



Canterbury Christ Church  
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# SpinEd

The role of Physical Education and  
sport in education



**THE ROLE OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND  
SPORT IN EDUCATION**

**FINAL REPORT**

This document represents the summary findings of an international research project financially supported by the International Olympic Committee and carried out on behalf of the International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education (ICSSPE/CIEPSS), and the International Committee of Sport Pedagogy, a working group of ICSSPE/CIEPSS.

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1. Sport in Education (SpinEd) is an international research project that aims to gather and present evidence regarding the benefits to schools of quality physical education and school sport (PESS). Its main objectives are:
  - to construct a framework for evaluating the role of PESS, which can be adapted for use in different countries and cultures;
  - to produce a research summary and annotated bibliography on the role of PESS;
  - to collect examples of good practice, giving evidence of how PESS can make positive contributions to school life;
  - to collect data regarding pupils' perceptions of the outcomes of PESS.
2. Through a combination of a comprehensive literature review, national case studies, web-based dissemination, and a large-scale questionnaire of children and young people's views, the project has devised a framework for understanding and discussing the benefits of PESS. This framework structures the claimed benefits of PESS in terms of: Physical Development; Lifestyle Development; Affective Development; Social Development and Cognitive Development.
3. Both the case studies and the literature review show that PESS has the potential to make a significant contribution to the overall education and development of children. In each of the SpinEd domains – Physical, Lifestyle, Affective, Social, Cognitive – there is evidence that PESS can have a positive and profound effect. In some respects, such effects are unique, owing to the distinctive contexts in which PESS takes place.
4. The study also found that the school- and educational-focus of PESS offers important and distinctive benefits, including access to nearly all children, and the significant role of teachers in the learning process.
5. The study concludes that the benefits of a quality PESS experience are significant, and many of these benefits are not reproducible through other areas of the curriculum, or through other sporting or physical activity settings. It suggests that quality school-based PESS should be available to every child in every school system, as an educational entitlement.

## 1 - INTRODUCTION

The World Summit on Physical Education, held in Berlin in November 1999, called attention to the serious decline in the state and status of physical education and school sport (PESS), all over the world. The Summit reported the findings of a world-wide survey, which presented evidence, from countries in all parts of the world, that the time and resources allocated to PESS had in almost all cases been seriously reduced; and it was argued that urgent action is required, both to improve the quality of PESS, and to secure its place in school curriculum time<sup>1</sup>.

The present report summarises some of the findings of an international research project, funded by the International Olympic Committee, which offers a response to some of the problems confronting PESS. It has drawn together evidence from around the world on the benefits of PESS, and by seeking to identify a shared framework for understanding the subject and its contributions to educational systems and to children. In doing so, this project offers empirical support to Article 10 of the UNESCO Charter of Physical Education and Sport, which called for international co-operation in supporting and promoting:

the universal and well-balanced promotion of Physical Education (with a full range of organizations) giving Physical Education .. greater prominence in international bilateral and multi-lateral co-operation .. (indicating that such collaboration will) encourage the development of Physical Education .. throughout the world<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Hardman, K. and Marshall, J.J. (2000) World-wide Survey of the State and Status of School Physical Education: the final report to the International Olympic Committee. Manchester: University of Manchester.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (1978) International Charter of Physical Education and Sport,  
[www.unesco.org/education/information/nfsunesco/pdf/SPORT\\_E.PDF](http://www.unesco.org/education/information/nfsunesco/pdf/SPORT_E.PDF)

## 2 - THE STATE AND STATUS OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SCHOOL SPORT

### Introduction

In 1998 a comprehensive study, the World-wide Survey on the State and Status of Physical Education in Schools was undertaken<sup>3</sup>. This one-year investigation, funded by the International Olympic Committee, aimed to establish whether the actualities in schools were consistent with the principles and policies of governments or agencies responsible for PESS delivered in schools. The information was collected through a semi-structured questionnaire and was supported by an extensive literature review providing an informed picture of policies and implementation practices of PESS in schools. Several international organisations and extensive individual contacts were utilized to enable the distribution of questionnaires and a specifically created web site allowed for a speedy and efficient means of collecting and interacting with data on a global scale. In all, 167 countries were involved. Unless otherwise specified the quotes provided have been cited in the world-wide survey<sup>4</sup>.

Globally, there was found to be significant differences between the PESS curriculum requirement in countries and the actual implementation. Although in 71% of cases physical education was being implemented according to the curriculum requirement, in 29% of cases, only the minimum requirement was provided and in some areas even dropped for the sake of other subjects. In Canada, a survey was carried out with elementary schools which revealed that curriculum time for PESS averaged 55.9 minutes per week, just over-half of the provincial guidelines and one-third of the national recommendations of 50 minutes<sup>5</sup>. Similarly, the world-wide survey found that in Botswana,

‘some teachers do not teach at all and nobody seems to bother. The supervising ministry does not seem to care whether it is taught or not’  
(Professor).

In order to explore the reasons for the disparity between curriculum requirement and implementation of the curriculum, the world-wide survey identified specific focal areas for assessment in each country. These were curriculum time allocation, subject status, attitudes of teachers and parents, resources, teacher education, curriculum content, the future of physical education and equity issues.

### Time Allocation

Reductions in time allocation were seen in all parts of the world. Moreover, the survey revealed that the greatest time allocation occurred when the children were aged 9-14, and that the time allocated in schools declined as the children got older, when it either became an optional subject or not an option at all. One example cited was in Sweden, where time allocated for physical education had been reduced by a third

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<sup>3</sup> Hardman, K. and Marshall, J.J. (2000) World-wide Survey of the State and Status of School Physical Education: the final report to the International Olympic Committee. Manchester: University of Manchester.

<sup>4</sup> Hardman and Marshall, *op cit*.

<sup>5</sup> Tremblay, M., Pella, T. and Taylor, K. (1996) The quality and quantity of school-based physical education: a growing concern, *CAHPERD-ACSEPLD Journal* 62: 4-7.

during the last decade<sup>6</sup>. Similarly a Professor in Brazil claimed that, “for many years, there were 3 classes per week for secondary schools (grades 3-5)...Now there is only 1 to 2 classes of PE per week”.

### **Subject Status**

Of considerable concern was the low status of PESS in schools that was evident around the world. Whilst 86% of countries' respondents indicated that PESS had attained a similar legal status to other subjects, status was not found to be equal in practice. In fact, the survey highlighted that PESS lessons were frequently cancelled during the examination season and suffered skepticism regarding its academic value. This was particularly the case in countries such as India, where intellectual development had traditionally been felt to be superior to physical activity. Here, “children participate in physical education only for fun but the main emphasis is on academic' subjects, which carry more weight than PE” (Lecturer). Even Australia, renowned for its sport, was said to suffer from the low status of its physical education in schools in favor of intellectual activities.

### **Attitudes of Teachers and Parents**

Significant groups such as Headteachers, other teachers and parents revealed sometimes indifferent and non-supportive attitudes towards PESS. Some Headteachers were even reported to prioritize sports performance achievement rather than quality PESS programmes. Similar negative attitudes were held by other teachers, who believed that apart from allowing the students “to let off steam after or before intellectual classes”, the subject is not important (Teacher, France). Parents often saw it, “as a waste of time” (Lecturer, Malta).

### **Resources**

In the majority of countries (60%), funding cuts were anticipated during periods of financial constraint, which were likely to lead to future reductions in PESS program. In some countries, PESS was already facing declining financial support, which had a significant impact on the allocation of curriculum time, resources and qualified teaching personnel. For example, it was found that in Switzerland, “decreased funding has resulted in a number of hours for physical education within several cantons, even though this contravenes the federally set minimum” (Teacher). Perhaps unsurprisingly, many developing countries were suffering from practically non-existent or grossly inadequate facilities, but the extent of the problem was proven to stretch beyond the divides of developing and developed countries.

### **Teacher Education**

A common scenario was reported to have been the practice of using qualified 'specialist' PESS teachers at secondary level and 'generalist' teachers at elementary

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<sup>6</sup> Sollerhed, A.-C. (1999) The Status of Physical Education in the Swedish School System, Paper presented at the ICHPER-SD 42nd World Congress, Developing Strategies of International Co-operation in Promotion of HPERSD for the New Millennium, Cairo, 2-8 July.

level. In some countries, however, there was no such 'specialist' teacher at secondary level and the generalist teacher at primary level was often inadequately or inappropriately prepared to teach PESS. The numbers of specialist advisors have also reportedly declined, as in New Zealand, where the "numbers were reduced to 20 by 1982 and to 9 in the 1990's"<sup>7</sup>.

### **Curriculum Content**

Another issue that emerged from the survey included the level of enjoyment that PESS offered children in school and the quality of physical education that is being delivered. In some schools, there appeared to be an over-emphasis on elite level sport at the expense of basic PESS programs. For example, PESS specialists in elementary schools in Indiana have claimed that a "great many programmes still exist with many students waiting in line and teachers training the elite athletes only" (Elementary school specialist). The move towards delivering PESS programs that focus mainly upon health and fitness was also evident in many countries, such as Canada where it was said that, "physical education will emphasize physical fitness and activity as essential for a healthy body"<sup>8</sup>.

### **Future of PESS**

There was a, "fairly widespread skepticism and pessimism about the future for school physical education" and a number of contributors to the world-wide survey foresaw a decline in physical education, a rise in health-related activity and a continuing domination of competitive sport. Most alarmingly one Professor in Bolivia stated that, "there does not exist a culture where the continued practice of physical education can be sustained".

### **Equity Issues**

Worrying trends were observed in relation to equity, particularly in terms of gender and disability. In some countries, such as Saudi Arabia, no PESS was found to exist at all for girls on the grounds of culture, whilst in others, "teachers are not prepared to deal with the differences between boys and girls" (Professor, Brazil). 43% of the respondents to the survey stated that integration of students with disabilities was not being achieved. Two reasons for this, according to commentators, were the lack of teacher knowledge (Lecturer, Canada) and overcrowded classes (Lecturer, Malaysia).

### **Conclusion**

Overall, the survey revealed alarming discrepancies between the principles and policies of government or other agencies responsible for PESS curricula, and the realities in school. At best, the findings emphasize the fact that PESS occupies only a tenuous place in the school curriculum. There are good reasons to believe that the

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<sup>7</sup> Stothart, R. A. (1997) The Rise and Demise of a Physical Education Advisory Service: the New Zealand experience. *FIEP. Bulletin*, 67: 23-25.

<sup>8</sup> Luke, M.D. (1999) *Physical and Health Education Curricula: a cross-Canada perspective*. Unpublished manuscript, February.

future of PESS in many countries around the world is in peril. There is now an urgent need for policymakers and practitioners to take action to ensure that quality PESS and the benefits it accrues is made available for all children.

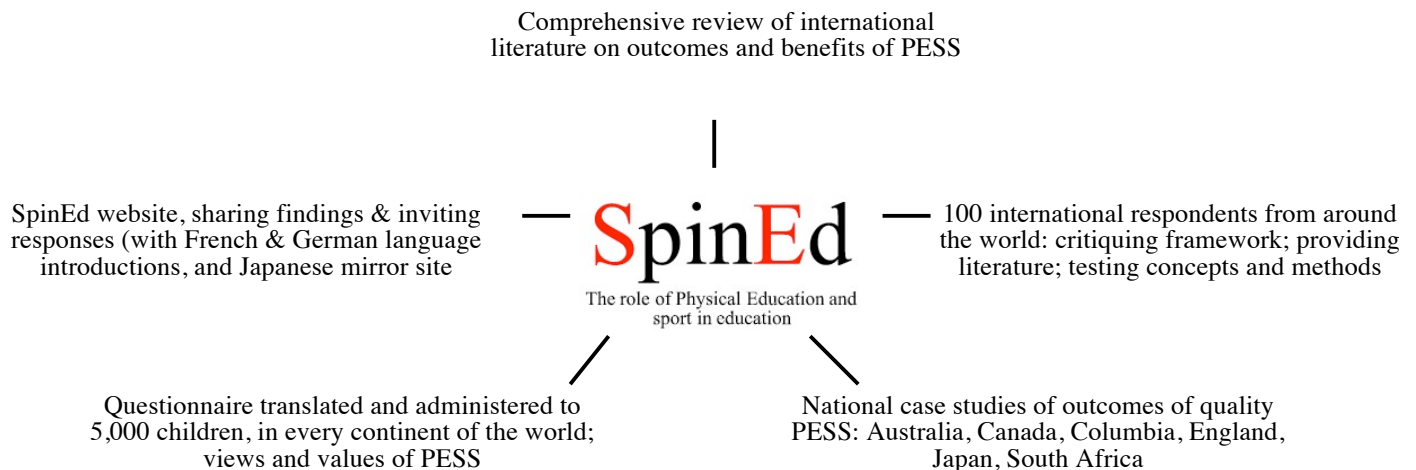
### 3 - SPORT IN EDUCATION (SpinEd)

#### The SpinEd Project

The SpinEd project's aim is to gather and present evidence to policymakers regarding the benefits to schools of quality PESS. Its main objectives are: to construct a framework for evaluating the role of PESS, which can be adapted for use in different countries and cultures; to produce a research summary and annotated bibliography on the role of PESS; to collect examples of good practice, giving evidence of how PESS can make positive contributions to school life; to collect data regarding pupils' perceptions of the outcomes of PESS.

To realize these objectives, the project team has drawn on as wide a range of information as possible, including the scientific literature, case studies of good practice and the voices of children and young people. It uses a number of methods to gather these data, which are summarized in the diagram below:

Figure 1: Summary of the SpinEd Project



A central theme within the SpinEd project is the importance of articulating a shared framework of understanding the outcomes and benefits of PESS, which would be valid across cultures and educational systems. Therefore, the first stage of the project was to find a working definition of PESS that was applicable to the widest range of educational systems. This was achieved through a process of offering various definitions (drawn from published literature), and inviting feedback from the large team of respondents from around the world. Eventually, the following 'functional' definition of PESS was found to be acceptable to all questioned:

Physical education and school sport refers to structured, supervised physical activities that take place at school and during the school day.

Of course, a definition like this does not capture the full educational intent of any system's PESS curriculum. However, it is worth noting that whilst there was great variation between different systems' aims, justifications and foci, there was a surprising degree of consensus regarding the broad types of activities undertaken and the abilities developed in the name of PESS.

### **The SpinEd Framework**

Next, it was necessary to develop a framework with which to structure the discussion of outcomes and benefits of PESS. The Steering Group, made up of very experienced and highly respected PESS scholars and teachers, provided an initial, provisional list of themes, and these were subsequently tested by the project team. Testing consisted of evaluating the themes' compatibility with curricula, textbooks and previously published frameworks from around the world, reviewing research literature related to teachers' and students' views of the outcomes of PESS, and asking the international team of respondents to assess the extent to which the framework accurately reflected their system's PESS programme. The intention of this part of the project was to find a list of themes related to the outcomes of PESS that struck a balance between parsimony (the list should be simple and economical) and inclusion (it should be acceptable to every educational system).

A list of five main themes (or domains) was established, which refer to specific aspects of children's and young people's development through PESS:

- Physical development;
- Lifestyle development;
- Affective development;
- Social development;
- Cognitive development.

These domains were found to be acceptable to our international respondents, and also consistent with previously published literature and policy documentation on the aims, outcomes, benefits and justifications of PESS. For example, Table 1 shows a selection of statements, from academic and policy contexts, regarding the contributions of PESS. It is evident that the SpinEd domains are entirely compatible with these, and other, models.