic progress of pupils since its introduction and the respondents' general satisfaction with it. Physical Education did not feature strongly in these evaluations but some pertinent information can be gleaned from them.

The first evaluation of the new physical education curriculum by the Department of Education Inspectorate was conducted in 1974.²⁴ The inspectors concluded that there was general agreement with the underlying rationale and that the attitude to the new curriculum was positive. Implementation levels in most areas were reported to be

moderate to high. They reported that the larger the school the greater the implementation, with the exception of very large schools. In reply to the question concerning the extent to which the new curriculum approach had been adopted in different subjects, a majority of respondents felt that the new curriculum approaches had been adopted in physical education to a reasonable extent but the achievement of objectives in physical education was considered to be low. The respondents ranked 'teacher education and attitudes' as the number one factor militating against successful implementation of the curriculum principles overall. 'High pupil-teacher ratio and level of equipment' was ranked sixth in this hierarchy. Again, in 1974 the Conference of Convent Primary Schools²⁵ evaluation found overall positive support for the principles of the new curriculum and the new approaches. It was found that the attitude to the new curriculum was most favourable in schools of 17 or more teachers. In relation to physical education, the implementation of the objectives of physical education was again seen to be low. When asked what they considered essential towards satisfactory implementation teachers replied that, first would be to lower pupil teacher ratio, second, would be teachers' preparation of work and third would be in-service provision and suitable school buildings.

In 1976 the Irish National Teachers Organisation surveyed its members on the implementation of the new curriculum to evaluate its operation and progress. 92% of teachers surveyed reported that they had implemented the new curriculum in their classroom to a "moderate, great or very great extent"²⁶. In relation to Physical Education 64.6% of teachers confirmed that they taught the subject but only 34.2% were satisfied with the way they taught it. This was the lowest satisfaction rating for teaching in all of

the subjects. The obstacles to satisfactory implementation of the overall curriculum were identified as high pupil-teacher ratio, small classrooms, cumbersome furniture, the lack of alignment between primary and post-primary and lack of facilities and aids. The continued failure to meet the need for a sustained and ambitious programme of in-service training was also noted as "very disturbing"²⁷. This report also quoted from a document issued by the Irish National Teachers Organisation in 1971 titled "Comments from the Irish National Teachers Organisation on the Working Document of the New Curriculum for Primary Schools". On the subject of physical education it stated:

*"This is an up-to-date enlightened programme based upon principles accepted in many developed countries. It will be impossible, however, to carry out the programme in many schools because of inadequate indoor space, unsuitable playing grounds and lack of equipment."*²⁸

In 1977 Patricia Fontes and Thomas Kellaghan reported on their study of the primary curriculum for the Department of Education.²⁹ Again positive support was expressed for the underlying principles of the curriculum and implementation levels were reported as moderate or high. Low implementation was rarely reported except in the case of physical education and music. Indeed over one-third of the principals surveyed reported that the teachers in their school found physical education to be the most difficult subject to implement. It was also noted that in the case of History, Art & Craft and Physical Education there was a decreasing rate of adoption of curricular approaches as school size decreased.

These first four general evaluations, conducted during the 1970's, which were mainly attitudinal in focus, were carried out to gauge the extent of acceptance and

implementation of the new curriculum. A considerable degree of agreement emerged from these surveys. In general there was widespread support for the new curriculum and the principles upon which it was developed. There was a consistent perception among teachers that the implementation of the curriculum was moderate to good in most areas. However, in relation to physical education an analysis of the surveys indicates that in all the evaluations there was dissatisfaction expressed with the teaching of physical education and its level of implementation was generally low. Factors which impeded implementation were also identified in these surveys. Class size was perceived to be the major obstacle to implementation by the teachers involved. Other important inhibitors included lack of appropriate pre-service and in-service training, lack of equipment and poor facilities.

The first investigation to focus on the implementation of the physical education component of the primary school curriculum specifically, was conducted by Michael Cotter in 1978.³⁰ He sought to discover the extent of implementation of the new physical education syllabus and its new approaches. His survey of teachers concluded that implementation of physical education was low in primary schools. The proportion of teachers teaching physical education regularly ranged from 81% during the summer to 47% during the spring term. The implementation of the programme was often weather dependent. A majority of the teachers paid little attention to the prescribed programme because their schools did not have the facilities or equipment to implement it. Class size and lack of appropriate training were also identified as inhibiting factors in the implementation of the physical education curriculum.

In 1982, Noel Keating surveyed sixth class teachers in the Dublin area to ascertain the degree of implementation of the objectives of the physical education programme.³¹ He concluded that the majority of respondents admitted to teaching only 33% of the Department of Education's stated objectives in physical education. Implementation once more was shown to be low.

In 1986, the Education Committee of the Irish National Teachers Organisation undertook a survey of the primary school curriculum to follow up its 1976 study.³² This survey again focused on teachers' attitudes to the curriculum and its operation in primary school. Again, the vast majority of respondents agreed with the philosophy and principles of the curriculum. Indeed the level of agreement with the principles was greater in this survey than it had been in the 1976 survey. With reference to physical education, the survey reported that physical education featured "as a classroom experience on a weekly basis for the pupils of the vast majority of respondents".³³ Over three quarters of the teachers surveyed taught physical education once a week or more often. However, the most common components of the physical education programme were games, free movement and health education while dance and gymnastics were taught by only about half of the respondents. Of the respondents in 1-3 teacher schools, almost half indicated that they did not teach physical education on a weekly basis or more often because of lack of indoor facilities and equipment. It was noted that "the disparity between the frequency of teaching physical education (at least once per week) in the larger schools and the schools of 1-3 teachers indicates that the provision of facilities and resources in these schools is still similar to the position outlined in the 1966 report "Investment in

Education”.³⁴ The lack of teachers with specific skills in areas like physical education was considered to be a “vulnerable feature” of a small school with multi-grade classes. Other inhibiting factors to implementation were again identified as class size and lack of in-service education.

The general findings of the Irish National Teachers Organisation’s 1986 survey were corroborated to a large extent by a Department of Education report on the implementation of the principles of the primary school curriculum.³⁵ The two most successfully implemented principles were ‘that the curriculum should cater for the full and harmonious development of the child’ and ‘that due allowance should be made for individual difference’. In this survey two-thirds of the inspectors indicated that they were not satisfied with the work done in physical education. In their summing up the inspectors pointed to the overwhelming support which existed for the principles underlying the primary school curriculum but they pointed to the need for a major injection of resources and for in-service education if fuller implementation was to occur.

With the establishment of the Primary Curriculum Review Body in October 1987, a major review of the Primary School Curriculum was set in motion. The Review Body³⁶ reported in 1990 that the constraints that impeded the implementation of the curriculum needed to be removed. It acknowledged the poor implementation record in physical education from the studies previously conducted. It stated that games and athletics were taught most often and that a major revision was necessary. It also recommended systematic in-service provision, an improvement in resource provision and a reduction in

class size. It reported that teachers considered the implementation of the curriculum to be beyond their present expertise and the provision of facilities and equipment was inadequate.

In the same year the Report of the Primary Education Review Body³⁷ was published. It also acknowledged that the implementation of music, art & crafts and physical education could cause problems for some teachers, and that there was a deficit in facilities and equipment to implement the physical education programme. It also recommended a reduction in the pupil-teacher ratio.

The publication of the Green Paper 1993, Education for a Changing World,³⁸ was supposed to bring a 'new momentum' in physical education. This was to include better pre-service and in-service education for teachers, a daily 30 min physical education time allocation, a syllabus which it would be possible to implement with limited facilities and better programmes which would be continuously evaluated.

The Report of the National Education Convention 1994 summed up the results of the evaluations on physical education up to this date when it stated that "It is generally accepted that physical education received inadequate attention in schools because of lack of facilities, teachers perceived lack of competence and fear of litigation".³⁹ The Convention accepted that these areas needed to be addressed if implementation was going to be successful.

In 1993, Brigid Shelley⁴⁰ surveyed teachers to evaluate the implementation of the physical education section of the curriculum in primary schools. Being specifically concerned with physical education this study provided valuable information about the degree of implementation and extent of attainment of the curriculum objectives. Shelley reported that the vast majority of classes received physical education and that everybody in schools seemed committed to physical education. However, she also noted that the majority of teachers did not follow the physical education syllabus as set out in *Curaclam na Bunscoile* or any alternative programme. Games seemed to dominate the curriculum because most of the facilities and equipment was games related. Despite the fact that most pupils did some physical education it seemed apparent that they did not receive a balanced physical education and teachers seemed to implement only certain sections of the prescribed syllabus. She concluded that teachers felt inadequately prepared to implement the full physical education curriculum and that the standard of both facilities and equipment was inadequate. In relation to other inhibiting factors she noted that while time allocation was seen to be inadequate, the size of class was not seen as a problem. The main constraints with regard to implementing the programme and the most important factors required for implementation were found to be facilities, equipment and lack of in-service training.

The Irish National Teachers Organisation continued its evaluations of the primary school curriculum in 1996 when it conducted another survey of teachers.⁴¹ This survey was designed to evaluate teachers attitudes to the curriculum and to provide data

comparable to the data of the 1976 and 1986 INTO surveys. Once again support for the general principles of the curriculum by teachers was very high. With reference to physical education the survey reported that “practically 82% of the pupils are taught PE at least once a week and the numbers who encounter little or not PE has fallen from 20% in 1985 to 14% in 1995”.⁴² However, once again the range of physical education experience and the extent of implementation of the prescribed syllabus was shown to be quite restricted. Games and free movement dominated the physical education curriculum. The elements of the physical education programme which were taught to the pupils were games (87.2%), free movement (71.7%), dance (41.7%) and educational gymnastics (40%). This seems to indicate that while the majority of children experienced physical education, it was a very restricted programme with less than half of the recommended elements of the physical education syllabus being implemented in most schools. Concerns were once again expressed about facilities and equipment to implement the physical education programme and the urgent need to provide relevant in-service education was also identified “so that teachers’ expertise in each curricular area may be enhanced”.⁴³ The survey also noted a significant increase in the number of specialist physical education teachers which could indicate a lack of expertise in schools or a fear of litigation.

The findings of these studies form a consistent picture of the implementation of physical education in primary schools. From the very beginning in 1971 the Irish National Teachers Organisation⁴⁴ had expressed its belief that the physical education curriculum, although well designed, was impossible to implement in most schools. Each of the subsequent studies confirm this with all of the studies indicating low implementation.

Even as the numbers of children experiencing physical education increased the breadth and balance of the programme was not being implemented. The children may have been involved in physical activity but not necessarily physical education as specified by the curriculum guidelines. The surveys reveal that while a majority of teachers taught physical education, a significant number of them were not satisfied with their teaching. Considering the regard which teachers appear to have for physical education, these results might perhaps suggest a mismatch between the syllabus itself and the means to implement it.

On the issue of implementing change Fullan, 1982, noted that the adoption of the new curriculum packages by teachers “may be the necessary first steps which set the proceedings for real change in motion”.⁴⁵ The degree to which teachers take these first steps is often decided by their perceptions of their own procedural competence, the organisational structures and the conditions in which they work. Hargreaves, 1984, highlighted the importance of the absence or presence of ‘situational constraints’ such as large classes, poor facilities or lack of equipment.⁴⁶

The evaluations of the implementation of the physical education curriculum at primary school have highlighted many such difficulties and constraints. Certain inhibiting factors have repeatedly emerged which have hindered the implementation in the school.

These factors include

1. Appropriate Physical Education Syllabus
2. Facilities
3. Equipment
4. Teacher Competence and Confidence
5. Time Allocation
6. Class size

An examination of these factors highlights the extent to which each one impeded implementation of the physical education curriculum in primary school.

2.5 Impediments to Implementation

The Syllabus

The cornerstone of any physical education programme is the syllabus which teachers are required to implement. To fulfill the rationale for physical education in primary school the syllabus must be broad and balanced, offering children opportunities to develop physical skills, competencies, attitudes and lifeskills in and through physical activities. The aims of Physical Education Curriculum in 1971 were “to promote the organic well being of the child, to cultivate desirable social attitudes and to help him adapt to his environment”.⁴⁷ Physical education was also recognised as making an important contribution towards the aesthetic emotional and moral development of the child. The centrality of child activity and personal involvement was identified in the statement "How a child learns is just as important as what he learns".⁴⁸ At the time of its introduction the new physical education syllabus was accepted as containing the new philosophy of child

centredness and the modern approaches connected with this. The Irish National Teachers Organisation commented that "This is an up to date, enlightened programme based upon principles accepted in many developed countries".⁴⁹ However, many of the subsequent studies revealed that the physical education syllabus was one of the most poorly implemented. In her summing up of the first four surveys Sr. Marion Walsh noted that "there was dissatisfaction expressed in all evaluations with the teaching of physical education".⁵⁰

Cotter, in his physical education survey concluded that the physical education syllabus was "unrealistic in its aspirations" and "not designed for the majority of national schools".⁵¹ He reported that 60% of teachers paid little attention to the syllabus and 7% claimed they had never read it. This may not have been a criticism of the physical education syllabus alone but also of the lack of support structures to implement the programme - facilities, equipment, teacher training and guidance. Perhaps because of this, Cotter noted however, that a majority of the teachers sampled admitted paying little attention to the new physical education curriculum. Keating⁵² in 1980, surveying 6th class teachers, found similar results. The majority of teachers he surveyed admitted teaching only 33% of the objectives of the programme as specified by the inspectorate at the Department of Education. Many teachers taught only those parts of the programme which they felt confident to implement. The 1986 Primary Curriculum Survey⁵³ reported that games were most often taught and that educational gymnastics and dance were taught by about only half of the respondents.

Deenihan⁵⁴ also recorded that 65% of teachers that he surveyed felt that the physical education syllabus needed to be revised and updated. This revision should include a textbook of schemes of work and lesson plans. He argued that the "syllabus should be accompanied by a textbook on physical education, complete with lesson plans and schemes of work for each class".⁵⁵

The Physical Education Association of Ireland⁵⁶ in its submission document to the Primary Review Body argued that while it supported the aims of the syllabus it recognised that successful implementation required more specific objectives and clear guidelines on how to implement them. 'A suitable range of motor skills' and 'desirable social attitudes' needed to be more clearly defined and guidance given on how to develop these. It stated that the syllabus did not provide the teacher with clear guidelines for achievement of objectives and assessment of these objectives.

The Review Body for the Primary Curriculum reiterated these findings, reporting that the "vast majority of inspectors regard the physical education syllabus as being suitable while the majority of teachers regard it is unrealistic and demanding excessive expertise".⁵⁷ The Review Body also asserted that games are most often taught as the physical education lesson. It claimed that a major revision of the physical education chapter was necessary, with the provision of practical guidelines for teachers as an essential aspect.

Shelley 1993 found that 61% of teachers paid little attention to the physical education syllabus and some never read it.⁵⁸ Teachers criticised the programme for being too idealistic and for making assumptions with regard to facilities and equipment available in schools. She noted that 60% of schools reported that they had no school policy for physical education. She found that the majority of teachers, reported that they did not use the existing programme or any alternative programme.

Again in 1993 the Physical Education Association of Ireland in its submission document to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment argued that "the content of the syllabus needs to be more extensive and detailed enough to provide guidance to the non-specialist physical education teacher".⁵⁹ They called for clear attainable objectives which would provide better pedagogical guidelines for primary school teachers.

Bernadette Cotter 1997 found in her study of teacher confidence in physical education, that "confidence and understanding of curriculum requirements was firmest in games".⁶⁰ She recommended that "the revised curriculum in physical education needs to be more specific in giving well worked out lesson notes and objectives for each class level".⁶¹ The curriculum needed to give detailed explanation of skill related development in each area of physical education.

The syllabus, although child-centred and progressive in nature, failed to provide the class teacher with enough guidance to properly implement the programme. This is not simply a criticism of the syllabus but also of the support structures for implementation which were unfortunately neglected. With systematic in-service teacher training and proper resourcing the difficulties encountered with the syllabus might not have materialised to the same extent. The gap between the specified syllabus and the means to implement it, made the syllabus unworkable in many schools.

Facilities

Quality learning is best achieved when the environment supports and enhances learning. Space is an important pre-requisite if children are going to be able to move with freedom and control in safety.⁶² The provision of physical education is significantly influenced by the availability of facilities both indoor and outdoor. The Department of Education acknowledged this when it stated in the physical education section of the Teachers Handbook II that “There are few areas of work in the curriculum in which stimulus and environment are more important than in Physical Education”.⁶³ The Irish National Teachers Organisation expressed concern as early as 1971 that the new physical education programme would be impossible to implement due to inadequate facilities. In its ‘Working Document of the New Curriculum for primary schools’ the INTO claimed that “it will be impossible however, to carry out the programme in many schools because of inadequate indoor space, unsuitable playing grounds...”⁶⁴ The new physical education curriculum rather understated this problem in the handbook that declared “there are few

schools which can provide the ideal equipment and facilities”⁶⁵ and then went on to suggest “improvisation”. It then listed the facilities which ideally each school should have including specified indoor facilities and outdoor grass and all weather surfaces.

The Department of Education's 1977 ⁶⁶ survey found the situation concerning facilities was far from ideal. Two thirds of primary schools surveyed did not have suitable indoor facilities and over one third did not have suitable outdoor facilities. Cotter 1978 ⁶⁷ found that only 10% of schools surveyed had suitable indoor facilities.

Keating in 1982 stated that 70% of the schools surveyed were ineligible to apply for Department of Education equipment grants because they had no indoor facilities.⁶⁸ Deenihan⁶⁹ 1990 confirmed these findings when his survey reported that at least 30% of schools had no indoor facilities. In 1990 The Report of the Primary Education Review Body stated that “less than half the schools in the country have a general purposes room in which such activities as physical education can be undertaken”.⁷⁰ It recommended that the need for general purposes room be recognised where new schools were being built or existing schools modified. Shelley⁷¹ in 1993, also found that only 50% of schools had indoor facilities and where indoor facilities were available these were not always suitable for physical activities. She also noted that smaller schools were most disadvantaged, with 77% of these having no indoor facilities. Cotter, Deenihan and Shelley confirmed that a majority of schools did have access to an outdoor hard surface area but that indoor facilities were very restricted.

The 1996 INTO Primary Curriculum Survey⁷² highlighted once again the lack of basic facilities for physical education provision in schools. It stated that "With regard to resources and facilities, 60% of schools have a physical education hall, 72% have a suitable surfaced school yard, 60% have access to a playing field and only 21% have a general purposes room."⁷³ Many aspects of the curriculum were designed to be implemented indoors and these facilities were obviously inadequate.

The research indicates that many schools lacked basic facilities for full curriculum implementation. There were large discrepancies between schools in relation to the facilities available for physical education. It would appear that in 1971 the physical education curriculum was developed independent of the realities of implementation and very little progress was made in the provision of facilities during the lifetime of the curriculum.

Equipment

Adequacy and appropriateness of the equipment available also has a profound effect on the learning achieved.⁷⁴ The Primary School Curriculum Teacher's Handbook Part 2, recognised that "a large and diverse selection of equipment will be necessary".⁷⁵ It recognised that few schools had ideal equipment. However, it then suggested improvisation was possible and desirable, to provide the necessary equipment - mats, bats, balls, climbing frames, hoops, bar, boxes and even small swimming pools.

The provision of equipment for physical education is an important component in the successful implementation of a physical education programme. The INTO's concern about the provision of such equipment was expressed as early as 1971⁷⁶ and was reiterated strongly in 1976⁷⁷. Inadequate materials was second only to class size in the list of factors which created difficulty in implementing the whole curriculum and for physical education in particular the lack of equipment made it impossible to carry out the programme. In 1978 Cotter⁷⁸ surveyed the equipment available in schools for physical education and concluded that the vast majority of schools, 81%, were not equipped for the teaching of the physical education programme. He noted that almost half of the schools had none of the recommended items of equipment at their disposal and only 10% of schools surveyed had the full quota of indoor large equipment.

Deenihan's⁷⁹ survey in 1990 confirmed these findings stating that 80% of teachers felt that their equipment was inadequate. He continued "many children are experiencing very little physical education in our primary schools because of lack of basic facilities and resources".⁸⁰ The Report of the Primary Education Review Body declared that "the provision of equipment for national schools has never received the attention it deserves".⁸¹ In the same year the Report of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum acknowledged that the provision of physical education is significantly influenced by the availability of resources as evidenced by predominance of games and athletics in the physical education programme. It recommended that "the appropriate facilities and resources be made available".⁸²

Shelley 1993⁸³ also found that the lack of equipment mitigated against the successful provision of a broad and balanced physical education curriculum. She discovered that the range and standard of equipment in most schools was inadequate and that most of the equipment available was outdoor games - related equipment. This suggested that because of lack of equipment other areas of activity were neglected.

The 1996 INTO Primary Curriculum Survey⁸⁴ also identified the poor provision of equipment for implementing the physical education curriculum. This survey found that only 51% of teachers were satisfied that there was adequate equipment in their schools for the teaching of physical education.

Overall it appears that inadequate resourcing of physical education has impeded the full implementation of the programme. Schools have been unable to provide a broad and balanced physical education curriculum due to lack of suitable equipment.

Time Allocation

Effective learning in physical education is achieved when there is appropriate regularity and frequency in the planned programme for physical education. It is very important that adequate time is allocated to the subject.⁸⁵ In the physical education section of the Teacher's Handbook of the 1971 New Curriculum the only reference to frequency of lessons or amount of time which should be allocated for physical education was one for infants. It states that the length of lessons may vary but "generally 15 minutes will be

found to be the most rewarding period of time".⁸⁶ For the other classes I to VI, no guideline about time allocation was given.

Michael Cotter⁸⁷ in his survey of physical education found that while there was a wide range in the duration of physical education classes, the majority of classes were under 30 minutes. In respect of frequency of lessons his findings showed that only 56% of teachers taught physical education once a week or more but that 3.5% never taught physical education.

The Report of the Review of the Body on the Primary Curriculum⁸⁸ stated that the time allocation suggested at in-service courses for teachers by the inspectorate for physical education school was 7% for infants and 4% for juniors. This translated into approximately 2 hours physical education for infants each week and 1 hour physical education for juniors each week.

Deenihan⁸⁹ confirmed Cotter's findings that these inspectorate expectations were not happening in reality. He discovered that the average time spent on physical education each week was under 30 minutes.

Burke and Fontes,⁹⁰ in their questionnaire of sixth class teacher in 1986 found the average time allocated for physical education to be at 0.71 hours per week. The Irish National Teachers Organisation Primary Curriculum Survey 1986⁹¹ reported that over 75% of the teachers surveyed taught physical education at least once a week.

Shelley 1993⁹², found that between 30 and 39 minutes was the most frequent class period for physical education and that 82% of respondents taught physical education at least once per week. These findings indicate that the time allocation to physical education in schools was poor. In all of the surveys the allocation was well below the minimum one hour per week recommended by the Inspectorate.

Teacher Confidence and Expertise

High quality physical education is best promoted and sustained by high quality teaching which should ensure that pupils learn effectively and are able to reach their potential. The greatest impact on the learning of a child is teaching. The implementation of any syllabus is critically dependent on those charged with its delivery.⁹³

The implementation of the 1971 syllabus in physical education was considered to be the responsibility of the class teacher. The teachers' 'attitude to Physical Education' was identified as a key factor in the response and measure of involvement of the pupils in his or her charge. The curriculum stated that "age and lack of ability on the part of the teacher is not a barrier".⁹⁴ However, it did recognise that the teacher "should have a sound knowledge of the underlying principles of Physical Education so that he may endeavour to implement a broadly based programme with confidence".⁹⁵

From the beginning, teacher education and attitudes were identified by the inspectorate as an important factor which militated against satisfactory implementation of

the new physical education syllabus.⁹⁶ When teachers were asked what they considered essential towards the satisfactory implementation of the new curriculum they ranked "In-service training" highly.⁹⁷ The INTO survey 1976⁹⁸ confirmed these findings stating that only 34% of teachers were satisfied with the way they were teaching physical education. This was the lowest satisfaction ranking for any subject. It concluded that while a high percentage of teachers taught physical education, a considerably lower percentage considered that they taught it satisfactorily.

The 1977 Department of Education⁹⁹ evaluation of the curriculum declared that the area that was most selected as presenting the greatest difficulty was physical education. Michael Cotter¹⁰⁰ 1978 also identified a reluctance to teach physical education because of lack of confidence, feelings of incompetence, lack of training and age. Keating¹⁰¹ 1982 reiterated these findings and added that most teachers were enthusiastic about physical education and were keen to teach it given proper training and facilities. The Report of the Education Review Body in 1990 recognised that "music, art & crafts and physical education are examples of subjects which can cause problems for some teachers." ¹⁰² The Report of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum noted that the majority of teachers regarded the current physical education syllabus as "unrealistic and demanding excessive expertise."¹⁰³ Deenihan 1990 reaffirmed these findings stating that "60% of the teachers surveyed did not feel confident to teach physical education because of lack of preparation and training at teacher training colleges".¹⁰⁴

In her 1993 survey Shelley¹⁰⁵ found that half of the teachers surveyed expressed disappointment with their initial training in physical education. Many complained that they were not prepared for teaching in small schools with multi-grade classes. While physical education was seen as a very important subject by the teachers surveyed, a "large proportion of teachers do not feel adequately trained or confident in teaching the programme".¹⁰⁶ In the same year the Physical Education Association of Ireland had stated that one of the requirements for the development of Physical Education at Primary level was in the "upgrading of the competencies of primary school teachers in this area".¹⁰⁷

In its Primary Curriculum survey 1996¹⁰⁸ the Irish National Teachers Organisation established that games again dominated the physical education curriculum and that dance and gymnastics were taught in less than half of the schools surveyed. This could perhaps be attributed to facilities and equipment issues but could also be influenced by lack of teacher confidence in these areas. This is further supported by the large increase in specialist physical education teachers in schools. It was reported that more specialist teachers (22.4%) were employed to teach physical education than any other subject and 20% of teachers taught physical education to other classes in their own school.

The survey report recognised a need to examine the case for increasing the level of specialisation within the larger school and for employing peripatetic teachers in smaller schools so that teachers who have particular talents in Art and Crafts, PE and Music could empower teachers through school based in-career development opportunities to teach these subjects, thus enabling pupils to encounter a broadly balanced curriculum which

promotes all aspects of their development. It concluded that “in any event there is an urgent need to provide relevant in-service education so that teacher’s expertise in each curriculum area, may be enhanced”.¹⁰⁹

The most recent research available on physical education in Irish Primary Schools by Bernadette Cotter (1997)¹¹⁰ on Teacher Understanding and Confidence in physical education provides many valuable insights. She found that confidence and understanding of curriculum requirements were firmest in games. In the areas of gymnastics, dance, athletics, outdoor pursuits and swimming she found that teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the training they received. Consequently, it seemed that teachers had a limited knowledge of curriculum requirements in these areas and a lack of confidence in teaching them. However, she did note that teachers under 25 were more confident than other age groups in teaching athletics and swimming and they also claimed to have a greater understanding of the motor skill development aspect of games, dance, athletic, swimming and outdoor pursuits.

Initial teacher training and continued professional development can play a significant role in promoting developing and sustaining high quality physical education. The research illustrates that there is a reported lack of confidence among teachers in teaching physical education which they attribute to inadequate pre-service and in-service training.

Class Size

One of the major impediments, found in all of the early surveys of the 1971 Primary School Curriculum was the problem of class size. All of the general evaluations identified the class size issue and recognised that class sizes were too large to sustain a child-centred approach that required activity methods. This was as true for physical education as for any other subject in the curriculum. In 1974, the Inspectorate ranked “high pupil-teacher ratio” second in a list of factors which militated against implementation.¹¹¹ In the same year a survey of Convent Primary Schools identified “lower pupil ratio” as the most important factor in satisfactory implementation of the curriculum.¹¹² The Irish National Teachers Organisation in 1976 stated that size of class was the major factor which made a teacher feel that he was not teaching the subject satisfactorily.¹¹³ Again in 1986 the Irish National Teachers Organisation identified ‘oversized classes’ as a major constraint under which the national school system operated.¹¹⁴ The Review Body on the Primary Curriculum 1990 reported that class size was one of a number of influences which impinged on actual practices. It stated that “of the various inhibiting factors, class size was perceived by both inspectors and teachers as being especially important in the full implementation of the various principles”.¹¹⁵ The Review Body recommended that there should be an overall reduction, initially in the junior classes. Deenihan in his physical education survey in 1990 reported that 50% of respondents felt that it was difficult to teach physical education in their large classes especially in small spaces and with limited equipment.¹¹⁶ While very few of the studies looked specifically at physical education and class size, the issue of class size would impact on physical education like any other subject.

Dealing specifically with physical education Shelley's study of the implementation of the physical education curriculum provides valuable insights. She found that although the majority of classes were 20-40 pupils, the size of class was not seen as a major problem in the teaching of the subject.¹¹⁷ Class size with 63%, was ranked only fourth in the hierarchy of constraints in implementation, behind facilities, equipment and inservice training. In regard to important factors to support implementation it was again ranked fourth behind the same three factors and was ranked as important by only 2% of respondents. While this might indicate that the class size issue has been addressed to some degree over the last 25 years, it might also mean that the limited programme being implemented was adapted to suit large classes.

Other issues

Other issues also emerged in the various studies as influential factors in the implementation of the physical education component of 1971 Primary School Curriculum. They include status of physical education, neglect of special needs children and litigation concerns. Some of these issues are relatively recent developments and may become more influential in the future.

2.6 Conclusions

From the evidence of the research, it can be argued convincingly that the physical education curriculum in Curaclam na Bunscoile remained aspirational for many schools who lacked the basic necessities to implement it. The degree of successful

implementation of this new physical education curriculum was inextricably linked to the confidence and competence of teachers to deliver it; to the provision of suitable equipment and facilities; to the allocation of adequate time and to the size of classes and schools. In all of these areas, the programme was under-resourced and these factors impeded implementation. Implementation was reported to be low and the constraints on the system were repeatedly identified in the various surveys. Throughout the life-term of the curriculum these situational constraints were never adequately addressed to promote a fuller implementation of the curriculum. These constraints under which the physical education curriculum was implemented included oversized classes, inadequate funding, lack of appropriate buildings and facilities and lack of in-service training.

It is one thing to introduce a physical education curriculum, it is quite another to make it effective in practice. From the very beginning the shortcomings of the system were apparent and over the life-term of the curriculum very little remediation of the major impediments has taken place. While it must be acknowledged that the numbers of children doing physical education increased over this period, the breadth and balance of the curriculum was narrowed to fit the resource-starved system. Schools had to ignore significant sections of the physical education curriculum due to lack of basic facilities such as a physical education hall or a multi-purpose room. Games took a disproportionate amount of time and emphasis, at the expense of other aspects of physical education. Rather than reproducing the prescribed curriculum as practice, teachers appeared to adapt, modify or recreate it to make it manageable within the restricted contexts in which they worked. Considering the low levels of implementation it appears that there was an

apparent mismatch between the syllabus itself and the resources to implement it. As Duffy 1997 had observed the details of the syllabus were significantly in advance of what might reasonably have been expected to happen in most schools.¹¹⁷

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CHAPTER 3

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE 1971 CURRICULUM AND THE 1999 REVISED CURRICULUM IN RELATION TO PHYSICAL EDUCATION

3.1 Introduction

The curriculum has always been the blueprint for what occurs in school. It is an amalgam of many varied influences, ideas and resources and it is the instrument through which knowledge values and skills are communicated to children. In modern society curricula need to be constantly evaluated to keep pace with changes in education and society. This chapter examines the 1971 physical education curriculum and the 1999 revised curriculum for physical education. The aim of this section is to compare both curricula to determine if the revised curriculum has improved on the 1971 curriculum and if so in what ways and to what degree. The 1971 curriculum in physical education like all other subjects was not supposed to be viewed as a finished article. It was to be subject to review to keep pace with changes in society and education. In this chapter an attempt is made to examine this development of the physical education curriculum in primary schools.

Section 3.1 has explained the background and rationale for this chapter. In Section 3.2, the 1971 physical education curriculum is outlined. This includes a summary of the 1971 curriculum as set out in Teachers Handbook II. It provides an overview of the syllabus and the organisational features of the curriculum. Section 3.3 outlines the 1999 Revised Curriculum for physical education in primary schools. It explains the new presentation format of the physical education curriculum in two separate handbooks. An overview of the syllabus in the new strands is presented and the

new emphases of the revised curriculum are referred to. The teacher guidelines explains the pedagogic principles underlining the teaching and learning in physical education and the organisational issues involved in school and classroom planning. In Section 3.4 the two curricula are compared to highlight similarities and differences and to trace the evolution of the revised curriculum. Finally, the conclusions to be drawn from this analysis are set out in Section 3.5.

3.2 An Outline of the 1971 Primary Curriculum for Physical Education

The new Curriculum, *Curaclam na Bunscoile*,¹ introduced into Irish primary schools in 1971 was a child centred programme, focusing on the full and harmonious development of the child which emphasised a flexible curriculum to meet the needs of each individual child. The three pedagogical principles of activity and discovery based learning, the integrated nature of the curriculum and the importance of environment-based learning underpinned this curriculum. It was contained in two teachers handbooks which set out the aims, syllabi and approaches for each curriculum area. Physical education was included as one of these curricular areas and was laid out in the final chapter of *Teacher's Handbook 2*.² This chapter was arranged under the following headings.

Aims and Approach:- This was a brief introduction to the aims and rationale of the physical education curriculum and it stressed the child centred, nature of the new approach.

Areas of Work:- This divided the classes into groupings to allow for the child's different stages of development. These groups in primary schools included:

- (1) Infants
- (2) Classes I and II
- (3) Classes III and IV
- (4) Classes V and VI

Work and activity was to remain at play level for infants but for the other groupings the activities were to be divided as follows:

- A. Movement (Educational gymnastics & dance)
- B. Games (including national & traditional games)
- C. Athletics
- D. Other activities (orienteering, combat sports, swimming)

These activities were considered individually, introducing changes in approach and emphasis and discussing generally the rationale for their inclusion.

Syllabus:- This section set out the syllabus prescribed for each group. It gave a general account of the syllabus for each group and followed this with suggestions for implementing sample theme lessons of the syllabus.

1. Infants - Syllabus
Suggestions - (Running and throwing)
- Classes I and II - Syllabus
Suggestions on themes - (Rolling, locomotion, hoops)

Classes III and IV - Syllabus
Suggestions on themes - (Balance, floor patterns,
free jumping)

Classes V and VI - Syllabus
Suggestions - (Vaulting, free dancing, shooting,
orienteering)

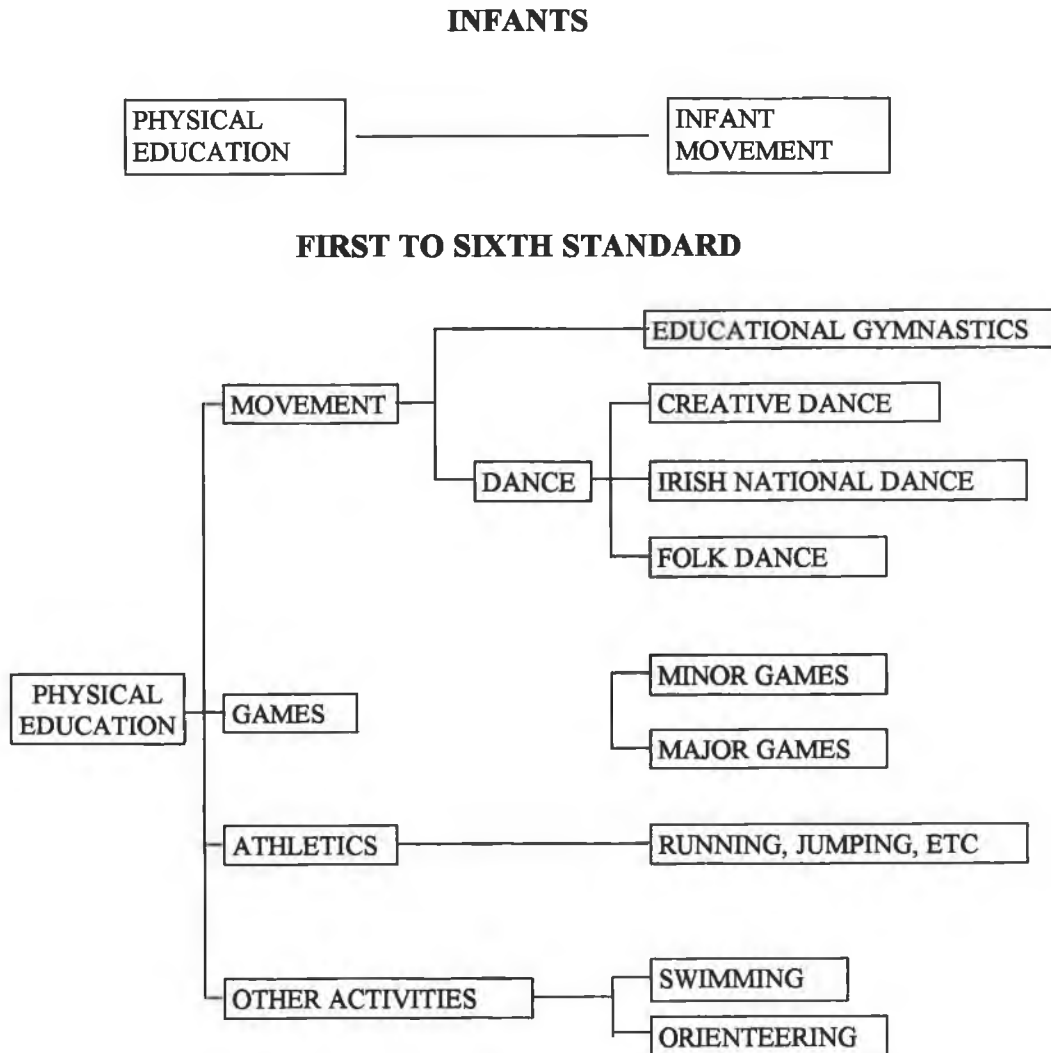
Organisation and Preparation:- This section considered the organisational issues and teacher responsibilities in the physical education curriculum. It included sub sections on: The teacher; Discipline; Integration; Preparation (remote and immediate); Facilities & equipment and Use of Irish.

Health Education:- This section contained a syllabus for health education divided into the same four groups as for general physical education with the same structure of "syllabus and suggestions". The syllabus was divided into sub sections

- Personal hygiene and school facilities
- Clothing and footwear
- Food
- Safety

Diagram 3.1

Overview of 1971 Physical Education Syllabus



(Source: Report of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum p 65)

3.3 An Outline of the 1999 Revised Curriculum for Physical Education

The Revised Primary School Curriculum was officially launched in 1999 and was structured to be phased into Irish primary schools over the following five years. The curriculum re-endorsed the principles underpinning the 1971 Curaclam na Bunscoile and sought to develop these in line with up-to-date educational knowledge. The principles of the full and harmonious development of the child and of making allowance for individual difference was re-defined in the broader concepts of 'celebrating the uniqueness of the child' and 'ensuring the development of the child's full potential'.³ The 3 pedagogical principles of activity and discovery based learning, an integrated curriculum and environment based learning were subsumed into a wider range of educational principles which characterised more fully the learning process that the revised curriculum envisaged.⁴ The defining features of the curriculum were identified as a focus on learning; a relevant, broad and balanced curriculum; a developmental approach to learning; a detailed statement of account; a balance of knowledge concepts and skills; assessment as an integral part of teaching and learning and the importance of planning.⁵

The 1999 Primary School Curriculum was set out in 23 handbooks retaining traditional subject delineations. The curriculum was divided into six curriculum areas - Language, Mathematics, Social Environmental and Science Education, Arts Education, Physical Education and Social Personal and Health Education. These were then subdivided into eleven subjects. The documentation which contained the curriculum included an over-arching 'Introduction' booklet, a Curriculum Statement in each subject and Teacher Guidelines for each subject. Physical education as a distinct curricular area was set out in a 'Physical Education Curriculum' handbook and 'Physical Education-Teacher Guidelines' handbook. These two handbooks complemented each other and

together they provided the prescribed syllabus and the guidelines for implementation of physical education in primary school.

The Revised Physical Education Curriculum Handbook

The Physical Education Curriculum was presented as a separate document. This handbook detailed the prescribed curriculum for physical education in primary schools. It began with an 'Introduction' to the new physical education curriculum which included a definition of physical education in primary school and details of content, aims, broad objectives and planning procedures. There were also statements concerning gender, sport and competition, the school plan, assessment, integration, special needs, developing understanding and appreciation and ICT. Each school was to develop a broad and balanced programme of physical education. The content of the physical education curriculum was divided into six separate units and sub-units called 'strands and strand units'. Strands were major learning areas while strand units outlined more specific areas of content which together comprise the strand. Strand units incorporated objectives, experiences and attitudes to enable to child the develop particular concepts, skills and attitudes. The strands were Athletics, Dance, Gymnastics, Games, Outdoor & Adventure Activities and Aquatics.

The Syllabus

The syllabus was divided into four distinct class groupings or levels - one for each development level. These groupings were set out in separate sections and were colour-coded for ease of identification and reference

Infants	-	Green
Classes I - II	-	Purple
Classes III - IV	-	Blue
Classes V - VI	-	Orange

All of the class groupings, followed the same strand structure and strand unit structure. Each groupings' syllabus included the strands Athletics, Dance, Gymnastics, Games, Outdoor and Adventure Activities and Aquatics. These strands were outlined for each class level and broken into strand units or sub-sections of each strand. For example in the Games strand all class groups should explore the following:

Games

- sending, receiving and travelling
- creating and playing games
- understanding and appreciation of games.

Each strand has similar sub-sections or strand units which remain the same from Infants to Class VI. Diagram 3.1 shows the structure of all the class groupings' syllabus from Infants to Class VI.

Diagram 3.2

OVERVIEW OF THE 1999 PHYSICAL EDUCATION SYLLABUS		
FROM INFANTS TO SIXTH CLASS		
OVERVIEW		
<i>Strands</i>		<i>Strand units</i>
Athletics	*	Running
	*	Jumping
	*	Throwing
	*	Understanding and appreciation of athletics
Dance	*	Exploration, creation and performance of dance
	*	Understanding and appreciation of dance
Gymnastics	*	Movement
	*	Understanding and appreciation of gymnastics
Games	*	Sending, receiving and travelling
	*	Creating and playing games
	*	Understanding and appreciation of games
Outdoor and adventure activities	*	Walking
	*	Orienteering
	*	Outdoor challenges
	*	Understanding and appreciation of outdoor and adventure activities
Aquatics	*	Hygiene
	*	Water safety
	*	Entry to and from the water
	*	Buoyancy and propulsion
	*	Stroke development
	*	Water-based ball games
	*	Understanding and appreciation of aquatics

The work in these strand units was developmentally graded as one progressed from infants to the senior classes. Expectations of quality of movement, range of movement and endurance rose at each level, to guide continuity and development. The objectives for all of the strand units were supplemented by examples of activities and suggestions appropriate for each level. Each strand was expected to be taught at each class level with the exception of Aquatics. This was presented as one complete unit which could be implemented at any level depending on access to facilities. Thus, the aquatics programme could be implemented progressively at whatever stage the child had the opportunity to begin aquatic activities.

Assessment

The curriculum contained a rationale for assessment of physical education in primary schools. Assessment in education provided information on what the child has learned and how he/she had learned. This could help to inform and improve teaching and learning in physical education. It could also be used to identify areas of learning difficulty for the child, and so it could fulfil a diagnostic role. Summative assessment could be used to report to parents on a child's progress in physical education and evaluative assessment could provide the school with a means for appropriate decision making about planning and supporting its physical education programme. It was recommended that assessment in physical education should focus on: social and personal qualities of the child; physical skills and competence; knowledge and understanding; creative and aesthetic development; development of health related fitness; development of safe practices.

To assess these wide range of attitudes, skills and knowledge a variety of assessment tools and approaches would be necessary. The following techniques of assessment would be considered appropriate: teacher observation; teacher designed tasks; curriculum profiles. The assessments overall, would to a large extent be formative in their nature. The school policy should outline ways in which assessment in physical education could be conducted and recorded.

The Revised Physical Education -Teacher Guidelines

Introduction

In addition to the Curriculum statement, physical education was supported by a book of guidelines for teachers which outlined new emphases and new thinking on the teaching/learning process. The teacher guidelines were designed as an aid and resource for teachers in school and class planning in physical education. It begins with an account of what constitutes physical education in primary school. Physical education provides opportunities to learn through the medium of movement and helps children to lead full active and healthy lives.⁶ The considerations for implementing a physical education programme in a child centred curriculum are then discussed. The programme should be based on the "principles of variety and diversification".⁷ When implementing the programme the following factors need to be considered.

- the importance of enjoyment and play
- the maximum participation by all children
- the development of skills and understanding
- a balance between competitive and non-competitive activities
- a balance between contact and non-contact activities

- providing opportunities for achievement for each child
- providing activities equally suitable for girls and boys.⁸

The content of the physical education curriculum is outlined providing the teacher with "a structured balanced programme of work".⁹ The framework of the curriculum is presented -

- ⇒ the delineation at four levels, Infants, first and second class, third and fourth class and fifth and sixth class
- ⇒ the division of the syllabus into 6 strands, Athletics, Games, Aquatics, Dance, Gymnastics, Outdoor and Adventure Activities
- ⇒ the subdivision of each 'strand' into 'strand units'

Five of the strands are to be implemented at each level but the Aquatics strand can be implemented at any level or over a number of levels. Each of the strands is explained in detail and the rationale for its inclusion is presented.

School Planning For Physical Education

This section of the teacher guidelines deals with curriculum planning for physical education and organisational issues. The successful implementation of the physical education curriculum will depend on "efficient planning by school and teachers".¹⁰ To ensure the provision of a broad balanced physical education, the school programme should: meet the needs of the school; include all strands of the curriculum where possible; provide for progression and continuity (in difficulty and quality); recommend some selection within strands.¹¹

Time-tabling should allow for maximum time for activity in the physical education lesson. Some strands can be taught in block form or spread out over the course of a year. Other issues dealt with in this section include

- ⇒ integration with other subjects
- ⇒ promoting gender equity
- ⇒ physical education and health - health related fitness
- ⇒ special needs children - catering for the needs of the less able and gifted children
- ⇒ safe practice in physical education - medical history of children, awareness of age appropriate activities, equipment, posture etc.
- ⇒ assessment - rationale for assessment
 - range of assessment tools (teacher observation)
 - recording and communicating (pupil profile cards)

Organisational Planning

This section deals with developing the school plan for physical education.

Planning for physical education should

- create a common understanding of physical education
- aim to utilise the interests and expertise of the teaching staff
- provide real help to the teacher
- involve an examination of facilities and resources available in the school
- contribute to the overall plan

- determine how the school is going to phase in the introduction of the new curriculum
- involve review and evaluation
- involve communication between teachers, parents and the boards of management
- determine the role of the principal and the role of the teacher.

Each one of these considerations is dealt with in great detail especially the role of principal and the role of the teacher. All of these factors will contribute to the creation of a whole school policy for physical education within the school plan.

‘Organising and managing support for the physical education programme’ deals with the role of parents and coaches in supporting the programme. Parents can support it by fostering positive attitudes to physical education or perhaps assist at sports days. The support of coaches stresses that their role should be "one of support, not of substitution for the teacher".¹² The in-career development needs of teachers is recognised and in-service training is encouraged. Managing and organising facilities indoor, outdoor and use of community facilities is discussed. The importance of facilities in providing a balanced curriculum is clear. In respect of equipment, it is stated that "a comprehensive range of equipment is necessary to teach a balanced programme of physical education".¹³ Use of publications, books, videos and the benefits of links with local sports clubs and national bodies are also highlighted. Finally some recommendations are given on how to implement the physical education programme in small schools and schools with limited facilities.

Section 4 of the Teacher Guidelines deals with “Classroom planning for physical education”. It details the considerations for the class teacher in the planning of physical education at the class level. Factors to be taken into consideration include:

- the experience of the class
- the guidance offered by the school plan
- the use of a variety of teaching methods and approaches
- the time devoted to each strand and the depth of treatment
- the period of the year in which activities might take place
- establishing a code of practice for physical education lessons
- the availability of resources and support
- integration of strands with other subjects
- involvement of pupils in the organisation of physical education
- how to provide for differing abilities
- how pupil progress might be assessed.¹⁴

Each of these factors is discussed and recommendations given on how to accommodate them in the physical education lesson at classroom level.

Approaches & Methodologies

One of the key factors in the successful teaching of physical education is the use of a broad range of approaches and teaching methods. This section outlines some of the approaches which have been found to be particularly suited to physical education in the primary school. Each teacher in each school may use a selection of these approaches

which he/she considers suitable for implementing sections of the programme. Three teaching approaches are listed: direct teaching approach; guided discovery approach; integrated approaches.

Each approach is discussed and guidelines given on the appropriate use of these methodologies in various contexts. Examples of sample lessons and units of work called Exemplars are included which illustrate the broad range of approaches and methodologies, detailed content of lesson or unit and some methods of assessment. Recommendations are also given on how physical education can be integrated with other subjects.

Guidelines are also given on “Organising the physical education lesson”. Maximum participation by the children should be encouraged in all lessons. This can be achieved by whole class activities or the effective use of small groups. Teachers need to plan for children to work alone or with others co-operatively and competitively⁽¹⁵⁾. At infant level much of the work will be on individual activities which can be developed into partner work. Eventually work in small groups will be fostered. In first and second class, group work should provide opportunities for group co-operation in preparation for team play. From third to sixth class team play is considered appropriate but “should always suit the individual needs of the child”.¹⁶ The use of “stations” - children playing in groups on certain designated games - is recommended as a useful organisational framework where equipment is limited. The division of play areas into grids, where children practice skills in small groups is also advocated.

In addition to the general guidelines on planning the class programme, there are also specific guidelines given for planning each individual strand and these guidelines are supplemented with exemplar lessons and units of work which illustrate the proposed approaches. Each exemplar on a unit of work provides a framework for planning that particular strand. For example the exemplar on 'a unit of work in Athletics' includes

- Title of the Strand Unit - Athletics
- Equipment - List of all equipment to be used
- Warm up activities
- Assessment
- Integration
- Detailed breakdown of the development of the lesson in step by step format.
- Follow up work

Similar suggested approaches and exemplars are given for all of the Strands - Athletics, Dance, Gymnastics, Games, Outdoor and Adventure Activities and Aquatics.

Throughout each physical education lesson the teacher will be involved in various forms of assessment of children's work. Through assessment the teacher can ensure that achievements are recognised, areas of difficulty identified, progress of each child recorded and the next stages of learning are planned. Examples of how teachers might use the assessment tools of teacher observation, teacher designed tasks and curriculum profiles in physical education are detailed. Methods of recording each child's achievements and difficulties are also provided.

Finally in the Appendix section of the Teacher Guidelines a resource a “Suggested List of Equipment for Physical Education” is presented. The equipment is classified under the headings

- ◆ Suggested equipment for athletics and games
- ◆ Suggested equipment for gymnastics and dance
- ◆ Suggested equipment for outdoor and adventure activities
- ◆ Suggested equipment for Aquatics

The ratio of equipment to each child is acknowledged as an important consideration.

3.4 Comparing the Two Curricula

The 1971 Primary School Curriculum had received significant support for its principles in all of the surveys conducted since its introduction.¹⁷ There appeared to be considerable goodwill among teachers for the child-centred philosophy of the curriculum and the pedagogical principles attending to it. Therefore, it was no surprise to find the Revised Curriculum formulated firmly on these accepted principles. A radical shift was not necessary. Rather an updating, refining and revising of the curriculum was needed but still firmly embedded in the philosophy, principles and spirit of the 1971 curriculum. The necessary changes were evolutionary and developmental rather than revolutionary. This led to a redesign of the old curriculum to take account of educational, economic, social and cultural developments in Irish society in light of the most up-to-date educational theory and practice. In such a context, it is no surprise to find many

similarities between the 1971 curriculum and the 1999 curriculum. This is as true in physical education as in any other subject. Many of the differences between the 1971 Primary School physical education curriculum and the 1999 revised primary school curriculum are born out of criticisms and recommendations found in the curriculum evaluations and surveys. These studies with their conclusions and recommendations have presented critiques of the 1971 physical education curriculum and provided guidance and direction on how the programme could be improved. Thus the new curriculum has to some degree attempted to address the issues identified in the studies as weaknesses and built upon the positive aspects of the 1971 curriculum.

Presentation Format

A comparison of the two physical education curricula highlights many similarities but also some differences between the two. The most immediate and recognisable difference between the physical education curriculum in 1971 and the 1999 physical education curriculum is the format and structure of the documents. Instead of the one chapter of the Teachers Handbook II which dealt with all aspects of the old physical education curriculum, the revised physical education curriculum is outlined in two separate handbooks. One handbook deals with the 'Curriculum' or syllabus and the other provides Teacher Guidelines on all aspects of the curriculum implementation. These two complementary handbooks provide, in great detail, the prescribed syllabus and the methodologies and approaches to implement it. Although the 1971 documents were models for their time, the revised curriculum documents represents a significant advance of the old curriculum. This documentation is presented in a very attractive and user friendly format and represents a step forward in terms of accessibility, clarity and general usability.

Detail

There is also a huge difference in the level of detail included in each curriculum. The 1971 physical education curriculum was contained in 38 pages of one chapter compared to 180 pages in the two separate handbooks detailing the revised curriculum. The huge increase in detail is evident when the areas covered in each curriculum are compared to each other. Diagram 3.1 illustrates this:

Diagram 3.3

Comparison of Level of Detail in 1971 Physical Education Syllabus and the 1999 Physical Education Syllabus

1971 CURRICULUM	1999 CURRICULUM
<u>Teacher's Handbook 2 - Chapter IV</u>	<u>Primary School Curriculum</u>
Aims and Approach	Introduction
Areas of Work	Physical Education
Syllabus and Suggestions	The Physical Education Curriculum
Infants - VI (21 pages)	Aims
Organisation and Preparation	Broad Objectives
The Teacher	Planning Content for Physical Education
Discipline	Syllabus - Overview and Content
Integration	Infants - VI (55 pages)
Remote Preparation	Assessment
Immediate Preparation	Appendix
Facilities & Equipment	<u>Physical Education - Teacher Guidelines</u>
	Physical Education in the Primary School
	The content of the Physical Education Curriculum
	School Planning for Physical Education
	Classroom Planning for P.E.
	Approaches and Methodologies
	Appendix

The two separate handbooks of the 1999 Curriculum provide a more detailed syllabus and more guidance on how to implement the programme. One handbook deals with the 'Syllabus' in detail and the other handbook provides 'Teacher Guidelines' on all aspects of the curriculum implementation. One of the major criticisms of the 1971 curriculum was that it was too general and unrealistic.¹⁸ The Physical Education Association of Ireland had recommended that the syllabus "needed to be detailed enough to provide guidance for the non specialist physical education teacher"¹⁹ and it had called for clear attainable objectives and guidelines for teachers.²⁰ The revised curriculum has provided much more of this type of guidance for the teacher.

This increased detail is to be found in all aspects of the new curriculum – more clearly defined objectives, more detailed syllabus in each strand, more guidance on school and classroom planning and more detailed explanation of approaches and methodologies.

Aims and Objectives

There was a clear link between the broad aims of the two curricula with both documents outlining the contribution of physical education to the development of the individual. The 1971 document stated that

"The aims of Physical Education are to promote the organic well being of the child, to develop a suitable range of motor skills, to help him adapt himself to his immediate environment and to cultivate desirable social attitudes. It also makes a valuable contribution towards the aesthetic emotional and moral development of the child".²¹

This statement emphasised that physical education in primary school was concerned with the development of physical well being, the enhancement of motor skills

and adaptability and the advancement of social skills. Aesthetic emotional and moral development appeared as important but secondary aims. A major criticism of these aims in the research was that they were too general and that 'a suitable range of motor skills' and 'desirable social attitudes' needed to be more specifically defined.

The revised curriculum addressed this criticism and the aims of the 1999 physical education curriculum are much more specific and detailed than the older curriculum.

These aims of the 1999 curriculum are:

- ❖ *to promote the physical, social, emotional and intellectual development of the child*
- ❖ *to develop positive personal qualities*
- ❖ *to help in the acquisition of an appropriate range of movement skills in a variety of contexts*
- ❖ *to promote understanding and knowledge of the various aspects of movement*
- ❖ *to develop an appreciation of movement and the use of the body as an instrument of expression and creativity*
- ❖ *to promote enjoyment of, and positive attitudes towards, physical activity and its contribution to lifelong health related fitness, thus preparing the child for the active and purposeful use of leisure time.*²²

These general aims are supplemented by a section on "Broad Objectives" which details the specific goals of the new physical education curriculum taking account of the intrinsic abilities and varying circumstances of each child. The 32 objectives are set out under the headings

Social and Personal Development
Physical and Motor Development
Knowledge and Understanding
Creative and Aesthetic development
Development of health related fitness
Development of safety.²³

These broad objectives explain in significant detail what is expected in all areas of development promoted by physical education. They help to define the original aims in practical language which specifies what the child should be enabled to do. This clarification and detailed explanation of the aims is an attempt to deal with the problem of vague statements of aims found in the 1971 document.

Although the general aims of both curricula are very similar in philosophy and outlook, there are some important additions. One of these is the aim “to promote understanding and knowledge of the various aspects of movement”. This was not mentioned in the 1971 physical education curriculum but it has a high profile in the revised curriculum. To implement this aim a ‘strand unit’ called ‘Understanding and Appreciating’²⁴ is contained in each of the 6 strands of the physical education curriculum. Its function is to promote the child’s understanding and appreciation of physical activities both as participant and as spectator. It involves the intellectual and affective education of the child and includes developing the child’s comprehension of strategy, rules, tactics and an appreciation of performance and athletic skill.

Another augmentation of the 1971 physical education curriculum aims is the promotion of positive attitudes towards physical activities leading to lifelong involvement in active leisure time activities. This involves laying the foundations for life-long learning in physical activities, sport and recreation which will benefit the child throughout his life.

Teacher Guidelines

The second handbook to support the Physical Education Curriculum, Physical Education Teacher Guidelines is a significant development in the revised curriculum. To aid the teacher in implementing the physical education curriculum specific teacher guidelines and 'exemplars' are provided. These include sample lesson plans and sample units of work on strands and strand units. The teacher guidelines handbook contains guidance on school planning and classroom planning of the child's physical education experience. However, the greatest proportion of the handbook is dedicated to the 'Approaches and Methodologies' to be used in implementation. It outlines the approaches which have been found to be particularly suited to physical education in primary school. Providing exemplars of strands and strand units it is designed to provide examples of how to implement the curriculum. This focus on the 'how' of implementation and the provision of guidelines provides a framework for translating the syllabus into practice. The 1971 curriculum provided only vague 'Suggestions' on how to implement the curriculum. One of the criticisms of this curriculum was its lack of guidance for teachers. Indeed in 1990 Deenihan²⁵ had recommended the provision of a text book with lesson plans and schemes of work. The 1999 curriculum provides 'exemplars' of units of work and approaches to each strand of the physical education syllabus. This represents a fundamental change from the 1971 curriculum which was not really supported by any form of teaching guidelines.

Organisational Features

The revised 1999 physical education curriculum absorbed some of the organisational features of the earlier curriculum. In the 1971 curriculum to allow for the child's different stages of development, the activities were divided into developmental groupings of (i) Infants and (ii) Classes I - II (iii) Classes III - IV and (iv) Classes V-VI.

Table 3.1

Delineations of Curriculum Content at Class Levels

<u>1971</u>	<u>1999</u>
Infants	Infants
Classes I - II	Classes I - II
Classes III - IV	Classes III - IV
Classes V - VI	Classes V - VI

As table 4.1 shows, in the grading of the developmental levels of the 1999 curriculum for physical education, the class level groupings of 1971 are retained. This same four level delineation of content provides schools with a structure for developing a balanced curriculum which provides for progression and continuity in physical education through primary school. In the studies surveyed no individual or group commented negatively on this structure which may imply a general acceptance of these levels as appropriate. For this reason their retention is not unexpected.

Role of the Teacher

Another similarity is the key role ascribed to the class teacher in both curricula. The centrality of the teacher in the teaching of physical education is pronounced in both.

Due to the integrated nature of these curricula in primary schools the most appropriate person to implement the program is the class teacher^{26,27}. The recommendation for “specialist” physical education teachers and co-ordinators in the Report of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum²⁸ and in the Green Paper²⁹ appears to have been overshadowed by the INTO response³⁰ that the best teacher of physical education is the generalist, the qualified primary teacher. This stance was also recommended by the Primary Education Review Body³¹ when it advocated systematic in-service training of class teachers instead of appointing subject specialists. Both curricula state that the implementation of the physical education curriculum is the responsibility of the class teacher. The 1999 curriculum stressed that while sports coaches may be used in schools, their role should be one of support not of substitution for the teacher. The teacher must retain overall control for planning, organisation, control and monitoring.

Time

In regard to ‘time allocation’ the 1971 physical education curriculum made no real recommendations except to specify periods of 15 minutes for infant activities.³² There was no recommendation on the frequency or length of the physical education lesson for schools to implement. However, the revised 1999 physical education curriculum has a designated time allocation. In the Introduction handbook, a breakdown of time allocation for each subject was given.³³ Physical education was assigned 60 minutes each week for all classes from Infants to Class VI, in the suggested minimum weekly time framework.

Table 3.2

**Comparison of 1971 and 1999 time allocation recommendations
for physical education.**

1971 Curriculum	1999 Curriculum
No specified weekly time allocation	60 minutes per week for all classes plus use of discretionary time for physical education.

The new curriculum's guideline on time allocation provided an organisational framework to assist teachers in facilitating a balanced and integrated learning experience for children. Considering the low status physical education occupies in the subject hierarchy of schools this prescribed one hour allocation is important. Also the option of planning in blocks of time and the use of the discretionary time (1 hr for infants and 2 hrs for other classes) represents realism in the provision of quality physical education where transition time, changing time and organisational time may be required.

Equipment

Both curricula acknowledge the importance of equipment in the provision of a proper physical education programme. The 1971 curriculum highlighted the need for "a large and diverse selection of equipment".³⁴ While the 1999 curriculum stated that a "comprehensive range of equipment is necessary to teach a balanced programme of physical education".³⁵

Table 3.3

Comparison of Suggested Equipment for the 1971 and 1999

Physical Education Curriculum

<i>1971</i>	<i>1999</i>
(a) <u>Portable</u> : mats, balls, benches, ropes, hoops, bats, bar boxes, scramble tables etc.	<u>Suggested equipment for Athletics and Games</u> : small and large balls, hoops, canes, skipping ropes, beanbags, quoits, hurdles, cones, bibs, bats, hockey sticks, batons, containers, nets, chalk, tape, stop-watch
(b) <u>Fixed</u> : ropes and standard units for climbing and other work	<u>Suggested equipment for Gymnastics and Dance</u> : selection of music, tape recorder, hoops, cones, gym mats, climbing frame, balance benches, bar box.
(c) <u>Further items</u> : hiking equipment, compass, tents	<u>Suggested equipment for Outdoor & Adventure Activities</u> : Outdoor education centres may provide a variety of equipment for use by class groups. Within the school it may be possible to construct adventure trails using benches, mats, climbing frames etc.
(d) A small learner pool	<u>Suggested equipment for Aquatics</u> : swimming floats, diving rings, diving sticks, diving hoops, ropes, poles.

The 1971 curriculum provided an inventory of recommended equipment and suggested improvisation where ideal equipment was not available. As table 3.3 clearly indicates the suggested list of equipment in the 1971 curriculum was very restricted when compared to the extensive list detailed in the 1999 curriculum. Presented in the Appendix section of the Physical Education Teacher Guidelines the 1999 curriculum listed all the equipment needed in each strand of the curriculum. Along with this comprehensive list was a stipulation that the ratio of pieces of equipment to each child should be an important consideration. This “certain basic equipment” is necessary to provide a comprehensive programme.

Content

In the structure and presentation of the content of the curricula there has been significant development. The revised physical education curriculum 1999 is divided into six strands (Athletics, Games, Aquatics, Outdoor Activities and Dance) instead of the four divisions (Movement, Games, Athletics and Other Activities) found in the old 1971 curriculum.

Table 3.4
Comparison of Content in 1971 Physical Education Syllabus and
1999 Physical Education Syllabus

1971	1999
Movement	Athletics
Games	Dance
Athletics	Games
Other Activities Orienteering	Gymnastics
	Outdoor & Adventure Activities
	Aquatics

Gymnastics and Dance which were grouped together under Movement are now separate strands. Aquatics, which used to be incorporated in Other Activities is also now a separate strand. This division into six strands provides the teacher with distinctive sections of the physical education curriculum which may help cultivate different aspects of the child's physical development. All classes from infants to sixth are expected to undertake five strands of the syllabus at each level with the aquatics strand outlined for implementation at any level depending on facilities. This approach in the 1999 curriculum exposed all children in primary school to at least five strands of the content at

each level, unlike the 1971 curriculum which treated infants as a separate category where work remained at play level.

Health Education

Table 3.5

Comparison of Health Education Sections in 1971 Physical Education Syllabus and 1999 Physical Education Syllabus

1971	1999
Health Education	No corresponding section (treated as a separate curricular area, Social Personal and Health Education, with its own curriculum and Teacher Guidelines).
Hygiene	
Safety	
Food	
Health needs	

A Health Education section was included as part of the physical education curriculum in 1971 because it was felt that physical education lessons would provide suitable opportunities for the promotion of personal and general cleanliness and the fostering of habits that are socially acceptable. It included areas such as personal and communal hygiene, food and healthy eating, safety and health factors like smoking and alcohol. The 1999 physical education curriculum has no such corresponding section. The health education syllabus is attended to in the Social, Personal and Health Education curriculum which is a discrete curriculum itself. This may not represent a neglect of health education but perhaps an upgrading of this area to a separate curricular area.

Assessment

The inclusion of assessment is a radical development in the new curriculum. The 1971 curriculum had no reference to assessing physical education but the new curriculum views assessment as a central component.

Table 3.6

Comparison of Assessment Sections in 1971 and 1999

Physical Education Curricula

<i>1971</i>	<i>1999</i>
no corresponding section	Assessment in physical education - what to assess - how to assess - assessment tools - recording and communicating

Assessment is an essential part of the teaching and learning process in physical education. It informs teaching and learning by “providing information on what children have learned and how they learn”.³⁶ It contributes to informed decisions about future learning. However, it is essential that assessment be related to the physical education objectives and serve the aims of the programme. Assessment is a major issue in education nowadays and it is no surprise to find that it plays a key role in the revised physical education curriculum.

Facilities

Table 3.7

Comparison of facilities recommended for the Implementation of the 1971 and 1999 Physical Education Curricula

<i>1971</i>	<i>1999</i>
<p><u>Indoor:</u> A smooth non slip floor area Sufficient space to implement the indoor curriculum</p> <p><u>Outdoor:</u> Grass play area All weather play area</p>	<p><u>Indoor:</u> Indoor area for dance and gymnastics Access to swimming pool</p> <p><u>Outdoor:</u> Outdoor grass facility School Grounds Use of community facilities Outdoor facilities in local area</p>

On the subject of provision of facilities both the 1971 and 1999 physical education curricula acknowledged certain basic requirements. The 1971 curriculum admitted that there were as yet few schools which could provide ideal facilities, which were an indoor facility with a smooth non slip floor and sufficient space to implement the programme - outdoor play areas to include grass, all-weather surfaces and hard areas, a small learner pool.³⁷ It went on to recommend 'improvisation' to make up for inadequate facilities. In the 1999 physical education curriculum the issue of facilities is dealt with in the "Organisational Planning" section. It states that "the availability of outdoor and indoor facilities should be examined".³⁸ This curriculum again recognises the indoor and outdoor facilities necessary to implement the programme. It recommends that "Gymnastics and dance are best suited to an indoor area".³⁹ An outdoor grass facility and an indoor area are recommended for the athletics and games sections. Access to pool facilities is identified as important in the provision of the aquatics strand. Use of outdoor facilities and community facilities is recommended

where these facilities are not available in schools. For small schools it recommends use of corridors, playgrounds, community facilities and sharing with other primary and secondary schools. The use of an outdoor education centre is recommended for Outdoor and Adventure Activities.

Both curricula acknowledge the need for these facilities and yet both fail to address the issue of provision of facilities. The 1971 curriculum is more forthright in its acknowledgement, setting aside a separate section for its recommendation on facilities. The 1999 curriculum treats facilities in a much more superficial way including it in the section on Organisational Planning. Furthermore it apparently lays the responsibility for its provision on the school with phrases such as “every effort should be made”⁴⁰ to provide aquatic experience. The recommendation to use community facilities also transfers responsibility for facility provision to the school.

School Plan

Another issue which the new curriculum attends to, but which the old curriculum ignored is the school planning for physical education. In the 1971 curriculum the individual teacher was responsible for planning the physical education curriculum for his/her class. This involved both “remote” and “immediate preparation”⁴¹ to ensure continuity. The new curriculum recommends whole school planning and the drawing up of a school policy on physical education as part of the School Plan⁴² Detailed guidelines are given in Organisational Planning on developing the school plan for physical education. This plan should then be adapted by the teacher in his ‘classroom planning’ with consideration for the children’s needs and the resources.

Gender

In relation to gender, the 1971 curriculum overtly differentiated between boys and girls – “Girls tend to choose light delicate movement” and boys “generally move with strength”.⁴³ The curriculum even specified that at fifth and sixth class level in games separate arrangements will often need to be made for boys and girls.⁴⁴ This gender division probably reflected the general attitude at this time. However, in the new curriculum the promotion of gender equity in physical education is an important issue. In planning the physical education programme consideration should be given “on an equitable basis to the needs and interests of both girls and boys”.⁴⁵ Grouping children solely on the basis of gender is discouraged, equal access encouraged and promotion of positive attitudes towards all physical education activities should be cultivated in both boys and girls.

Special Needs

With the integration of special needs children into the general education system the new curriculum makes provision for the inclusion of these children. “A safe and secure environment should be provided for physical education appropriate to the child with special needs”.⁴⁶ This includes gifted children who need to be challenged or less able children who may require modifications to equipment or activities. The old curriculum failed to address this issue except to say that children should be encouraged to organise sporting events, thus providing rewarding opportunities for those who cannot compete.

Physical Education and Sport

The new curriculum makes an important distinction between physical education and sport, which the old curriculum did not address. Physical education focuses on the holistic development of the child stressing the physical and motor development, the personal development and the social development. Sport emphasises winning but physical education stresses development and learning. However, competition can be part of physical education. A balanced approach to competition is recommended where competition is used to serve the aims of the physical education programme and the needs of the children.

Integration

A section dealing with integration is to be found in the two curricula. This is not surprising considering the fact that integration is an underpinning principle of both curricula. The 1971 curriculum was based on a philosophy of education which incorporated the integrated nature of the curriculum and the 1999 curriculum stated that “learning is most effective when it is integrated”.⁴⁷ Both curricula acknowledge that physical education can enrich the development of other curricular areas and be enriched itself by integration with other subjects.

Physical Education in small schools or schools with limited facilities

The 1999 Revised curriculum provides guidance for small schools in implementing the physical education programme. The 1971 Curriculum made no such allowances for small schools and did not recognise their particular problems. The Revised Curriculum makes suggestions on improvisation of school grounds, sharing facilities with other schools, allocation of more time to physical education in good

weather and forming links with sports organisations. While this acknowledges that many small schools have poor facilities it does not provide real solutions to the problems. In relation to multi-grade classes certain factors are highlighted which the teacher should consider. While this recognition of the existence of multi-grade classes is an advance on the 1971 curriculum which failed to consider it, it does not provide much in the way of practical guidance or solutions to the difficulties involved in implementing the physical education programme in such classes.

Role of Parents

The formal recognition of the role parents play in their children's learning is a significant change in the revised curriculum for physical education. Parents are encouraged to support the implementation of the physical education curriculum in school by having a voice in its organisational planning.⁴⁸ It is recommended that an appreciation of the importance of physical education should be fostered in the wider community. This inclusion of parents in their children's physical education is a recognition of parents as partners in the education system. The 1971 curriculum for physical education saw no such role for parents as the implementation of the syllabus was seen to be the responsibility of the class teacher only. This importance of parental involvement in their children's education was first publicly acknowledged in the Report of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum 1990.⁴⁹ The change in policy is a reflection of a change in the public attitude concerning the role that parents play in their child's education.

3.5 Conclusions

The Revised Curriculum for Primary School has been built upon the principles of the 1971 Curaclam na Bunscoile. In physical education the revised curriculum has

reiterated and expanded these principles of the older curriculum and this is reflected in all aspects of the curriculum. It has endeavoured to modify, adapt and improve the curriculum to make it relevant for physical education in the present educational climate. The revised physical education curriculum has acknowledged many of the issues relating to physical education which repeatedly emerged in the surveys and evaluations. The criticisms of the syllabus, the time allocation, the vague aims and lack of pedagogical guidance have all been addressed to some degree. The general aims of the revised physical education curriculum are supported by specific objectives which are designed to facilitate the realisation of the general aims. This is a response to the criticism that the aims were too vague.

The syllabus has been re-designed and modified into six-strands which are spiral and developmental in nature, building gradually and progressively from junior infants to sixth class. The physical education curriculum outlines a detailed body of content and a wide range of skills concepts and attitudes appropriate to different ages and stages of development.

The issue of time allocation is addressed in the revised curriculum. Curaclam na Bunscoile did not make recommendations regarding time allocated to physical education but in response to requests for guidance, guidelines were issued at in-service courses which followed its introduction. The revised curriculum specifies a designated 60 mins for physical education in primary school. In the 'Teacher Guidelines' the teacher is provided with a selection of appropriate methodologies and approaches which were lacking in the 1971 document. The 1999 revised physical education curriculum also recognises other important issues which the older curriculum failed to address. This may

not be due to blind neglect of the issues but more than likely reflects the prevailing attitudes then and now. The issues of gender, school planning, parental involvement and assessment are such developments in the 1999 physical education curriculum. These are important contemporary factors which have become established elements in the physical education curriculum.

Many teachers already feel uncertain in their knowledge and expertise in the limited physical education curriculum set out in *Curacclam na Bunscoile*. This revised curriculum in physical education is going to make extra demands on the teacher and the school in terms of balance and breadth of content and curriculum and in terms of expertise and greater indepth knowledge required.

While the revised physical education curriculum has made many improvements to the older curriculum it should not be seen as a panacea for all the ills in physical education. It addresses many of the issues for which the 1971 document was criticised but it brings with it its own advances and difficulties. Certain issues have not been addressed to any greater degree than they were in 1971. The situational constraints of equipment and facilities, will influence the implementation of this curriculum in schools as they influenced the older curriculum. It continues to make assumptions about availability of facilities and equipment as both curricula failed to address the provision of these necessities. The degree of implementation of the revised curriculum will be dependent to a large extent on the circumstances in individual schools.

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- (42) Department of Education and Science (1999) Primary School Curriculum Physical Education : Teacher Guidelines p 24. Stationery Office : Dublin
- (43) Department of Education (1971) Primary School Curriculum Teachers Handbook 2 p 291. Browne & Nolan : Dublin
- (44) Department of Education (1971) Primary School Curriculum Teachers Handbook 2 p 310. Browne & Nolan : Dublin
- (45) Department of Education and Science (1999) Primary School Curriculum Physical Education : Teacher Guidelines p 18. Stationery Office : Dublin
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- (47) Department of Education and Science (1999) Primary School Curriculum Physical Education: Curriculum p 9. Stationery Office : Dublin
- (48) Department of Education and Science (1999) Primary School Curriculum Physical Education : Teacher Guidelines p 27. Stationery Office : Dublin
- (49) Report of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum (1990) Government of Ireland: Dublin. The Stationery Office p 73.

CHAPTER 4

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY OF THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH STUDY

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to research the implementation of the 1971 physical education programme in Irish primary schools, with a view to identifying factors which have impeded the programme. This project was chosen at this time because the findings may prove useful in the implementation of the Revised Curriculum for Physical Education 1999 scheduled for 2004. The preceding three chapters provide insights into physical education in primary schools. In Chapter 1 the rationale for including physical education in primary schools and its importance in the curriculum is delineated. The potential benefits of a high quality physical education programme for the physical, social and personal well being of the child are illustrated. Chapter 2 reviews the research on the implementation of the physical education programme. It catalogues and examines the evaluations of the implementation of the 1971 curriculum with particular emphasis on the physical education component. The surveys which have dealt specifically with physical education are also tabulated and investigated to identify factors which influence the degree of implementation of the physical education curriculum. Having identified the inhibiting factors to implementation, each one is examined to determine the nature and extent of its effect on the physical education programme. Chapter 3 endeavours to compare and contrast the 1971 physical education curriculum and the 1999 physical education curriculum. By examining both of these programmes it is hoped to identify improvements in the evolution of physical education programme. It may also be possible to identify the barriers to implementation which still remain and will have to be addressed to promote fuller implementation of the Revised Curriculum 1999.

The empirical component of this study seeks to investigate the issues which may still impede the physical education curriculum. These issues have been highlighted by the various evaluations and surveys on the physical education curriculum in Irish primary schools. They include: Teacher confidence and expertise; Time; Equipment; Facilities; Attitudes to Physical Education; Limitations of the Curriculum and Class size. These issues provide the basis for the questions in the survey which seek to establish the current reality of the effect of these impediments on physical education provision and implementation in school. This chapter details the process of the empirical research component of this study. In Section 4.2 the aims of the empirical study are defined. The research procedures selected are delineated in section 4.3. The development of the questionnaire is explained in section 4.4. Section 4.5 deals with the pilot study. The selection of the survey sample is described in section 4.6. Finally, the plan for administering the survey and the rate of response to the questionnaire are set out in section 4.7.

4.2 Aims of the Empirical Study

This study aims to:

- a. examine the state of physical education in primary schools
- b. investigate the factors which impede the implementation of physical education and the extent to which they inhibit the provision of a balanced physical education.
- c. To identify factors which need to be addressed to ensure fuller implementation of the 1999 Revised Curriculum for Physical Education.

From the information gained from teachers through this research, it may be possible to identify impediments and make recommendations to improve the implementation of the Revised Curriculum in Physical Education. This study it is hoped will reveal what factors

teachers feel have restricted the fuller implementation of the 1971 physical education curriculum and also highlight elements of the revised curriculum which need to be addressed. The study will seek to discover to what extent the new curriculum has tackled these problems and identify what else needs to be done to ensure fuller implementation of the revised curriculum.

The aims centre around 8 interrelated themes which influence the implementation of physical education. These include: School background; Teacher; Facilities; Equipment; Time; Attitudes; Curriculum and Assessment. An examination of the present state of these factors in primary school may help to identify what factors need to be addressed to ensure a more successful implementation of the 1999 Revised Curriculum in physical education.

4.3 The research procedures selected

The two methods of research considered for this study were interviews and questionnaires. The interview technique would be beneficial in providing the opportunity to ask detailed, open-ended questions and obtain an accurate account of teachers beliefs and practices. However, with the researcher's limitations of time and resources it would be difficult to include a broad enough sample. The questionnaire technique, while accepting the limited nature of the questions which could be asked was selected as most appropriate. It would be more practical to implement as it could be conducted over a short duration. It would also be easier and cheaper to obtain the views of a larger sample of teachers. In this context the questionnaire method was preferred as a research procedure in this study.

4.4 The development of the questionnaire

The development of the questionnaire began with a review of the research literature on physical education in Irish primary schools. This helped to identify the impediments to implementation which were to be the focus of the research. A list of these factors was compiled based on the information gathered. Many conversations and interviews with teachers, principals, College of Education Lecturers, Department of Education Inspectors and University Education staff were then conducted to clarify the focus of the questionnaire. It was decided that information concerning the following should be sought: The school background; the teacher; possible implementation impediments - time, facilities, equipment - relevant curriculum; attitudes to physical education and assessment.

Questionnaires were then drafted based upon the above areas. In the construction of questions, care was taken to eliminate bias and every effort was made to ensure that the questionnaires were clear and easy to follow. The design attempted to incorporate simplicity of design with clarity of wording and presentation. Existing questionnaires on physical education were consulted during the construction of this questionnaire especially those administered by Michael Cotter, Brigid Shelley and Bernadette Cotter. Indeed much of the information gained may update some of the findings of these studies. This particular questionnaire however focused on aspects which were only peripheral issues in the other studies.

Originally the researcher had intended to issue two questionnaires to each school - one for the principal and one for the class teacher. However, with the feedback of the pilot study and due consultation it was decided to combine the two original questionnaires into one questionnaire. The pilot study indicated that where more than one questionnaire was

involved the response rate was low. Respondents commented that the collection and return of two questionnaires from two individuals in a school was an extra workload. Also the size of school, with many schools being small rural schools with 4 teachers or less meant that the principal as a class teacher might complete both questionnaires. Another criticism of the two questionnaires was the amount of duplication of questions in them. For these reasons the two questionnaires were condensed into one which the researcher felt would be an accurate and efficient survey instrument.

4.5 The Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to identify and correct any deficiencies in the questionnaires and to test the suitability of the questionnaires as a suitable research instrument. Drafts of the questionnaire were piloted among the primary teachers in the 2001 M. Ed class in Maynooth, other primary school teachers known to the researcher, Dept of Education Primary Inspectors, University Staff, College of Education Physical Education lecturers. Comment and constructive criticism was welcomed from all respondents. The subsequent feedback proved to be very constructive and it led to significant modifications of the instrument.

Instead of separate questionnaires for the principal and a class teacher it was decided to amalgamate the two into one questionnaire. The pilot study indicated that the response rate was lower when two separate questionnaires were used as this involved extra workload for respondents co-ordinating the collection and return of questionnaires. Also a significant amount of duplication in the questionnaire for Principal and Class Teacher was noted. One questionnaire, it was felt, would be a more accurate and effective instrument so the two separate questionnaires were combined to produce one comprehensive questionnaire.

Other modifications included alterations in the wording of questions to clarify points of ambiguity which had been identified. Following subsequent drafts and consultations the final questionnaire was constructed. A covering letter was composed which explained the nature of the study and the implementation procedures for the questionnaire.

4.6 The Selection of the Survey Sample

It was considered necessary to the study that the size of the sample be sufficiently representative so as to allow valid conclusions to be drawn. Original proposals of sampling 10% of primary schools nation wide or sampling 50% of the schools in one county with questionnaires for the principal and one class teacher were rejected in favour of concentrating on one particular county and surveying one class teacher in each school. This it was hoped would be reasonably representative of the country at large.

It was decided to survey all of the primary schools in Co. Kildare. A list of all primary schools in Kildare with details of addresses and school size was obtained from the Department of Education's Statistics Office. This list contained 97 schools including special schools, schools designated as disadvantaged and all denominational, multi-denominational and non-denominational primary schools in the county.

Table 4.1

Primary Schools in Co. Kildare

Numbers of different sized schools in Co. Kildare based on pupil numbers

School Size by pupil numbers	No of Schools	%
1 - 100	36	37.1
101 - 200	22	22.7
201 - 300	18	18.6
301 - 500	14	14.4
501+	7	7.2
	Total 97	100

It was decided to send questionnaires to all schools without any specification about what class teacher should complete the questionnaire. The school principal was asked to pick a teacher at random, not necessarily a teacher with an interest in physical education to complete the form. This was to ensure a broad and valid sample of regular classroom teachers and not a sample of specialist physical education orientated teachers.

4.7 Administering the Survey

The 97 questionnaires were despatched on Monday April 2nd two weeks before the Easter holidays with a covering letter to explain the procedure. Returns were to be made as soon as possible. Reminders were due to be sent out on April 23rd a week after Easter.

By April 11th, 51 of the 97 questionnaires (52.5%) had been returned. By April 20th 64 questionnaires had been returned. Reminder postcards were despatched on April 23rd to encourage people to return the questionnaires, to offer replacement questionnaires to teachers who lost originals and to express gratitude to those who had returned questionnaires. Two schools requested replacement questionnaires which were duly

despatched. By May 4th 2001, 74 of the 97 questionnaires had been returned producing an overall response rate of 77%.

Table 4.2

Response rate from different sized schools in Co. Kildare

School Size by Numbers	No of Schools	No of Questionnaires despatched	No of Questionnaires returned	% returned
1 - 100	36	36	27	75%
101 - 200	22	22	15	68%
201 - 300	18	18	13	72%
301 - 500	14	14	14	100%
500+	7	7	5	71%

This data was then analysed to produce coherent findings and possible recommendations.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

EVALUATION AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the results of the research study and it is presented in nine sections. The first section introduces the chapter and explains the layout of the results. The next eight sections reproduce the format of the questionnaire - school background, teacher, facilities, time, equipment, attitudes, curriculum and assessment. The first section 5.2, on school background, presents information on the schools surveyed to determine size and type of school, the catchment area of the school, whether the school has a policy for physical education and who, if anyone, is responsible for physical education in schools. Section 5.3 investigates the teachers involved in the survey focusing on gender, age, the class they teach, teacher education and teachers perceptions of their competence and confidence in teaching physical education. The next section 5.4 seeks to establish the present situation in schools with regard to facilities for physical education. Information on the type and range of facilities used for physical education in schools and in the locality are presented here. In section 5.5 the subject of 'time' in physical education is examined. This involves information on timetabling of physical education, frequency of lessons and duration of lessons. Section 5.6 seeks to ascertain the availability of equipment in schools and teachers' perceptions of the adequacy of this equipment to teach the physical education programmes. The attitudes to physical education and the perceived status of the subject are examined in section 5.7. This involves ranking physical education in the hierarchy of school subjects identifying factors which inhibit the implementation of physical education and investigating attitudes on the perceptions of the importance of physical education. Section 5.8 presents information on the physical education curriculum. Data on how closely the teachers surveyed, followed the

1971 physical education curriculum and what they think of the 1999 physical education curriculum is presented. Considering the centrality of assessment in the Revised Curriculum including the physical education component, section 5.9 presents information about the level of formal assessment in physical education.

5.2 The School Background

This first section presents information on the school background of each respondent and the general conditions in which they teach. It illustrates the organisational environment in which teachers teach physical education. Table 5.1 presents data on the size of schools from the perspective of teacher numbers.

Table 5.1

Size of school by teacher numbers

Teacher numbers	Number	%
1 to 4	29	39.2
5 to 10	19	25.7
11 to 15	12	17.6
more than 15	12	16.2
No reply	1	1.3
Totals	74	100

Over 39% of the teachers who responded to this survey were teaching in small schools of four teachers or less. More than two-thirds of the teachers taught in schools with less than ten teachers. This has implications for resources, especially facilities and for multi-grade teaching and curricular leadership in physical education.

The majority of schools in the survey have less than two hundred pupils. As table 5.2 indicates most schools are small.

Table 5.2

Size of school by pupil numbers

Pupil numbers	Number	%
1 - 100	27	36.5
101 - 200	15	20.2
201 - 300	13	17.6
301 - 500	14	18.9
501 +	5	6.8
Totals	74	100

This finding corroborates the findings of the previous table that the majority of schools are small with over 36% having less than one hundred pupils and more than 56% having less than two hundred pupils.

Table 5.3 presents data on the types of school that participated in the study. This table shows the percentage participation of different types of school - boys, girls, co-ed, junior, senior or vertical.

Table 5.3

Type of school

School Type	Number	%
Junior Co-ed	9	12.2
Junior Boys	0	0
Junior Girls	1	1.3
Senior Co-ed	4	5.4
Senior Boys	3	4.1
Senior Girls	0	0
Vertical Co-ed	46	62.2
Vertical Boys	6	8.1
Vertical Girls	4	5.4
No Reply	1	1.3
Totals	74	100

The majority of respondents 62.2%, taught in vertical co-educational schools. None of the teachers taught in boys junior-schools or girls senior schools. 79.8% of the schools in the survey were coed schools.

Table 5.4

Catchment area of school

Catchment Area	Number	%
Mainly Urban	16	21.6
Mainly Sub-urban	19	25.7
Mainly Rural	35	47.3
No reply	4	5.4
Totals	74	100

The schools in the survey served predominantly rural catchment areas with 47.3% of the schools falling into this category. The other two categories were fairly evenly divided with 21.6% of schools in mainly urban areas and 25.7% of schools in mainly sub-urban areas.

The development of school policies on all subjects is a requirement of the Revised Curriculum. Table 5.5 presents the information concerning the number of schools who have designed a physical education school policy.

Table 5.5

Number of respondents whose school has a School Policy for physical education

School Physical Education Policy	Number	%
Yes	36	48.6
No	38	51.4
Totals	74	100

In relation to a school policy on physical education, 48.6% of respondents reported that their school had a policy while 51.4% stated that their school did not. This policy would form one component of the overall School Plan which schools are obliged to draft.

Table 5.6

Number of respondents whose school had a teacher responsible for physical education

Teacher responsible for Physical Education	Number	%
Yes	28	37.8
No	46	62.2
Totals	74	100

Table 5.6 shows that only twenty eight teachers making up 37.8% of respondents reported that their school had a teacher with responsibility for physical education in the school. In the survey it was noted that most of the schools who did not have a teacher responsible for physical education were small rural schools. Of these twenty eight who had a designated teacher responsible for physical education, 22 (78.6%) of these held a post of responsibility (Table 5.7).

Table 5.7

Teachers with responsibility for physical education who hold a Post of Responsibility

Teachers Responsible for Physical Education who hold a Post	Number	%
Yes	22	78.6
No	6	21.4
Totals	28	100

Of those holding Posts of Responsibility who were responsible for sport only six of the twenty two teachers held an A post while sixteen held B posts (Table 5.8)

Table 5.8
Type of Posts held by teachers responsible for physical education
who hold a Post of Responsibility

Type of Post	Number	%
A	6	27.3
B	16	72.7
Totals	74	100

Most of these teachers who held posts of responsibility for physical education were found in large schools due to Department of Education appointment regulations.

Summary

Almost two-fifths of the teachers in the survey taught in small schools of four teachers or less and over two-thirds taught in schools of ten or less teachers. The vast majority of these schools were co-educational, vertical schools, teaching boys and girls from infants to sixth class. Almost half of the schools served predominantly rural catchment areas with over 25% serving mainly suburban and 21% serving mainly urban areas. Over half of the schools had no school policy on physical education and over three-fifths had no individual teacher responsible for this curricular area. In the 37.8% of schools who had a teacher responsible for physical education, 78.6% of these physical education curriculum co-ordinators held a Post of Responsibility, the majority (72.7%) holding B posts. The size of school and the rural nature could have implications for availability and access to facilities and resources.

5.3 Teacher

Table 5.9 presents the data on gender indicating the male-female balance in teachers who were involved in this study.

Table 5.9

Number of teacher respondents according to gender

Gender	Number	%
Male	26	35.1
Female	47	63.6
No Reply	1	1.3
Totals	74	100

The respondents in this survey were predominantly female (63.6%). This finding reflects the gender balance in the teaching workforce to some degree, in that the majority of primary school teachers in Ireland are female. In 1999 the relative balance nationally of male to female teachers was male 20.9% and female 79.1%.¹

The majority of teachers 77.1% surveyed were in the 31-50 age range, as table 5.10 clearly shows. These teachers could be described as teachers in mid-career and this may have implications for in-service education and training, to update skills and provide motivation.

Table 5.10

Age of teacher

Age	Number	%
25 or under	6	8.1
26-30	4	5.4
31-40	29	39.2
41-50	28	37.9
51-60	6	8.1
No reply	1	1.3
Totals	74	100

Only 13.5% of teachers were under thirty and only 9.4% were over fifty years of age

(Table 5.10)

The classes taught by the respondents shown in Table 5.11 indicates the broad range of class groupings covered in the survey.

Table 5.11

Class taught by respondents

Class	Number	%
Junior Infants	5	6.8
Senior Infants	6	8.1
Class I	4	5.4
Class II	2	2.7
Class III	4	5.4
Class IV	3	4
Class V	2	2.7
Class VI	11	14.9
Junior Infants - Sen Infants	3	4
Junior Infants - Class I	4	5.4
Junior Infants - Class II	2	2.7
I - II	1	1.3
II - III	1	1.3
II - IV	1	1.3
III - IV	5	6.8
III - V	1	1.3
III - VI	3	4
IV - V	1	1.3
IV - VI	4	5.4
V - VI	9	12.2
Special Class	1	1.3
No Reply	1	1.3
Totals	74	100

The most striking element of this data is the large number of multi-grade classes. 36 teachers (48.6%) taught multi-grade classes. The majority of multi-grade classes were to be found in rural schools with teaching staffs of four teachers or less.

Table 5.12

Number of children in class

Number of Children	Number	%
Less than 20	15	20.3
21-25	25	33.8
26-30	19	25.7
31-35	12	16.2
more than 35	2	2.7
No reply	1	1.3
Totals	74	100

A majority of respondents (59.5%) teach classes of between twenty one and thirty pupils. One fifth of teachers teach less than twenty pupils. This is roughly in line with national figures which show that 52% of children are in classes of 20-29 pupils.² However, almost 19% reported that they taught more than thirty pupils.

Table 5.13

Colleges of Education attended

Colleges of Education Attended	Number	%
St. Patrick's Drumcondra	24	32.4
Mary Immaculate Limerick	17	23
Carysfort	14	18.9
Marino	6	8.1
Church of Ireland College of Education	4	5.4
Froebel College	2	2.7
St. Nicholas Montessori College Dublin	1	1.3
University of Wales Bangor	1	1.3
Trinity College Carmarthen Wales	1	1.3
No Reply	4	5.4
TOTALS	74	100

The majority of teachers were trained in the state recognised Teacher Education Colleges and would have experienced an approved physical education training programme. Two teachers were trained in Wales and one as a montessori teacher in Dublin.

Table 5.14**Respondents who took an extra physical education option**

Take an extra physical education option	Number	%
Yes	13	17.6
No	60	81.1
No Reply	1	1.3
Total	74	100

Over 81% of teachers did not take physical education as an elective and some indicated that it wasn't available in the Colleges of Education. A minority of teachers did take an extra physical education option in their teacher education programme. Of those who took this extra physical education option some reported it to be 'adequate' or 'excellent' but others noted that the training was 'inadequate' even as an elective subject and that there was 'inadequate recognition of areas such as aquatics, gymnastics and dance'. One teacher declared that while the elective physical education training was adequate she 'needed to be updated'.

Table 5.15

Level of teachers' satisfaction with Training College course in different strands of physical education

	No Reply		Very Satisfactory		Satisfactory		No opinion		Unsatisfactory		No Training	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Gymnastics			4	5.4	21	28.4	5	6.7	28	37.8	16	21.6
Games			8	10.8	37	50	2	2.7	25	33.8	2	2.7
Aquatics	2	2.7	2	2.7	5	6.8	1	1.3	11	14.9	53	71.6
Outdoor Pursuits	2	2.7	6	8.1	7	9.4	2	2.7	20	27	37	50
Dance	2	2.7	4	5.4	27	36.5	3	4	23	31.1	15	20.3
Athletics	2	2.7	0	0	15	20.3	4	5.4	26	35.1	27	36.5

Regarding the level of satisfaction of the teachers with their college physical education course, the findings varied across each strand. However, a high degree of 'unsatisfactory' training or 'no training' was reported in all areas. In games a majority 60.8% stated that their training was satisfactory or very satisfactory. However, this still left over one third of respondents reporting unsatisfactory training in games. In gymnastics only 33.8% reported satisfactory or very satisfactory training while almost 60% reported the training to be unsatisfactory or non-existent. The athletics strand presented similar findings. No teacher reported their training in athletics to be very satisfactory and only 20.5% reported it to be satisfactory. In contrast to this 71.6% reported their athletics training to be unsatisfactory or non-existent. The results concerning dance show a similar picture with over half, 51.4%, of the respondents reporting 'unsatisfactory; or 'no training' provided and only 41.9% indicating that their training was satisfactory (36.5%) or very satisfactory (5.4%). Outdoor pursuits and aquatics present very low satisfaction rating with the level of training received. In Outdoor Pursuits 77% of teachers felt that the training was unsatisfactory or they had received no training. Aquatics appears to be the most serious case. 76.5% of the teachers surveyed, reported that they had received no training or the training had been unsatisfactory in this strand of physical education.

When asked to comment on their physical education training the vast majority of responses were negative in nature. Of those who indicated a positive response, most reported their training to be 'excellent' but not in all strands. The majority reporting negative comments found the training 'inadequate' and reported that areas such as gymnastics, dance and aquatics received little recognition. This is reflected in the lack of confidence reported in the teaching of these strands. Other teachers felt that it didn't prepare them for schools with

multi-grade classes and limited facilities. One teacher described his physical education training as “a pastime approach not a lifeskill approach” while another stated that “I did not have physical education at all in school, very little training in college and no additional training in twenty years except attendance at a couple of summer courses in my own time at my own expense”. Many teachers felt that the training should be ongoing.

Table 5.16

Teachers who attended at physical education in-service since leaving college

Teachers who attended in-service	Number	%
Yes	42	56.8
No	30	40.5
No Reply	2	2.7
Total	74	100

Over half of the teachers (56.8%) in the survey had attended in-service training in physical education since leaving college. However, a significant percentage (40.5%) had received no extra training or updating in physical education since their initial college training.

When asked to comment on the in-service physical education training received, the vast majority found it to be a positive experience. Most teachers reported the courses to be ‘excellent’, ‘practical’ and ‘class friendly’. A minority who found the courses inadequate felt that the courses made assumptions about facilities. One teacher stated that she learned more from watching a physical education specialist employed by her Board of Management, working in her own school. Another teacher noted that it was necessary to keep updating one’s expertise through in-service.

Table 5.17

**Teachers who have another teacher teach their class
physical education**

Other teacher teaching Physical Education	Number	%
Yes	19	25.7
No	54	73
No reply	1	1.3
Totals	74	100

Over a quarter of the teachers surveyed reported that another teacher taught their class physical education. Some schools employed a specialist physical education teacher who taught physical education throughout the school, while in other schools teachers swapped with other teachers for physical education because of lack of confidence in this area or they were specialists in other areas (e.g. music). In one school, 'a special school', specialist qualified staff were used for physical education and other subjects.

Table 5.18

Schools who employ an outside person to teach physical education

Employ an outside person	Number	%
Yes	42	56.8
No	32	43.2
Totals	74	100

A majority of teachers (56.8%) reported that their school employed an outside person to teach some aspect of physical education. Most of these outside school people taught either aquatics, gymnastics, dance or gaelic games. The reasons given for employing these people were mainly a lack of expertise by teachers and the fact that these people were 'qualified coaches' in their particular area. In regard to swimming, it was usually a member

of the local pool staff or a designated swimming teacher that was employed. In Gaelic games, a GAA sponsored scheme provided qualified coaches to teach these games in school. Most of the 'outside people' taught classes from 30 -60 minute duration. The frequency of classes was usually once a week. In Gaelic games this was usually a 6 to 8 week course and in swimming it ranged from 6 weeks to a full year.

Table 5.19

Confidence teaching the strands of physical education

	Very Confident		Confident		Don't Know		Not Confident		Don't Teach		No Reply		Totals	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Games	24	32.4	38	51.5	3	4	6	8.1	2	2.7	1	1.3	74	100
Athletics	8	10.8	35	47.2	11	14.9	7	9.5	11	14.9	2	2.7	74	100
Gym	3	4	13	17.6	12	16.2	20	27.0	25	33.9	1	1.3	74	100
Dance	3	4	15	20.3	12	16.2	18	24.3	23	31.2	3	4	74	100
Outdoor	8	10.8	14	18.9	11	14.9	14	18.9	26	35.2	1	1.3	74	100
Aquatics	2	2.7	10	13.5	8	10.8	10	13.5	43	58.2	1	1.3	74	100

Regarding the levels of confidence, the majority of teachers 83.9%, felt 'confident' or 'very confident' in games and almost everyone teaches games. In teaching Athletics there is also a high level of confidence with 58.1% expressing confidence in their ability. However, in the other strands the confidence levels are much lower. In gymnastics only 21.6% expressed confidence in their teaching and 60.9% felt that they were not confident or they didn't teach it. There is also a high proportion of teachers who 'don't know' (16.2%). There is a similar result for Dance with 24.3% of respondents expressing confidence in their teaching but 55.5% of teachers felt that they were not confident or did not teach it at all. Outdoor and Adventure activities show a similar picture as 54% don't feel confident or don't teach it and only 29.7% felt confident in their teaching. The Aquatics strand shows the poorest results in

terms of confidence. Only 16.2% feel confident in the teaching of aquatics and a massive 58.2% don't teach it at all.

This shows that teachers are most confident in games and athletics but their confidence is significantly lower in the other strands. This ties in to some degree with the results for satisfaction in training where most people were satisfied about their training in games but felt that other strands were neglected.

Table 5.20

Degree of satisfaction with the way you teach physical education

Degree of Satisfaction	Number	%
Very satisfied	3	4
Satisfied	39	52.8
Not sure	12	16.2
Not satisfied	16	21.6
Very Dissatisfied	4	5.4
Total	74	100

Table 5.20 indicates that a small majority of teachers (56.8%) felt satisfied or very satisfied with the way they taught physical education, and just over a quarter felt not satisfied or very dissatisfied. There appears to be a discrepancy between the degree of satisfaction with training received and the degree of satisfaction with the way teachers teach physical education. Perhaps teachers are satisfied with the way they teach a limited physical education curriculum.

When asked to comment on their level of satisfaction with the way they teach physical education many teachers qualified their declaration of satisfaction by saying that they were satisfied with they way they teach, given the restrictions they encounter, such as poor

facilities. Others stated they were satisfied because the children were challenged, and enjoyed the physical education lesson but many teachers acknowledged that they would like to incorporate more of the strands. While they were satisfied with the way they taught physical education they were not satisfied with the relative neglect of areas such as gymnastics and dance. Teachers indicated that there were areas of the curriculum where they lacked competence and as a result they were reluctant to undertake these. One teacher declared that "I am satisfied with the aspects I teach but am confined by what I know". Among the 16.2% who were 'unsure', teachers reported that between children being brought swimming and games organised by outsiders they taught very little physical education and so they were unsure as to how to comment. Those teachers who indicated a lack of satisfaction (27%) in the way they taught physical education, reported that lack of facilities and expertise were the main constraints.

Summary

Most of the teachers surveyed were female in line with nation-wide trends. The majority were aged between 31-50 could be described as teachers in mid-career. They taught large classes and often have a range of grades of pupil in one class. Most of the teachers were trained in the state recognised training colleges, and so they would have received some training in physical education. A minority took a special physical education 'elective' in college. However, many teachers consider their training in the six strands of the physical education curriculum to be unsatisfactory. Over half have attended in-service in physical education since their initial training. The majority of teachers teach their own class physical education but many schools also employ outside specialists especially in aquatics, gymnastics and Gaelic games. This may be due in some part to a lack of confidence indicated by most teachers in certain strands of the curriculum. In spite of their perception of being poorly

trained and of lacking confidence in teaching many of the strands most teachers feel satisfied with the way they teach physical education. This discrepancy may be explained by the admission that most teachers teach a limited programme and they are satisfied with they way they teach this limited curriculum. They do not teach what they are not confident in.

5.4 Facilities

Table 5.21

Facilities available in schools

Type of Facility	Number	%
Indoor hall (exclusively for PE)	11	14.9
Indoor hall (multi purpose)	36	48.6
Outdoor tarmac/concrete area	69	93.2
Outdoor all-weather pitch	1	1.3
Outdoor grass playing field	55	74.3
Changing rooms	5	6.8
Changing rooms with showers	0	0

Table 5.21 details the availability of facilities to teachers in schools. 93.2% of teachers have access to outdoor tarmac/concrete area and 74.3% have access to a grass playing field. Outdoor facilities seem to be available to most teachers. However, indoor facilities are not so accessible. Less than half the respondents reported that they have an indoor facility available and only 14.9% have a purpose built indoor facility exclusively for physical education. No school has changing rooms with showers.

Table 5.22

Level of satisfaction with facilities

Level of Satisfaction with facilities	Number	%
Very Satisfied	7	9.5
Satisfied	22	29.7
Not Satisfied	16	21.6
Very Unsatisfied	29	39.2
No Opinion	0	0
Total	74	100

The majority of respondents 60.8% experience dissatisfaction with the level of facilities available to them for physical education and almost two-fifths of teachers are very unsatisfied. However, a sizeable percentage 39.2% reported themselves to be satisfied or very satisfied with their facilities.

When asked to comment on the facilities available those who reported that they had satisfactory facilities felt fortunate that because of these facilities many areas of the curriculum could be taught. However, many of the schools with facilities reported problems with them. In some schools while the facilities were good, the numbers of children meant that access to facilities was limited. Others felt that while they had access to facilities many of these were unsuitable. Tarmac areas were considered dangerous in more physical games. Schools which did have an indoor hall often reported these to be too small or dangerous because of poor design (pillars, low windows, used as corridors).

More than half of the teachers in the survey did not have access to an indoor facility. This severely restricted the amount and range of physical education available to children.

Some teachers reported doing very little physical education during winter time. Others went swimming as this was the only indoor facility available. This lack of indoor facilities seems more pronounced in small schools of 4 teachers or less.

Table 5.23

Comparison of facilities and school size (in teacher numbers)

Teacher Number	1-4	5-10	11-20	20+
Indoor	34.5%	57.9%	88.2%	100%
Outdoor	100%	94.7%	94.1%	87.5%

A comparison of the facilities available and school size illustrates this. In the survey all schools of 20 or more teachers had an indoor facility. 88.2% of 11 to 20 teacher school had an indoor facility. Almost 58% of 5 to 10 teacher schools had an indoor facility. But in smaller 1 - 4 teacher schools only 34.5%, just over one third, have an indoor facility. In respect of outdoor facilities almost all schools seem to be well served and small schools do best.

Table 5.24

Facilities most frequently used

Type of Facilities	1		2		3	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Indoor hall	9	12.2	6	8.1	0	0
Indoor hall (multi purpose)	19	25.7	7	9.5	6	8.11
Outdoor tarmac/concrete	28	37.8	25	33.8	8	0.8
Outdoor all weather	1	1.3	0	0	1	1.3
Outdoor grass	10	13.5	21	28.4	20	27
Changing rooms	0	0	1	1.3	1	1.3
Changing rooms with shower	0	0	0	0	0	0

The teachers were asked to identify the facilities most frequently used by them in school, where 1 indicated the most frequently, 2 the second most frequently used and 3 the third most important and so on. Most teachers stopped after the first 3, so Table 5.24 shows the three most frequently used facilities.

Not surprisingly this table reflects the information concerning the availability of facilities in schools. 'Outdoor tarmac/concrete' was the most widely available and is reported here as most frequently used. 'Outdoor grass' is next in availability and next in use and also 'indoor hall (multi-purpose)' is third in availability and third in use.

Table 5.25

Facilities available to the school for physical education in the locality

Type of facility	Number	%
Swimming Pool	59	79.7
Sports Hall	21	28.4
Leisure Centre	7	9.5
Outdoor Pursuits Centre	3	4
Others (Gym, hockey pitch, tennis court, handball alley, GAA field	5	6.8
None	3	4
No reply	2	2.7

As table 5.25 indicates the majority of respondents (79.7%) have a swimming pool available in the locality and 28.4% have a sports hall in the locality. Outdoor pursuits centres and Leisure centres do not seem to be available to many schools. Other facilities available to a minority of schools include hockey pitch, tennis court, GAA field, handball alley, pitch and putt course and gymnasium.

Table 5.26

Facilities available in the locality that are used by the School

Type of facility	Number	%
Swimming Pool	55	74.3
Sports Hall	17	23
Leisure Centre	3	4
Outdoor Pursuits Centre	1	1.3
Others	3	4
None (Gym, Pitch & Putt, Driving Range, GAA Pitch)	9	12.2
No Reply	5	6.8

The use of outside facilities by the school is shown in table 5.26. Almost three quarters 74.3% of schools use a local swimming pool and almost one quarter use a local sports hall. The results relating to availability of facilities and use of facilities in the locality outside the school are very similar. There appears to be a high correlation between availability and use of facilities in the locality of schools.

When asked to comment on outside school facilities many teachers reported support for the idea. Some schools used the pool as their physical education class for the winter because of the lack of indoor hall and the inclement weather. However, other schools identified certain constraints in accessing these facilities. The expense of facility fees, cost of transport, and time involved in transport were seen as prohibitive factors. These were especially prominent in small rural schools.

Summary

Most schools have an outdoor facility for teaching physical education but less than half of the schools in the survey had indoor facilities. It is understandable then why the majority of respondents indicated that their facilities were unsatisfactory.

Even where facilities were available, many teachers felt that they were unsuitable. The three facilities most commonly used were outdoor tarmac/concrete, outdoor grass facilities and indoor hall. This, not surprisingly, reflected the availability of facilities for schools. In their locality many schools made use of outside school facilities with pools and sports halls being most frequently used. However, the expense in terms of money and time was often prohibitive.

The lack of appropriate facilities is a major finding in this study, with a significant majority of teachers indicating their dissatisfaction. The small rural schools seem particularly disadvantaged in terms of facilities in school and in the locality.

5.5 Time

Table 5.27

Timetabled physical education slot

Timetabled Physical Education Slot	Number	%
Yes	70	94.6
No	4	5.4
Total	74	100

The respondents reported that the vast majority of teachers (94.6%) have a timetabled physical education slot with a minority 5.4% not having an assigned physical education slot.

This may be due to a number of factors - including the need to timetable due to lack of facilities or the influence of school planning.

In this study every class was reported as experiencing physical education at least once a month. No respondent indicated that the children in his/her class received no physical education.

Table 5.28

Frequency of physical education lessons

Frequency	Number	%
Daily	2	2.7
Once a week	38	51.5
Twice a week	29	39.2
3-4 times a week	1	1.3
Once a fortnight	3	4
Once a month	1	1.3
Less than once a month	0	0
Never	0	0
No reply	0	0
Total	74	100

The majority of teachers 51.3% reported teaching physical education once a week. A significant number, 39.2%, however, indicated that they taught physical education twice a week. Only 2.7% reported teaching physical education daily while some children 5.3%, only received physical education once a week or once a month.

Table 5.29

Duration of average outdoor physical education lesson

Duration in minutes	Number	%
0-15	0	0
16-30	25	33.8
31-45	25	33.8
46-60	19	25.7
60+	1	1.3
None	2	2.7
No reply	2	2.7
Total	74	100

Table 5.29 shows the length of outdoor physical education lessons. Where teachers indicated none or no reply it was assumed that no outdoor lessons took place. This would appear to be a reasonable assumption as some respondents indicated that they had no outdoor facilities. (see table 5.21 on facilities). The majority of lessons (67.6%) were between 16 and 45 mins with no respondent indicating lessons of 0-15 mins duration. Only 27% of teachers reported that they were teaching lessons of 46-60 or 60+ mins of physical education as recommended by the Revised Curriculum.

Table 5.30

Duration of average indoor physical education lesson

Duration in minutes	Number	%
0-15	2	2.7
16-30	22	29.7
31-45	24	32.4
46-60	9	12.2
60+	1	1.3
None	5	6.8
No reply	11	14.9
Total	74	100

Table 5.30 presents the information of the average duration of indoor physical education lessons. Where teachers indicated none or no reply it was assumed that no indoor lessons were taught. This would appear to be a reasonable assumption considering the numbers of respondents who indicated that they lacked indoor facilities (table 5.21 on facilities). The percentage of respondents who responded with no indication of time is significant (21.7%) and may indicate a serious deficiency in indoor facilities. Again the majority of lessons (62.1%) lasted from 16 mins to 45 mins, with only 13.5% of teachers reporting that they taught the 60 mins stipulated in the Revised Curriculum.

Table 5.31

Statements concerning time allocated to physical education

Statement	Number	%
Every class does physical education every week regardless of weather	34	46
Every class does physical education every week weather permitting	20	27
Most classes do physical education every week regardless of weather	12	16.2
Most classes do physical education every week weather permitting	8	10.8
Total	74	100

In relation to time allocated to physical education only 46% of respondents indicated that in their school every class does physical education every week regardless on the weather. The influence of weather, probably related to restricted indoor physical education facilities, can be seen in the high percentage of classes (37.8%) whose physical education is provided “weather permitting”.

Summary

Almost 95% of teachers indicated that their schools timetabled physical education for each class. Every teacher reported that his/her class received physical education with the majority receiving physical education at least once a week. The most commonly reported duration of physical education lessons indoor and outdoor, was 16 to 45 minutes. However, for many schools this time allocation is weather-dependent as they have no indoor facilities. The reported time allocation shown in this study was below the recommended time in the Revised Curriculum.

5.6 Equipment

The availability of equipment for physical education in primary schools was investigated in this survey. To determine how well resourced schools are to implement the revised curriculum, lists of prescribed equipment for the strands of physical education were taken from the Revised Curriculum Teacher Guidelines.³ Teachers were asked to indicate from three lists what physical education equipment was available in their school. There were separate lists for athletics and games, gymnastics and dance, and finally aquatics. There was no list for outdoor and adventure activities as these are recommended for Outdoor Pursuit Centres. Table 5.32 shows the results for equipment available for Athletics and Games.

Table 5.32

Equipment available for Athletics and Games

Equipment available to you for Athletics and Games	Number	%
A variety of large and small balls	70	94.6
Plastic Hoops	61	82.4
Canes	9	12.2
Skipping Ropes	61	82.4
Bean bags	67	90.5
Quoits	26	35.1
Wire skittles/foam hurdles	2	2.7
Plastic cones, multi-markers and space-markers	68	91.9
Braids or bibs	52	70.3
Plastic racquets, wooden play bats	42	56.8
Hockey sticks, hurleys, uni-hoc sticks	52	70.3
Wooden, plastic or alloy relay batons	16	21.6
Plastic or wire containers	17	23
Ball carrying nets	18	24.3
Chalk	45	60.8
Tape	21	28.4
Stop watch	13	17.6
Others	8	10.8

The vast majority of schools had a large amount of games equipment including a variety of balls, beanbags, cones and markers, hoops, ropes and bibs. However, just over half

of the schools surveyed had 50% or more of the recommended equipment for games, and no school had all of the recommended equipment.

Other equipment schools used for games and athletics included hurleys, helmets, volleyball equipment, badminton equipment and portable goals and nets. There appears to be a huge range in the equipment available, with a minority of schools well resourced and a significant number with less than half of the recommended equipment.

A similar investigation was carried out on equipment available for gymnastics and dance.

Table 5.33

Equipment available for Gymnastics and Dance

Equipment available for gym and dance	Number	%
Selection of music	35	47.3
Tape recorder	66	89.2
Hoops	52	70.3
Plastic cones	57	77
Gymnastic mats	49	66.2
Portable or fixed climbing frame with attachments	23	31.1
Balance benches	38	51.3
Bar box or movement table	15	20.3
Others	8	10.8
None	2	2.7
No reply	1	1.3

While the large majority of schools had a tape-recorder (89.2%), plastic cones and hoops only two thirds of schools surveyed had gymnastic mats, just over half had balance benches and less than one third had portable or fixed climbing frames. The equipment for

dance is very general in its nature but the gymnastic equipment is more specialised. Most schools lack this specialised equipment to teach the gymnastic strand of the curriculum. Overall only about 46% of schools have half or more than half the prescribed equipment for gymnastics and dance and two schools claim to have none of this equipment.

In relation to aquatics, the teachers surveyed reported that very few schools had any of the prescribed equipment. One third of schools had swimming floats, and 10.8% had diving rings and ropes.

Table 5.34

Equipment available for Aquatics.

Equipment available for gym and dance	Number	%
Swimming floats	25	33.8
Diving rings	8	10.8
Diving sticks	6	8.1
Weights diving hoops	4	5.4
Ropes	8	10.8
Poles	3	4
Others	9	12.2
None	11	14.9
No reply	30	40.5

Eleven schools (14.9%) reported that they had none of the equipment and over two fifths made no reply. The no reply could indicate that these schools do not do Aquatics or that they also have none of the equipment. Overall 55.4% of schools may have none of the prescribed equipment for aquatics. Of those who claim they have aquatic equipment

available, many respondents stated that this equipment was provided by the swimming pool not the school.

Table 5.35

Level of satisfaction with equipment

Equipment available for gym and dance	Number	%
Vary satisfied	8	10.8
Satisfied	32	43.3
Not satisfied	22	29.7
Very unsatisfied	11	14.9
No opinion	0	0
No reply	1	1.3
Totals	74	100

A significant majority of respondents 64.1% were satisfied or very satisfied with the equipment available to them for physical education with 44.6% reporting that they were not satisfied or very unsatisfied. This seems to be at variance with the reported equipment available for the strands. This might be explained by the fact that many teachers are satisfied with the equipment they have available because they teach such a restricted programme - mostly games and athletics.

All of the schools who claimed their equipment was very satisfactory were large urban or suburban schools of 8 teachers or more. In contrast the schools who expressed the opinion that their equipment was 'very unsatisfactory' were mostly smaller rural schools of 4 teachers or less. Of the 11 schools who felt their equipment was very unsatisfactory, 8 (72.7%) were rural schools with 4 or less teachers.

When asked to comment on their level of satisfaction with the equipment available to them for physical education the responses were varied and wide ranging. Many teachers felt their school had a good selection of equipment but others considered their equipment to be totally inadequate. Some teachers highlighted the relationship between equipment and facilities in which to use the equipment. With only outdoor facilities they had and needed only outdoor equipment. The storage of equipment and the wear and tear of equipment were also mentioned many times. While some teachers acknowledged the Department of Education & Science sports grant,⁴ many felt that it was inadequate and that schools would have to continue to fundraise to maintain an appropriate supply of equipment. They regarded their equipment as satisfactory 'considering the facilities available'.

Summary

The majority of schools in this survey reported having less than 50% of the recommended physical education equipment for implementing the Revised Curriculum in games, athletics, gymnastics and dance. Two schools claim to have none of the equipment for gymnastics and dance. For aquatics, very few schools had any equipment although those that attended swimming pools indicated that the equipment was available at the pool. No school reported having all of the recommended equipment. Given the poor provision of equipment it is surprising to find a majority of teachers 'satisfied' with the equipment available to them. However, much of the equipment reported to be available in most schools, is games equipment and with facilities and equipment for outdoor games available many teachers may feel their equipment is satisfactory to teach the limited physical education programme which many schools offer. The equipment may be satisfactory to teach an outdoor games programme but not the six strands of the physical education curriculum.

5.7 Attitudes

With the anecdotal and research evidence indicating that physical education was considered a low status subject, it was decided to investigate teacher attitudes to physical education in primary schools. How a subject is regarded and perceived may influence the degree of acceptance and implementation in schools. Teachers were asked to rate the primary school subjects in order of importance as they themselves perceive them, and as the school perceives them.

When asked to rate subjects in order of importance as they themselves saw them, the majority of teachers rated English as the most important subject, followed by Maths. Interestingly physical education was rated the third most important just ahead of Irish and well ahead of the other subjects. Four teachers made no reply and 3 other teachers stated that they regarded all subjects as being of equal importance.

When asked to rate the subjects in order of importance in their school, the majority of teachers rated English again as the most important subject, followed once again in second place by Maths. Irish was considered to be third most important and physical education was considered to be the fourth most important subject this time. In both of these results physical education was reported to be a subject which was viewed as significant and important by the teachers surveyed. The fact that this questionnaire dealt with physical education may have produced a certain favourable response to the importance of physical education. Nevertheless, these results indicate a significant degree of importance attaching to physical education in primary schools in the opinion of the teachers surveyed.

The teachers surveyed were also asked to identify the factors which they considered most inhibited the implementation of a physical education curriculum. Over 40% of the teachers identified lack of facilities as their number one choice as an inhibiting factor and 16% identified lack of adequate teacher training. Table 5.36 shows the overall order of importance as inhibiting factors in the implementation of physical education.

Table 5.36

Order of importance as inhibiting factors

Order of Importance	Factor
First	lack of facilities
Second	lack of adequate teacher training
Third	class size
Fourth	lack of suitable equipment
Fifth	lack of time on curriculum
Sixth	lack of confidence
Seventh	poorly defined programme
Eight	safety fears
Ninth	low status

Overall, the lack of facilities, was identified as the most important inhibiting factor, followed in second place by lack of adequate teacher training. Class size might be considered a surprising third in order of importance before lack of suitable equipment. Poorly defined programme also appears to be well down the order considering the criticism Curaclam na Bunscoile received. This may indicate that the problem was more to do with the lack of infra-structure (facilities and equipment) to implement the programme rather than the programme itself.

The ranking of 'low status' of physical education as the least inhibiting factor is congruent with the high status which teachers indicated they had for physical education by ranking it high in the order of important subjects.

In the survey teachers were also asked to select from a list the three most important factors in implementing a physical education curriculum.

Table 5.37

Most important factors in implementing a physical education programme

Most important factors	Priority			Overall Priority
	1	2	3	
Small class size	10	6	9	5
Provision of adequate facilities	31	15	7	1
Better teacher education in physical education	16	11	9	2
Provision of adequate equipment	3	23	12	4
Regular relevant in-service training in physical education	9	13	20	3
Provision of teaching resources	4	5	16	6
No Reply	1	1		

Provision of adequate facilities was identified as the most important factor in implementing a physical education programme. This was followed by better teacher education in physical education which was second and regular relevant in-service training which was ranked third.

Table 5.38**Ratings of importance of physical education**

	You	Child	Parents	School Principal	Dept of Education & Science
Very important	42 56.8%	54 73%	11 14.9%	35 47.3%	5 6.8%
Important	31 41.9%	18 24.3%	43 58.1%	28 37.8%	15 20.3%
No opinion	1 1.3%	2 2.7%	8 10.8%	5 6.8%	11 14.8%
Not very important	0 0%	0 0%	12 16.2%	4 5.4%	37 50%
Not important at all	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	5 6.8%
No reply	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	2 2.7%	1 1.3%
Total No	74	74	74	74	74
Total %	100	100	100	100	100

A huge percentage 98.7% of the teachers surveyed rate physical education as important or very important with not one teacher rating it as not very important or not important at all. This indicates a high status for physical education among the teachers. Teachers also feel that most children, parents and school principals rate physical education as important or very important. However, teachers' perceptions of how highly the Department of Education & Science rate physical education are very different. Only 27.1% of teachers think that the Department rates physical education as important or very important while a significant 56.8% reckon that the Department rates physical education as 'not very important' or 'not important at all'.

Table 5.39

Reasons to cancel physical education class

Reasons for cancelling	Number	%
Inclement weather	40	54
Hall being used for other activity	32	43.2
Disciplinary measure	13	17.6
Seasonal activities/play etc	41	55.4
Safety Reasons	24	32.4
Other	5	6.8
No Answer	2	2.7

The main reasons that teachers might cancel a physical education lesson were inclement weather, seasonal activities/plays and hall being used for other activity. Nearly one third would cancel physical education for safety reasons and 17.6% would cancel physical education for disciplinary reasons. There appears to be a discrepancy here between the importance teachers have ascribed to physical education lessons and yet they would cancel lessons for disciplinary reasons. Cancelling physical education due to inclement weather may be related to lack of indoor facilities encountered in table 6.21. The high percentage who would cancel for seasonal activities and hall being used for other activity may also be related to the proliferation of general purpose halls instead of physical education halls in many schools. The issue of safety may also be prominent here and is also related to facilities and their suitability. The 'other' category for cancelling physical education included four teachers who said they would not cancel a lesson.

Table 5.40

Would you like to teach more physical education

Would you like to teach more physical education	Number	%
Yes	56	75.7
No	17	23
No reply	1	1.3
Total	74	100

Over three quarters of the respondents indicated that they would like to teach more physical education given the choice. Some teachers qualified this statement by saying that they would like to teach more as in a broader range of activities, provided they were given proper training in these areas. Many teachers reiterated their belief in the importance and value of physical education in developing the whole child and in the context of health and establishing physically active habits.

23% of the teachers indicated that they would not wish to do more physical education. Reasons given for this were that physical education was adequately catered for timewise in their school or that due to 'curriculum overload' no more time could be allocated to physical education. Some teachers also indicated that they felt incompetent and lacked the confidence to teach more physical education as they felt themselves too inadequately trained to do it.

Summary

Most teachers rate physical education as an important subject in the primary school curriculum, ranking it among the first four important subjects on the curriculum themselves and in their school. Teachers identified lack of facilities, lack of teacher training, class size

and lack of equipment as the four most inhibiting factors in implementing a physical education programme. The low status of physical education was ranked last in the list which is consonant with the high status the teachers surveyed indicated they had for physical education. Teachers reported that the most important factors in implementing a physical education curriculum were provision of adequate facilities, better teacher education, relevant in-service training and provision of adequate equipment. There is a strong correlation between factors that inhibit implementation and factors that are important for implementation - facilities, training and equipment are all factors in both.

Teachers indicated that everyone in schools rated physical education as an important subject but they felt that the Department of Education did not rate it highly. Teachers cancelled lessons for various reasons such as inclement weather, hall being used for other reasons, seasonal activities and even as a disciplinary measure. Most of these could be explained by the poor facility provision in some schools but the disciplinary measure is not consonant with a view of physical education as a high status subject. Over three quarters of the teachers would like to teach more physical education given proper training and facilities. Overall teachers seem to have a high regard for physical education and claim they consider it to be an important subject.

5.8 Curriculum

Table 5.41

Degree to which teachers followed the 1971 Physical Education Curriculum

How closely did you follow the Curriculum	Number	%
Very closely	0	0
Closely	4	5.4
Used as a guideline	37	50
Paid little attention to it	20	27
Ignored it	12	16.2
No answer	1	1.3
Total	74	100

In relation to the older curriculum, Curaclam na Bunscoile 1971, only a tiny minority reported following it closely. Half of the respondents said they used it as a guideline but a significant number 27% paid little attention to it. More noteworthy perhaps is the number of teachers 16.2% who openly ignored it. The 'no answer' was from a teacher who was in her first year teaching and claimed to be using the Revised Curriculum for Physical Education.

When asked to comment on Curaclam na Bunscoile many teachers acknowledged that the theory behind it was valid but that it never really transferred into practice. Some teachers described it as 'aspirational' and a significant number pointed to the lack of resources and training for its implementation. While teachers recognised that it was progressive for its time, they reported that it suffered from lack of proper facilities, equipment and teacher training. Some teachers criticised the content, guidelines and layout as too vague. The facilities issue was the most quoted issue regarding Curaclam na Bunscoile 1971.

Table 5.42

**Numbers of teachers who have read the 1999 Revised Curriculum for
physical education**

Read the Revised Physical Education Curriculum	Number	%
Yes	30	40.5
No	42	56.8
No reply	2	2.7
Total	74	100

The majority of respondents (56.8%) have not read the 1999 Revised Curriculum guidelines for physical education. However a significant number, over two-fifths claim to have read them. Considering the fact that no in-service days for physical education have been organised yet and the amount of curriculum change teachers are presently involved in, this 40.5% may be viewed as a positive sign of interest in the physical education curriculum.

Most teachers who have read it seem to view the revised curriculum in a positive light. Many recognise that it has made strides to embrace all aspects of physical education. However, issues of facilities and resourcing of the curriculum are also prominent. Teachers in multi-grade classes, while accepting the improvement in lesson plans, sought more detailed instructions on how to lay out multi-classes.

Summary

Most teachers did not follow the 1971 Curaclam na Bunscoile for physical education very closely. Half of the teachers stated that they used it only as a 'guideline' and almost one sixth of teachers ignored it. The main reasons given for these responses included the lack of

training and resourcing for full implementation of the curriculum. The lack of facilities was referred to constantly as a reason why people did not follow it closely.

A significant number of teachers have read the Revised Curriculum for physical education. Many indicated that it was a significant improvement on the 1971 document in terms of detail and guidelines. However, teachers still expressed reservations about the level of implementation due to poor facilities and lack of training in the strands of physical education. A large number of teachers did not seem to follow any prescribed physical education curriculum and the planning of physical education would appear to be fragmented and uncoordinated in many classes and schools.

5.9 Assessment

Table 5.43

Use of formal assessment procedures of physical education

Use of formal assessment procedures	Number	%
Yes	6	8.1
No	66	89.2
No reply	2	2.7
Total	74	100

Very few teachers (8.1%) use formal assessment procedures in physical education. This is perhaps not so surprising as the assessment of physical education is a new element in the revised curriculum. The 1971 Curaclam na Bunscoile for physical education never dealt with this topic and so the response of 89.2% of teachers that use no formal assessment procedures is not unexpected. However, this result does have implications for in-service provision in this aspect of physical education.

Those teachers that did use formal assessment procedures indicated that they observed and recorded details of co-ordination, speed and skill development. Some teachers used award schemes for skill assessment. One teacher felt that “children are being tested to death” and that they should be let “enjoy their physical education without having to be tested”.

Summary

The vast majority of teachers do not use any formal assessment in physical education. The minority of teachers who indicated that they use formal assessment procedures seem to employ a variety of procedures involving recording individual attainments in co-ordination and skill development.

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- (2) Department of Education & Science - Statistics Section - Annual Statistics Report 1998-1999
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CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This study set out to investigate the physical education curriculum in primary schools, its level of implementation and the factors which impeded its implementation. It explored the rationale for including physical education in primary school and the many benefits physical education provides for the developing child. The studies and surveys relating to physical education were reviewed to highlight the level of implementation of physical education in Irish primary schools and to identify factors which have impeded the fuller implementation of the physical education curriculum. The 1999 Revised Curriculum was compared to the 1971 Curriculum in relation to physical education, to determine how and to what extent the revised curriculum has developed and improved on the older one. Finally, an empirical study was conducted to investigate the current state of physical education provision and to identify the current impediments to implementation. This data, it is hoped, may help to guide the implementation of the Revised Curriculum in physical education and promote fuller implementation by identifying inhibiting factors and making pertinent recommendations. Having examined the rationale for physical education in primary school, reviewed the studies on its implementation, traced the development of the revised curriculum and investigated the current practice in schools, it is now appropriate to turn to an interpretation of this data.

This chapter endeavours to summarise the findings of the study, to determine the conclusions which can be drawn from this and to present recommendations which may improve the situation. Providing an overview of the whole study, it is presented in four

sections. Section 6.1 introduces the chapter and sets out how the chapter is presented. In Section 6.2 an overview of the study is provided including conclusions relating to the rationale, to the literature review and to the comparative analysis of the 1971 and 1999 physical education curricula. Section 6.3 sets out the conclusions to be drawn from the empirical research component of the study. Finally in Section 6.4, the implications of these results and the recommendations based on the results of this study are put forward to help promote fuller implementation of the Revised Curriculum for physical education in primary schools.

6.2 Conclusions on Rationale, Implementation and Curriculum Comparison

The main aims of this study were to examine physical education in Irish primary schools including the rationale for its inclusion, the level of implementation, the inhibiting factors which impeded implementation, the difficulties which have been addressed and to identify those which remain unresolved. The rationale for including physical education in the primary school curriculum and its contribution to the child's holistic development were explored in Chapter one. The main conviction emerging from this research was that physical education can play an important role in the physical, personal, social and intellectual development of the primary school child. Physical education is a vital part of each child's education.

However, a review of research on the level of implementation of the physical education curriculum in primary school in Chapter 2 highlighted the low level of implementation of a balanced physical education curriculum throughout the lifetime of the 1971 Curriculum. Many factors such as lack of facilities and equipment, poor teacher competence and confidence, lack of time allocation, attitudes and relevant physical

education syllabus were identified as impediments to fuller implementation of the primary school physical education curriculum. In the studies on physical education in Irish primary schools these constraints had been repeatedly identified, but few have been properly addressed.

A comparison of the 1971 Curriculum in physical education and the 1999 Revised Curriculum in physical education showed that significant advances have been made in curriculum design, especially in relation to teacher guidelines, well defined syllabus and organisational planning. Major constraints regarding the lack of teacher guidance were addressed through the publication of Teacher Guidelines handbook for physical education. The issue of time allocation was also addressed in the provision of a minimum one hour per week for physical education in the Revised Curriculum. However, this new curriculum should not be viewed as the final solution. The provision of a detailed, relevant, balanced physical education curriculum is no guarantee of an adequate provision of physical education in the country's primary schools.

6.3 Conclusions from the Empirical Study

While the empirical study only dealt with physical education in one county, Co. Kildare, it covered a wide range of school sizes and types in urban, suburban and rural areas and a wide range of classes in schools. In relation to teachers, the study embraced the full spectrum of teaching experience from teachers in their first year to teachers in the twilight of their careers. It also contained a well proportioned sample in the male to female balance in comparison with the nation-wide ratio of male to female teachers. While recognising the constraints of generalisability from a study with a small sample, the following conclusions are put forward based on the data analysed in the empirical study.

Teachers

Many teachers consider themselves ill-equipped to teach physical education. A large proportion feel their initial training in physical education at college was unsatisfactory in all strand areas except games. A significant proportion of teachers have received no in-career training in physical education. In aquatics and outdoor activities many teachers received no training at all. Not surprisingly, teachers have very little confidence in their teaching of these strands and feel they need considerable up-skilling in physical education.

Facilities

The facilities available in many schools make it impossible to implement certain strands of the curriculum. Most of the facilities available are outdoor facilities. Many schools have no indoor facilities which means physical education is weather dependent and the gymnastics and dance strands are neglected. Also, many of the existing indoor facilities are unsuitable for physical education. Smaller rural schools are particularly disadvantaged in terms of access to appropriate facilities. The lack of suitable facilities is a major impediment to the implementation of the physical education curriculum.

Equipment

The range and standard of equipment in many schools is inadequate to fully implement the Revised Curriculum. Schools have varying amounts of equipment but most of this is games related. Small schools appear to be particularly poorly resourced in regards to equipment.

Time

The provision of adequate time allocation for physical education on the curriculum needs to be addressed. The Revised Curriculum recommends one hour every week. While most teachers have a specific time-tabled physical education slot, very few teachers teach physical education for this recommended time. The time allocated to physical education is also related to availability of facilities.

Attitudes

Teachers appear to value physical education highly and claim to view it as a high status subject. They perceive that everybody in schools considers physical education to be important but many teachers feel that the Department of Education & Science rates physical education as unimportant. Most teachers state that they would like to teach more physical education given proper facilities, equipment and training. Factors which teachers considered as impediments to fuller implementation included poor facilities, lack of equipment, large class size, poor teacher education. They considered facilities, proper training (initial and in-service) and equipment as important prerequisites for the implementation of a physical education curriculum.

Teachers appear to have a positive attitude to physical education and claim to rate it highly. They feel that principals, teachers, parents and children all rate physical education highly but they feel that the Department of Education & Science is only partly committed to school physical education, and rates it as unimportant. Teachers report that facilities, teacher training and equipment are important factors that can enhance or inhibit physical education implementation.

Curriculum

A majority of teachers report that they did not follow the 1971 physical education curriculum closely and that they have not read the 1999 Revised Curriculum for physical education. They do not appear to follow any alternative curriculum either. This may be related to restrictions of facilities, time, equipment and expertise which inhibit implementation. It may also be related in some degree to some teachers' perceptions of physical education as more recreational than educational. In many cases, teachers appear to have recreated the curriculum to match it to their restricted circumstances. The curriculum must be properly resourced and schools must have facilities so that teachers can put the full curriculum guidelines into practice.

Assessment

The vast majority of teachers use no formal assessment in physical education. This is an area which teachers have very little experience of and in which they will require considerable initial and in-service training in the future.

Summary

The most important conclusions of this study are that facilities, teacher education and equipment are still major constraints in the implementation of the physical education curriculum. For those involved in teaching physical education, in formulating curricula and in implementing the Revised Curriculum in physical education the findings of this study have immediate and serious implications. Physical education has been shown to be a vital part of the primary school child's education, offering significant opportunities for development socially, physically, intellectually and personally. A new Revised Curriculum has been designed to provide a relevant and balanced physical education in primary schools. This

new physical education curriculum has taken due cognisance of the criticisms of the older curriculum and many improvements have been made. However, many of the impediments and constraints which restricted the implementation of the 1971 Curriculum and which were identified in the various surveys and studies including the empirical section of this study, remain and little appears to have been done to address these problems. Only the class size, time allocation and the relevant curriculum issues have been addressed to any significant degree. Other major constraints such as poor facility and equipment provision, lack of teacher competence and confidence and perceived lack of Department of Education support for physical education have not been addressed. The Revised Curriculum has failed to adequately address issues of equipment and facility provision and teacher expertise. Assumptions are still being made in this curriculum about the availability of facilities and equipment and about the competence of teachers to deliver this programme.

6.4 Recommendations

The introduction of the Revised Curriculum in physical education offers a significant opportunity to address the issues and problems which have restricted the full implementation of an appropriate physical education curriculum in Irish primary schools. A new up-to-date, relevant curriculum has been produced and the previous impediments have been identified. In Ireland today we enjoy an economic boom which provides favourable economic conditions to establish a twenty-first century physical education programme in schools. Public awareness of our more sedentary lifestyle, the health benefits of physical activity and the importance of physical education in the holistic development of children presents this as an ideal opportunity to address the issues relating to full implementation of physical education in primary school.

The 1971 physical education curriculum failed to be fully implemented because teachers received inadequate retraining and because the restricted economic circumstances could not sustain the investment needed to match the resources to the curriculum in terms of class size, facilities and equipment. Also, the low status attributed to physical education at that time meant that when resources were restricted physical education was often one of the first subjects to lose out. In these early years of the twenty-first century conditions have improved considerably. The 1999 Revised Curriculum in physical education will be introduced in a very different context. The provision of a well designed physical education curriculum coinciding with a period of economic boom presents an unprecedented opportunity to fully resource, support and implement this highly regarded Revised Curriculum in physical education.

The support of many agencies has raised the profile and status of physical education in the public eye. The Irish Sports Council and the Gaelic Athletic Association have highlighted the importance of sports in schools. The Department of Health's health promotion programmes have highlighted the health benefit of physical activity for children. The National Children's Strategy has declared the governments' commitment to give every Irish child access to play, sport, recreation and cultural activities to enrich the experience of childhood. The planned provision of Stadium Ireland has heightened the public awareness of sports and physical education.

A unique opportunity presents itself, to fully resource and implement an up-to-date physical education programme with public support and the open approval of many government departments. This opportunity in such favourable circumstances may not present itself again. If the opportunity is not seized now when conditions are optimum,

physical education may be condemned to the fringes of primary school education with the health, sporting, social and educational implications this represents, for this generation and future generations of Irish children.

The following recommendations are made which are born out of the conclusions reached in this study and reflected in many of the studies reviewed, in the hope that they may help to improve the level of implementation of physical education in the Revised Curriculum.

1. Status

The status and profile of physical education in schools needs to be heightened. The Department of Education & Science needs to show a commitment to developing physical education as a core subject in primary schools. The rationale for physical education's inclusion needs to be explicitly promoted. The Department, Inspectorate, Boards of Management in Schools, principals and teachers need to play a much more directive role in determining the image which children and their parents have of physical education, what its function is and its importance in the development of the child. In this context it is important that schools ensure that the attitudes and values which are practised in physical education are those which promote physical education as a positive educational experience for each child. Physical Education must be established and recognised as a core-subject within the School Plan and the resourcing and funding of it in school should reflect its central role in the development of each child. The high regard which teachers claim they have for physical education now needs to be transformed into a commitment to teach the Revised Curriculum in physical education in full.

2. Facilities

The provision of appropriate facilities must become a priority and the Department of Education & Science must ensure that each school has access to adequate facilities. This study and previous studies have shown that facilities especially indoor facilities are inadequate in many schools for the provision of a balanced physical education programme. If facilities are not provided the Revised Curriculum in physical education will not be properly implemented. Small schools are particularly disadvantaged in the provision of indoor facilities. There is an immediate requirement to match facilities to the curriculum.

However, the government's commitment to providing access to these facilities for all schools is in question. A member of the NCCA Curriculum Committee for Physical Education informed this researcher that the committee was not asked to make recommendations regarding provision of facilities.¹ This was considered to be beyond the brief of this committee. The Primary School Sports Initiative which is concerned with the promotion of physical education sport and healthy lifestyles in primary schools is not addressing this issue either. A Physical Education Task Force set up as part of this initiative has focused on developing a pilot project to inform in-service training but again has failed to address the facilities issue. The government and the Department of Education & Science must immediately address the issue of provision of adequate facilities for without the proper infra-structure the revised physical education curriculum cannot be implemented. An in-depth survey of the needs of schools with regard to facilities

could be undertaken to identify the requirements of schools and provide access to adequate facilities.

Bearing in mind the large numbers of small rural schools in the country, it is perhaps, unrealistic to expect the government to provide a new indoor hall for every school. However, this should not prevent the provision of adequate facilities for schools. In many areas local facilities such as community halls, sports halls, GAA club halls and pitches, leisure centres and local sport club facilities are available. The government must create the circumstances to ensure that these facilities are made available to the schools which need them to fully implement the physical education curriculum. A programme of matching the facility requirements of schools with the community facilities available should be initiated to provide access to proper facilities. Where local community facilities are available and are supported by government funds, then the principal or a representative of the local primary schools should have an automatic seat on the committee and the local schools should have access to the facilities free of rent paying only a nominal charge for lighting/heating. In future building of community facilities, these facilities should be located close to schools with appropriate access for school purposes. In amalgamations or the building of new schools, the provision of proper physical education facilities should be a priority. The onus remains on the Government and Department of Education & Science to ensure that every school has access to appropriate facilities to implement the revised physical education curriculum. However, the Government's commitment to and ability to provide adequate facilities by 2004 is seriously doubtful.

3. Teacher Education

The physical education component of teacher education (both initial and in-service) needs to be addressed urgently. Many teachers reported feeling a lack of confidence and competence in teaching certain strands of the curriculum and many felt their training was inadequate. Safety fears and litigation fears also prevent many teachers from teaching strands in which they feel ill-prepared and untrained. In their initial training, teachers must be trained so that they understand and feel competent in teaching all strands of the physical education curriculum. This will involve a greater commitment to physical education in Colleges of Education in terms of prioritising physical education and allocating extra time and resources to the subject.

The Revised Curriculum in physical education is going to make extra demands on the teacher and the school in terms of expertise and greater in-depth knowledge required. Provision must be made to up-skill teachers so that they feel confident and competent in teaching physical education. The Curriculum Committee for Physical Education recommended that 'Comprehensive in-service'² would be required to ensure full implementation of the revised physical education curriculum. The Government has established a Task Force, as part of the Primary School Sports Initiative to develop a pilot project to inform in-service training for the implementation of the Revised Curriculum in physical education. At this moment in time, the only provision for in-service in physical education, known to this researcher, is the two days in-service allocated by the Primary Curriculum Support Programme to physical education - one day in the school year 2003-2004 and one day in the school year 2004 - 2005, when the physical education curriculum is to be implemented.³ This will be totally inadequate to prepare teachers to teach the full

revised physical education programme. In this researcher's experience of these 'curriculum days' in other subjects, they have dealt with familiarising teachers with the new programmes and supporting schools in planning their own programmes for the specified subject. This is not 'comprehensive in-service' and fails to address the training, competence and confidence issues which have inhibited the provision of a balanced physical education programme.

A comprehensive programme of in-service training needs to be initiated as soon as possible to prepare teachers to implement the Revised Curriculum in physical education in 2004. This in-service must be country-wide and on-going to provide each teacher with the opportunity to up-skill their competencies in physical education in order to teach the revised programme. It would seem unrealistic to expect every teacher in the country to be adequately trained by 2004. In charting a way forward, focusing on particular strands at the beginning and ensuring that teachers are competent in these first would be more realistic. Athletics, Gymnastics and Dance might be addressed first, as these require urgent attention. Most teachers seem to be confident teaching Games while the Aquatic and Outdoor and Adventure Activities require specialised facilities which it may be unrealistic to expect every school to have access to immediately. If the Government is serious about implementing the full revised physical education curriculum in primary schools, it must invest heavily and immediately in in-service so that teachers are prepared, competent and confident in teaching the strands.

Serious consideration should be given to appointing physical education curricular leaders in larger schools and employing peripathetic physical education

teachers in smaller schools to empower class teachers through school based in-career development opportunities, to develop competence in physical education. One instance of in-service education highlighted in the empirical study, was reported to be most beneficial by the teacher involved. In a rural small school, the Board of Management paid a gymnastics specialist to devise a programme and teach it to all classes in the school over the course of two terms. The class teachers observed these classes, took notes and helped the gymnastic specialist for the first term. In the second term, the class teachers taught the programme themselves under the guidance of the specialist. The teacher involved said that this was the best in-service training she had received because it was realistic and was performed in the environment and within the restrictions of her own school.

An adaptation of this in-school in-career development is being piloted in Scottish schools. The curricular leader in physical education teaches one class each week in a strand of physical education and the class teacher observes the lesson. Then the class teacher teaches the same lesson later in the week under the guidance of the curricular leader. A pool of such 'curricular leaders' could be established to serve as peripathetic teachers to a number of small schools each week or to work in a large school with all of the teachers each week for a term. Establishing and training such a pool of physical education specialists would be the first step in providing realistic school based in-career development in physical education.

4. Equipment

Adequate equipment must be available in schools to implement the physical education curriculum. This study and previous studies have shown that many

schools lack the basic equipment to implement the physical education programme. Having provided a list of equipment for physical education in the 1999 Primary Curriculum Teacher Guidelines Handbook, it is incumbent upon the Department of Education & Science to ensure that each school has the listed equipment. The Department of Education & Science grant of £1000 to disadvantaged schools and £500 to others is a step in the right direction. However, this grant will have to be maintained and maybe even increased over the years to ensure that equipment supplies are established and maintained within schools. Small rural schools and schools in disadvantaged areas which may lack strong parental funding need to be resourced and funded to ensure the full range of equipment is available.

5. Time

There must be a concerted commitment to allocating adequate time in schools to physical education. Principals and teachers need to ensure that there is a basic threshold of time allocated to physical education in schools and that perhaps some fraction of discretionary time is set aside for physical education.

6. Assessment

The area of assessment is an aspect of physical education which needs to be addressed promptly. Most teachers have no recognised assessment procedures for physical education. The establishment of assessment procedures for physical education in schools may, not only help legitimise it as a core subject but also help relate the physical education programme to its rationale and aims and objectives and thereby establish physical education as a central area of a child's education.

Assessment must form a core element of teacher education in physical education in Colleges of Education.

7. Responsibility

Each stakeholder in the education system needs to accept responsibility for their contribution to ensuring the provision of a relevant balanced physical education programme. The Department of Education and Science needs to accept responsibility for providing curriculum, facilities, equipment, adequate teacher education and support for a quality physical programme. Teachers need to accept responsibility for implementing a well resourced relevant programme with enthusiasm and professionalism, up-skilling themselves through in-career development in physical education and for exerting professional pressure to ensure physical education is allocated a position as a core subject in primary school. Parents need to exert pressure on the government to provide the facilities equipment and trained personnel to implement the physical education programme. They also need to acknowledge the centrality of physical education in a child's development and support teachers in promoting physical education. All stakeholders need to constantly re-iterate their valuation of physical education as a central factor in the development of the child. Although these may appear aspirational, they are necessary conditions for the successful implementation of the physical education curriculum.

8. Further research and monitoring needs to be done on the implementation of the Revised Curriculum in physical education once it is introduced. This might focus on the extent to which the constraints identified in this and other studies have been

addressed, or if the revised curriculum has presented other unforeseen difficulties for schools and teachers charged with its implementation. It is hoped that this work will provide future researchers and those implementing the Revised Curriculum in physical education with both a reference point and a stimulus to further work in this area.

Concluding Remarks

To promote full implementation of the Revised Curriculum in physical education it is important at this time that a co-ordinated initiative be implemented on a phased basis encompassing all aspects of physical education provision. To do this will require an unprecedented investment in physical education in primary schools and this will necessitate a reappraisal of the perception of the importance of physical education. How highly physical education is valued may ultimately dictate the level of successful implementation achieved. If, as in the recent and distant past we view physical education as “..... no additional burden on school life but rather a pleasant form of recreation.....”⁴ as the Belmore Report did in 1898, then we will retain a nineteenth century physical education programme in the twenty-first century.

REFERENCES

1. Private telephone conversation with member of NCCA Curriculum Committee for Physical Education
2. Private telephone conversation with member of NCCA Curriculum Committee for Physical Education
3. NCCA Primary School Curriculum - Newsletter No 4
4. Belmore Report (1898) Commission on Manual and Practical Instruction in Primary Schools Final Report of the Commissioners Dublin: HMSO 1898: p 4

APPENDICES

Survey on Physical Education in Irish Primary Schools 2001

Key: ✓ = YES

CLASS TEACHER - QUESTIONNAIRE

SCHOOL BACKGROUND

1. Number of teachers in your school.

2. Number of pupils in your school.

1-100

101-200

201-300

301-500

500+

3. Type of school (Please tick ✓)

	Co-Ed	Boys	Girls
Junior	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Senior	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vertical	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. Catchment Area (Please tick ✓)

Mainly Urban	Mainly Suburban	Mainly Rural
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. Does the school have a written school policy/plan specifically for PE?

YES NO

6. Does the school have a teacher responsible for co-ordinating PE in the school?

YES NO

7. If YES does this person hold a Post of Responsibility for PE?

YES NO

8. If YES does he/she hold an A Post or B Post?

A POST B POST

TEACHER

9. Gender

Male Female

10. Age 25 or under
26 to 30
31 to 40
41 to 50
51 to 60

11. What class are you teaching?

12. Number of children in your class.

Less than 20
21 - 25
26-30
31-35
more than 35

13. Teacher Education

College/s of education	
Years of attendance	

14. Did you undertake any extra PE option during your teacher education?

YES NO

15. If YES do you have any comment to make on your PE training?

16. How satisfactory was your training college course in PE in these areas?

	Very satisfactory	Satisfactory	No opinion	Unsatisfactory	No training received
Gymnastics					
Games					
Aquatics					
Outdoor pursuits					
Dance					
Athletics					

17. Do you have any comment on your PE training?

18. Have you attended at PE inservice courses since leaving college?

YES NO

19. If YES do you have any comment on the inservice received?

20. Does any other teacher teach your class physical education?

YES NO

21. If YES, please give details?

22. If YES, why does this other teacher teach this area?

23. Does your school employ an 'outside' person to teach specific strands of PE within the regular school timetable?

YES NO

24. If YES what strands of the curriculum do they teach?

--

25. If YES why do they teach this strand?

--

26. If YES how much time per class do they teach?

--

27. How confident are you teaching the following strands of PE?
(Tick one category for each strand)

	Very Confident	Confident	Don't know /unsure	Not confident	Don't teach
Games					
Athletics					
Gymnastics					
Dance					
Outdoor Pursuits					
Aquatics					

28. How satisfied are you with the way you teach PE?

Very satisfied	Satisfied	Not sure	Not satisfied	Very dissatisfied

29. Do you have any comment to make on your level of satisfaction?

--

FACILITIES

30. Tick all facilities available to you for PE in your school.

- Indoor Hall (exclusively for PE)
- Indoor Hall (multi-purpose)
- Outdoor tarmac/concrete area
- Outdoor all-weather pitch
- Outdoor grass playing field
- Changing rooms
- Changing rooms with showering facilities

31. How satisfactory do you consider your facilities to teach the PE programme?

- Very satisfactory
- Satisfactory
- Not satisfactory
- Very unsatisfactory
- No opinion

32. Do you have any comments on the facilities available to you?

33. Which of these facilities would you most frequently use? Please rate them in order of frequency of use where 1 is most frequently used, 2 next, then 3 and so on.

- Indoor Hall (exclusively for PE)
- Indoor Hall (multi-purpose)
- Outdoor tarmac/concrete area
- Outdoor all-weather pitch
- Outdoor grass playing field
- Changing rooms
- Changing rooms with showering facilities

34. Tick the facilities available to the School for PE in your locality.

	Available
Swimming pool	
Sports hall	
Leisure centre	
Outdoor pursuits centre	
Others (specify)	

35. Tick the facilities available to you in your locality which are used by the school.

	Used by the School
Swimming pool	
Sports hall	
Leisure centre	
Outdoor pursuits centre	
Others (specify)	

36. Do you have any comments on use of 'outside school' facilities in your locality?

TIME

37. Does your class have a specific timetabled PE slot?

YES NO

38. How often do the children in your class generally receive PE?

- Daily
- Once a week
- Twice a week
- 3-4 times a week
- Once a fortnight
- Once a month
- Less than once a month
- Never

39 How many minutes does an average outdoor PE lesson last?

- 0-15 mins
- 16-30 mins
- 31-45 mins
- 46-60 mins
- more than 60 mins

40 How many minutes does an average indoor PE lesson last?

- 0-15 mins
- 16-30 mins
- 31-45 mins
- 46-60 mins
- more than 60 mins

41. In relation to time allocated to PE please indicate which one of the following statements applies to your school.

- Every class does PE every week regardless of weather
- Every class does PE every week weather permitting
- Most classes do PE every week regardless of weather
- Most classes do PE every week weather permitting

EQUIPMENT

42. Tick all equipment available to you for **athletics** and **games** in your school.

- A variety of small and large balls
- Plastic Hoops
- Canes
- Skipping Ropes
- Beanbags
- Quoits
- Wire skittles, foam hurdles
- Plastic cones, multi-markers or space-markers
- Braids or bibs
- Plastic racquets, wooden play bats
- Hockey sticks, hurleys, uni-hoc sticks
- Wooden, plastic or alloy relay batons
- Plastic or wire containers
- Ball carrying nets
- Chalk
- Tape
- Stop-watch
- Others _____

43. Tick all equipment available to you for **gymnastics** and **dance** in your school.

- Selection of music
- Tape recorder
- Hoops
- Plastic cones
- Gymnastic mats
- Portable or fixed climbing frame with attachments
- Balance benches
- Bar box or movement table
- Others _____

44. Tick all equipment available to your school for aquatics

Swimming floats

Diving rings

Diving sticks

Weights diving hoops

Ropes

Poles

Others _____

45. How satisfactory do you consider your equipment to teach the PE programme?

Very satisfactory

Satisfactory

Not satisfactory

Very unsatisfactory

No opinion

46. Do you have any comments on equipment available to you for PE?

ATTITUDES

47. Please rate the following subjects in order of importance as YOU perceive them.

(1 = most important 9 = least important)

Irish

History

English

Art

Music

Maths

Physical education

Social & Environmental & Science

Social, Personal & Health Education

48. Which of the following subjects are seen as most important in your school.
(1 = most important, 9 = least important)

Irish

History

English

Art

Music

Maths

Physical education

Social & Environmental & Science

Social, Personal & Health Education

49. The following factors have been identified as inhibiting the implementation of the PE programme. Please rate them in the order of importance as inhibiting factors as you perceive them.
(1 = most inhibiting factor 9 = least inhibiting factor)

Lack of time on Curriculum

Lack of suitable facilities

Lack of suitable equipment

Class size

Lack of adequate teacher/training

Low status of PE

Poorly defined programme

Lack of confidence

Safety fears (injury, claims)

Other

(Please specify) _____

50. From the following factors, please list the three (3) most important factors in implementing a PE programme - (where 1 is most important, 2 next and then number 3)

Small class size

Provision of adequate facilities

Better teacher education in PE

Provision of adequate equipment

Regular relevant in-service training in PE

Provision of teaching resources
(schemes, lessons, videos)

Other

(Please specify) _____

51. How important do you think PE for Primary School children is rated by the following people? (Tick one category for each person)

	Very important	Important	No opinion	Not very important	Not important at all
You					
Child					
Parents					
School Principal					
Dept of Education					

52. For what reasons would you cancel a PE class? (Please tick ✓)
(You may tick more than one)

Inclement weather

Hall being used for other activity

Disciplinary measure

Seasonal activities/Plays etc

Safety reasons

Other

(please specify) _____

53. Would you like to teach more PE, if you were given the option?

YES

NO

54. Please comment further on the reasons for your response above.

55. If you do not teach PE, can you give your reason why?

CURRICULUM

56. How closely did you follow the curriculum in PE in Curaclam na Bunscoile 1971?

Very Closely	Closely	Used as a guideline	Paid little attention to it	Ignored it

57. Do you have any comment to make on Curaclam na Bunscoile PE Curriculum?

58. Have you read the Revised Curriculum 1999 Guidelines for PE?

YES

NO

59. Do you have any comment to make on the Revised Curriculum PE guidelines?

ASSESSMENT

60. Do you use any formal assessment procedures for PE?

YES

NO

61. If YES please specify the procedures used.

62. Please give a brief account on your own general views on the place of PE in the Primary School.

Thank you

*7, Our Lady's Place,
Naas,
Co. Kildare*

March 2001

Dear Colleague,

I am a post graduate student at National University of Ireland, Maynooth studying for a Masters in Education Degree. As part of my studies I am carrying out a survey on Physical Education in Primary Schools and the factors which may inhibit the successful implementation of the PE Curriculum.

The Primary Schools in Co. Kildare have been selected as a survey sample in this study. For this reason I am requesting your co-operation in completing and returning the enclosed questionnaire. I would request that you please ask one of your class teachers, picked at random, to complete the following questionnaire.

It is important that every questionnaire despatched is returned, to ensure that this study is valid and representative of primary schools in the area. Therefore, I ask you to complete this questionnaire as best you can and return it to me in the stamped-addressed envelope provided, at your earliest convenience.

I realise that providing this information adds to your existing workload but the information which you provide will be put to constructive use. In the handling of the information provided, you may be assured of the strictest confidentiality and no references will be made at any time to individual teachers or schools.

In anticipation of receiving a favourable response I thank you most sincerely for your time, patience and co-operation in my study.

Yours sincerely,

JOHN DREWETT

A Chara,

I apologise for intruding on your time again. Earlier this year I sent you a questionnaire on Physical Education in Primary School. If you have not returned it could you please do so as soon as possible. If you mislaid it and require another, please phone 045-895752 and I will gladly send another on. If you have returned it, thank you very much.

Yours sincerely,

John Drewett

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