Sport For All? An investigation of teachers’ understandings of the purposes and manifestations of physical education in the early years.

Dr Carrie Weston
C.E.Weston@uel.ac.uk


Abstract

As a subject area, physical education (PE) has an eclectic inheritance derived from origins in physical training and exercise, traditional sports and games, gymnastics, creative movement and dance. More recently it is the ‘games and sport’ model of PE that has become increasingly prominent (PESSCL, 2002, Jirasek, 2003; Kirk, 2006; Gove, 2010; Kohe, 2010; DfE, 2011). This is particularly the case in the UK, fuelled by the forthcoming Olympic Games. However, this is a direction that may be problematic for young children, offering a praxis for PE that does not readily reflect early years pedagogy and holistic understandings of child development. In the light of Michael Gove’s (2010) affirmation of the place of competitive sport and games within PE policy, this paper investigates early years teachers’ understandings of the purposes of PE within the curriculum through teachers’ own descriptions of influences on planning and teaching. In doing so, quality practice is revealed where PE intersects with recognised, articulated understandings of early years pedagogy. Using semi-structured interviews ($n=12$) conducted with qualified teachers in the 4-7 age range across the UK, various manifestations of physical education are discussed with a consideration for early years pedagogy.

Key words: early years; pedagogy; physical education practice; quality; teachers’ voices

Introduction

The importance of the physical nature of learning is readily found within traditional, established theories and practices concerning early years teaching and learning. The influences of Froebel (1826), Dewey (1916), Piaget (1953), Vygotsky (1978), Athey
(1990), and Bruner (1996), amongst many, emphasise the importance of young children actively constructing knowledge and understanding through physical actions and interaction. Such traditional theories of early learning influence practice today, indeed, the 2011 review of the English Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) places increased emphasis on physical development as a prime area within the curriculum. The acquisition of motility and body mastery allows children to experience themselves as active agents within their world, promoting confidence, awareness, control and communication (HMSO 2011:95). It is widely understood that pre-school children do not acquire knowledge and understanding through sedentary learning, but through physically doing, and the EYFS notably extends pre-school strategies into the first year of school attendance, dovetailing with teaching and learning beyond. However, in a review of research David (2003) notes that once young children enter compulsory schooling there is a growing emphasis on teaching content, timetables and a move towards specific subject areas, formality and whole class teaching, with less emphasis on the pedagogy and practice of earlier years. Such concerns are echoed by Nutbrown (2005) arguing that the unique and vital needs of the youngest children in school are not always reflected or respected on entry to the education system.

This presents a strong case for understanding the purposes and manifestations of PE within the early years of schooling, in order that the needs of young children are met to both continue and maximise physical learning. However, locating what constitutes quality in PE practice raises further issues. The ubiquitous use of the term quality is a phenomenon grown out of public interest in accountability and assessment, carrying with it the danger of being merely a metaphor for good practice (Pike, 2004: 193). In this paper, the meaning of the term quality in relation to early years PE teaching is identified through teachers’ articulation of practice which reflects both PE subject knowledge and application of accepted, understood early years pedagogy. The voices of teachers explain their own PE practice in relation to their understandings of the purposes of PE and the desired learning outcomes for the children they teach.

**Constructing scaffolding for ‘quality’ in early years pedagogy**
Seeking a definition of quality in early childhood education through contemporary considerations of the term reveals a number of concerns. Osgood (2008:282) posits
that the concept itself is contentious and socially constructed; whilst Wood (2008:10) cautions that quality in early years education has a tendency to be associated with high levels of provision, cost and expertise. Dahlberg et al (1999:4) question what it is that should be measured; is it outcomes, quantity, staff ratio or measurable behaviours, and how can something that is so hard to define then be assured? In similar vein, Kontos and Diamond (2002: 338) point to the rarity of instruments designed to assess quality provision in the early years. Such considerations have implications for educational research that embarks on a pursuit of understanding or defining the ‘quality’ that prefixes statements of provision in so many policy statements. What quality is not, according to Dahlberg et al, is an objective and universal reality (1999:5), a point echoed by Raban et al (2003:67) in arguing for a multidimensional framework in early education which acknowledges the frailty of individual theories and the strength of practice informed by a consideration of many.

With this in mind, a critical examination of established and current practice and policy in early years education identified six theoretical perspectives covering the repertoire of effective pedagogy (see table i). Whilst it is not possible within the constraints of this paper to account for the complete critical examination of all historic and contemporary influences upon current practice in early learning, an audacious précis of this aspect of the research provides a distillation of the outcomes of the critique carried out. In short, six theoretical perspectives were identified as hypothesised dimensions reflecting substantial, recurrent themes in a systematic critical examination of dominant theories of early childhood education. The review categorised those perspectives which are familiar in tradition and literature, are referred to in practitioner training and which are reflected in curriculum documents.

It is not the intention to construct an historical account of pedagogy and practice in early childhood education, as in doing so there is the danger of ‘cherry picking’ accepted or standard practices. Instead, a multidimensional construction of theoretical perspectives represent variety and possibility rather than prescribed practice. Raban et al (2003:67-8) describe the many theories of early childhood learning and development as a ‘collection of partial truths’, not offering universal answers individually, but all available draw upon in creation of complex layers of possibility. In this sense, to rely on individual philosophies or understandings of early childhood
learning, even the most well-established ones, could not be considered to offer quality in pedagogy. Instead, practice that draws from a range of perspectives or paradigms seems to offer the best chance of incorporating ‘quality’. This, then, underpins the multidimensional framework established in table i.

**Table i**

*Multidimensional Framework of Early Years Pedagogy*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>i Child Centred</th>
<th>ii Social Learning</th>
<th>iii Developmental / maturational</th>
<th>iv Holistic</th>
<th>v Practical / physical</th>
<th>vi Intrinsicically motivated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Examples of major theorists / practice</td>
<td>Pestalozzi</td>
<td>Vygotsky</td>
<td>Gessel</td>
<td>Malaguzzi</td>
<td>Piaget</td>
<td>Dewey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Froebel</td>
<td>Bruner</td>
<td>Piaget</td>
<td>Athey</td>
<td>Piaget</td>
<td>Owen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Steiner</td>
<td>Bronfenbrenner</td>
<td>Erikson</td>
<td>Bruce</td>
<td>McMillan</td>
<td>Steiner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Montessori</td>
<td>Skinner</td>
<td>Donaldson</td>
<td>Te Whariki</td>
<td>Steiner</td>
<td>Montessori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rumbold Report</td>
<td>Pence</td>
<td>Dewey</td>
<td>Reggio Emilia</td>
<td>Isaacs</td>
<td>Steiner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Hazards in the search for quality early years PE**

The field of physical education is broad and nebulous, with many competing values, sometimes opposed, which comprise what is understood as PE in schools. Penney and Evans (2005) claim that physical education is ‘an openly contested and extremely crowded policy arena’ (p.28) with strands developed from a multitude of (sometimes) unconnected historical origins. Within the eclectic history of PE exists a wide range of values, understandings and practices, although more recently claims that PE is weighted with an emphasis on games, sport and health are evidenced in Green and Thurston, (2003), Kirk (2004), Haydn-Davies (2005), Gove (2010), Kohe (2010) and...
DfE (2011). Furthermore, in England, there is evidence that concerns for the legacy of the 2012 London Olympics have become deeply rooted in understandings of quality PE. As well as the ‘Get Set’ official London 2012 Education programme for 3-19 year olds to enhance schools’ engagement with the Olympic and Paralympic games, the launch of the National Curriculum Review announced clear expectations that all pupils should play competitive sport (DfE 2011). This echoes Michael Gove’s open letter to Baroness Campbell setting out the Coalition Government’s view that competitive sport should be a ‘vibrant part of the life and ethos of all schools’ and announcing the creation of an annual Olympic-style school sport competition (DfE, 2010).

Understanding what comprises quality early years PE is difficult to ascertain from such announcements and policy statements - and harder still to unify with early years documents. High Quality PE and School Sport (HQPESS) 2004, like the EYFS, associates ‘quality’ with the enhancement of learning and development in children. However, within the EYFS, quality is linked to the nature of the learning experiences, whilst in HQPESS it is identified through outcomes within the school setting. It also needs to be noted that policies for PE and school sport within England are concerned with the full age spectrum of schooling. For practitioners in the early years, this is potentially confusing. What may be described as quality in PE through outcomes does not necessarily make an easy bedfellow with descriptions of quality in terms of early years pedagogy. As noted by Gooch (2010: 226) prior to the introduction of the 1988 National Curriculum in England and Wales, children up to the age of 7 were referred to as ‘infants’, making the distinction between early years and primary pedagogy occur at a later age. The situation in PE, where policy documents simply refer to the 3-19 age-range, lends weight to the Cambridge Primary Review description of the ‘downward thrust’ of the primary curriculum into early years teaching and learning (Alexander, 2009).

Using again the example of the English EYFS, the nature of learning experiences for children up to and including the first year of school are promoted through six interconnected areas of learning; communication, language and literature; knowledge and understanding of the world; physical development; creative development; personal, social and emotional development; problem solving, reasoning and
numeracy. However, after the first year in school children move into the subject divisions of the National Curriculum. As a curriculum area rather than an interconnected strand of learning, PE tends to be timetabled for use of physical space and resources (Scottish Parliament 2009:113), thus becoming all too easily disconnected from the holistic pedagogy of the early years. It is further suggested that a curriculum designed to raise academic standards (Goouch, 2010) will create pressure that squeezes timetabled PE into the tight physical boundaries created for it (Scottish Parliament, 2009:111).

An additional factor that cannot be overlooked in seeking an understanding of quality practice in early years PE is the evidence indicating that the subject often receives scant coverage in primary teacher training (Anning, 1997; Hoey, 2001; Wright, 2002; Hardman, 2004; Kirk, 2005, Vickerman, 2007; Scottish Parliament, 2009). It has even been suggested that a paucity in PE subject knowledge amongst teachers of the youngest children in school may be linked to poor physical literacy in pupils later on (Scottish Parliament, 2009:76). It has been suggested that teachers bring to their PE practice personal experiences of participation, values and professional beliefs, all of which influence their teaching and are sometimes used to compensate for a lack of subject knowledge (Green, 2002; Capel, 2005; Aldous & Brown, 2010). Not only do these factors determine attitude towards PE, but are also reflected in confidence in teaching (Green 2002). Rather more anecdotal evidence for this is found Julie Myerson’s memoir *Not A Games Person* (2005), describing PE as; “a uniquely ruthless aspect of school experience which shapes us all and leaves its traces in unexpected and lingering ways.”

Considering the identified and evidenced issues of the broad scope of PE, the move towards an emphasis on sport and games, the undefined early years pedagogy within policies, the disconnected physical space of PE lessons and the possible paucity of subject knowledge in PE amongst early years teachers, it is necessary to listen to the voices of teachers themselves in order to understand what guides and influences their planning and teaching of PE.
A representative sample of in-depth interviews (n=12) were conducted following a survey of 196 qualified teachers employed within the 4-7 year age range across the UK. The original questionnaire asked teachers to rank the importance of various manifestations of PE, described as standard lesson activities. In order to provide a comprehensive range of possible practice, a framework was established identifying six strands to describe and categorise teaching and learning in PE (see table ii). This was derived from a systematic scrutiny of English and Scottish curriculum documents, policies and literature relating to primary PE teaching (from Keogh and Sugden, 1985; Laban, 1998; Capel & Piotrowski, 2000; Gallahue and Donnelly, 2003; Jess et al, 2003; Haywood and Getchell, 2005; Kirk et al, 2006).

The six areas cover the representations of PE located within current documents and literature, and it is suggested that this provides a comprehensive account of possible manifestations of PE in primary practice.

**Table ii**  
Framework of PE subject knowledge and core values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aims and purpose</th>
<th>Physical skill acquisition</th>
<th>Motor skills development</th>
<th>Health-related</th>
<th>Movement and Creativity</th>
<th>Games &amp; Subject knowledge</th>
<th>Sport, Culture, Performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Examples of practice in Early Years Education</td>
<td>Specific skills / competencies using the body, apparatus or equipment.</td>
<td>Development / establishment of stage and age-related motor milestones.</td>
<td>Aerobic, muscular endurance, muscular strength and flexibility. Exercise for physical and psychological well being.</td>
<td>Body knowledge and confidence, understanding of space, time, dynamics and relationships through physical exploration and physical expression.</td>
<td>Knowledge, understanding and experience of specific areas of physical activity and games.</td>
<td>Focus on learning specific skills and tactics to achieve performance levels and enable competitive situations. Tends to be culture specific Organised sports participation, both solo and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taught skills for throwing / catching, gymnastics.</td>
<td>Focus on age appropriate motor development.</td>
<td>Exercises, apparatus taught /used. Circuits; 'Fit Body</td>
<td>Includes using physical problem solving,</td>
<td>Includes participation in games, athletics,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Exercises, apparatus taught /used. Circuits; 'Fit Body</td>
<td>Includes using physical problem solving,</td>
<td>Includes participation in games, athletics,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
dance and games. Often the basis of ‘traditional’ PE lessons with simple games and ball skills. EG: TOPS programmes

Requires specific subject knowledge or training (such as, Basic Moves) For example, children should only attempt forward rolls beyond age 7yrs.

Kids’ programmes; Boxercise; Aerobics. May focus on understanding ‘healthy’ lifestyles and reasons for exercise. Individual body approach.

exploration and creativity through movement tasks and opportunities; some aspects of dance, but emphasis on creativity rather than taught moves.

swimming, dance, gymnastics, outdoor and adventurous activities. Requires adult-led and organised programmes of activity.

team (eg, football, cricket, rugby, netball, tennis, cycling, etc). Knowledge of rules, tactics and competition. Overlap with extra-curricula and out-of-school activities.

Responses to the initial questionnaire were sorted according to the importance given to PE practice described. These were then related to the six categories within the PE framework (table ii) in order to classify respondents. Follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted with two teachers randomly selected from each of the six categories. This ensured a representative sample of teachers ranking each of the PE categories as most important in their practice with young children.

Results

The semi-structured interviews focussed on what influenced the teachers in their planning and pedagogy in PE, with particular emphasis on the purposes of the activity. The interviews comprised six themes covering: i) the broad aims within planning PE schemes of work; ii) the skills and objectives identified in planning; iii) the manifestation of the activities in PE lessons; iv) the identified learning outcomes for children within a particular lesson; v) the strategies used in PE teaching, vi) understanding of the place of PE within the curriculum.

In order to interpret the interview data, transcripts were sorted and classified according to the six hypothesised dimensions related to traditional and understood aspects of early years pedagogy in table i. Responses were recorded against more than one of the early years dimensions where appropriate. This coding of data allowed for the voices of teachers from each of the six identified PE categories to be aligned with
the framework of early years pedagogy. Table iii shows the extent to which teachers from each category articulated their understanding of early years practice within their planning and teaching of PE.

Table iii

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of early years pedagogy</th>
<th>PE priority areas</th>
<th>i Physical skill acquisition</th>
<th>ii Motor skills development</th>
<th>iii Health-related</th>
<th>iv Movement and Creativity</th>
<th>v Games and Subject knowledge</th>
<th>vi Sport, Culture, Performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child Centred</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Learning</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental / maturational</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holistic</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical / physical</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsically motivated</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is evident from this process that the teachers in group iv, those identifying Movement & Creativity as the most important aspect of their PE teaching articulated the identified aspects of early years pedagogy most frequently. The teachers in group vi, those identifying Sport, Culture, Performance as the most important aspect of their PE teaching, gave the least number of responses that could be recorded as representing aspects of identified early years pedagogy.
Taking the words of the teachers as transcribed from the interviews, it is possible to see how they differed in articulating aspects of early years pedagogy within their PE planning and delivery, with some teachers making little reference to the identified aspects of early years teaching. The different emphases are also evident in teachers from different categories:

(Teacher 7: Movement & Creativity)
*I’d like to think…yes, I do use movement as a part of the way the children learn all things…it’s the physical experience of doing. It makes it more real for them as they want to move anyway to explore things. In some ways taking that as the starting point makes PE easy to plan for.*

(Teacher 12: Sport, Performance, Culture)
*Actually I believe in competition and I want that in their lessons somewhere. We always have a sports day and they build up to that over the year. Learning to win and lose is preparation for life….We get an active mark from the borough and part of it is for having the sports day.”*

(Teacher 5: Health Related)
*Well, you need to promote stamina…strategic skills…I want to help children develop strong bodies, multi-skills, balance…you know, that sort of thing. Its other things too, like working as a team, learning to compete, it’s all really, really important – and where else is that coming from in the timetable?*

The teachers articulating aspects of early years pedagogy least were those ranking *Sport, Culture, Performance* as the most important aspect of their PE teaching. In these cases, PE was most frequently referenced outside the curriculum and the emphasis was strongly on success in terms of sport. In relation to the current trajectory of PE (DfE, 2011) this appears to echo the zeitgeist.

(Teacher 11: Sport, Culture, Performance)
*When they do a club it really shows, you know? We get lots of ‘taster sessions’ offered by local clubs…they might come in and do judo, or whatever. It gets them started. I’d like to see one of our children be successful…I mean, you would…if a child goes on to be a doctor or actor or anything you’d be pleased. It’s our duty to develop skills.*

(Teacher 12: Sport, Culture, Performance)
I’m all for it (Olympics) it’s desperately needed, desperately needed. It’s more choice, more opportunity. A decent athletics track and a swimming pool…where children can go and train properly and get picked up early. No, I’m all for the focus on sport. Let’s be successful! Why not?

Where teachers articulated a focus on Motor Skills within their PE planning and delivery, this gave the strongest sense of PE as a separate subject, disconnected from classroom learning. By contrast, those teachers articulating aspects of the early years framework in their planning and teaching of PE described a more fluid curriculum.

(Teacher 3: Motor Skills)
...yeah, it’s different...I suppose it’s...well, not really academic. The pressure is off in that sense. They are developing skills and ability in a different sense.

(Teacher 4: Motor Skills)
We need to move away from the busy, happy, fun idea. It is actually very important that they are able to do the things they should be able to at the right age if they are going to make progress.

(Teacher 7: Movement & Creativity)
I linked it in with what they are doing in their other work, like counting, colours, body parts. .. It is another opportunity to learn but in a different and fun way.

(Teacher 8: Movement & Creativity)
It must be seamless, not a subject. Last year they did an assembly of Where The Wild Things Are – you know, the book? That came from PE largely. They did stomping and monster movement...lots of really good stuff. We made a play...it was all curriculum areas in one, so I was quite proud of that.

In some cases there was a particular emphasis on knowledge in PE being located beyond the class teacher, supporting earlier evidence of a paucity in subject knowledge. Interestingly, the teachers prioritising lessons in the Games & Subject Knowledge category gave the most explicit responses in relation to PE as specialist knowledge indicating reliance on documents, policies and external provision. In some cases, the planning and teaching of PE was not within the direct responsibility of the class teacher.

(Teacher 9: Games & Subject Knowledge)
We’re really lucky as it’s all done for us, straight from the National Curriculum, so we haven’t got to worry about that...the school has schemes of work done by the PE co-ordinator.
I follow the infant gymnastic scheme mainly...it is already linked to the QCA levels...I am not a PE expert.

Those citing the Olympics and competitive sport as a direct influence on their planning and teaching of PE were those teachers who did not strongly articulate aspects of the early years pedagogy framework:

2012 IS a part of the National Strategy for PE – be clear about that. PE must be related to that. You can’t separate the two.

Actually, I do believe that competition is good for them. Learning to win and lose is part of life and PE is the only place you can really have that kind of competition.

However, where teachers did articulate aspects of early years pedagogy in their descriptions of planning and teaching PE, they provided contrasting views on the nature of games and competition:

What you have to avoid (in PE) is having winners and losers...that’s hard if you’re doing games, isn’t it? If you have winners and losers then you send out the message of valuing one ability over another...so you are not being at all inclusive, are you?

I think we’ve got it wrong in many ways...we’ve forgotten to focus with the younger ones on what your body does in the space around and the people around – and to find pleasure in that. If it’s all about who can run the fastest with a beanbag, well then, half of them are crossed off from the time you shout go.

I don’t want to allow the football ones to have the centre stage just because we’re promoting sports all the time. What does that say to the others? It’s not about fostering champions...I feel quite strongly about that.

Yet some teachers were also keen to stress that PE was different from other aspects of the early years curriculum, thereby offering justification for a difference in
pedagogical approach. It was most often stated that PE lessons offer the only opportunity for particular outcomes or the development of certain skills:

(Teacher 5: Health Related)
*I try to get them out of breath every time. It’s hard to do that in maths or whatever!*

(Teacher 9: Games & Subject Knowledge)
*I try to get them out of breath every time. It’s hard to do that in maths or whatever!*

(Teacher 11: Sport & Performance)
*They need to learn how to be a team member…it’s not just there until they’ve had chances to do those sport activities.*

(Teacher 3: Motor Skills)
*It’s about playing for fun, playing for enjoyment…perhaps about success and achievement…knowing how activity effects you externally and internally. If you start early enough, there’s so much you can learn through sport…so much.*

The voices of the teachers revealed considerable variety in terms of influences on their planning and teaching PE. It is evident that the responses gathered all fall within an accepted understanding of PE, as evidenced through both the framework and current documents. Yet it is also clear that teachers differ vastly in approach, understanding and priorities in their planning and teaching of PE. Whilst some of these fit within the framework of early years pedagogy, others do not seem to fit so readily. However, it is interesting to note that in some cases teachers position PE as outside the curriculum (and sometimes their own expertise) whilst others justify practice within the uniqueness of PE to offer opportunities for sport and competition.

**Discussion**

PE has been described as a crowded curriculum area (Thorpe 2003; Penney & Evans, 2005). The current emphasis on PE as the location for competitive sport (DfE 2011) has potentially added to the contest for space within the early years PE curriculum. The extent to which a range of possible manifestations of PE are evident within the narrow definition of games and sport is arguable (Kirk, 2006; Green, 2004; Evans, 2004; Thorpe, 2003; Penney & Jess, 2004; Penney & Evans, 2005). This is evidenced
here in the voices of teachers themselves, where those prioritising sports, games and skill development identify less with early years pedagogy in PE than those emphasising movement and creativity in PE. Furthermore, the danger of ‘sport and competition’ discourses dominating the planning and teaching of PE is that not only are children inducted into what is valued in current physical culture, but they are also positioned in relation to it (Penney & Evans, 2005:34). In response to the proposed National Curriculum Review, the UK Youth Sport Trust emphasise that it is only through high quality Physical Education that necessary skills and confidence to participate effectively in competitive sport can be developed. To do this, it is urged that PE must “seek to build physical literacy” before putting skills into practice within a sporting context (DfE, 2011:41). This is perhaps reflected in the teacher response:

You can only get children active when they are familiar with their own body.

A concern for early learning implies an inter-connected, holistic, child-centred curriculum, evidenced in both traditional and contemporary understandings of early years education (see table i). It is difficult to see how some manifestations of PE are placed within this early years framework, leading to a potential gap between what is considered as quality in PE and quality early years pedagogy. Whilst the teachers prioritising creativity and movement within their PE teaching may be considered as offering quality physical education experiences in the early years, it may be argued that this does not ostensibly match the current government’s position on high quality PE with the clear expectation that all pupils should participate in competitive sport (DfE, 2011).

Houlihan & Green (2006: 85) claim that teachers are less well prepared to teach PE now than in the past, largely due to the clashes between pedagogy and practice in PE. Kay (2003: 8) suggests that the focus on skills and performance in PE neglects ‘a pupil-centred rationale’. Yet the current trajectory seems to be leading teachers in just such a skills and performance direction. Using specialist PE teachers or coaches places emphasis on the subject rather than (particularly in the case of coaches) the teaching process or pedagogy. Such a move in practice seems counter to both Plowden’s statement that “at the heart of the education process lies the child” (1967) and Rumbold’s (DES 1990) assertion that, in the early years, it is not what the child
learns that is essential so much as the way it is taught and the context in which learning takes place.

It is recognised that the frameworks used for the identification of early years pedagogy and categories of PE are subjective and qualitative in construction. Furthermore, it may be argued that those teachers prioritising *Movement & Creativity* in their PE teaching have, in doing so, aligned themselves with traditional early years manifestations of physical education. However, the evidence presented in this study echoes many voices within the field of PE stressing the need for a broader concept of the subject in order for a multi-faceted philosophy and tradition to be suitably located (notably, Capel, 2005; Talbot, 2005; Bailey, 2006; Kirk, 2006; Whitehead, 2006; Penney, 2008; Houlihan, 2009).

**Concluding thoughts**

This paper has suggested frameworks for locating both early years pedagogy and a wide spectrum of manifestations of PE. Combining these in the coding of interview data attempts to identify where teachers draw from both early years and PE in their planning and teaching. In doing so, teachers prioritising *Movement and Creativity* within PE for young children articulate the most comprehensive account of early years pedagogy within their practice. Further evidence supporting the centrality of movement and creativity in early learning is presented by Bruner (1983) in defining the “*culture of childhood*” as action, creativity and movement. It is urged by Doherty & Bailey (2003: 97) that in order to place the child, as a learner, at the heart of PE, then the subject must reflect Bruner’s culture of childhood rather than any specific activity or end product. Despite the current focus of PE in schools, a case is presented to claim that quality early years PE is not found in sports and games, skill-based learning or concerns for health, but in teaching which maintains an emphasis on pedagogy for early learning.

It may even be argued that a curriculum which views PE as a discrete subject area, concerned with sport, competition, health related issues, performance and skill acquisition is missing a trick. It is an important reminder that teaching and learning within the early years is not subject-bound and skill-related.
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