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# Physical education and health promotion: a qualitative study of teachers' perceptions

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## Abstract

Presents the findings from semi-structured interviews with 35 physical education (PE) teachers in secondary schools in the Northwest of England. A principal aim of the study was to examine the extent to which health promotion had become a central feature of PE teachers' "philosophies" and practices. The findings indicated that the views of many teachers were heavily tinted with health-related ideological justifications for PE. Teachers not only viewed sport as a central aspect of the subject but also as the main vehicle for health promotion. The paper concludes that an ideology of sport has penetrated deeply into the core assumptions of both PE teachers and government in relation to the promotion of health through PE. Gaps between "policy" and "practice" in relation to health promotion in PE remain and these appear likely to become hardened rather than diminished by recent government policy.

## Introduction

### Aims of this paper

This paper is set against the background of contemporary formal constraints (typically in the form of legislation and policy directives) upon English schools and school teachers towards the promotion of so-called "healthy" and "active" schools (DoH, 1999; Sport England, 1999; Gale, 2000; Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), 2000). It explores the place of health promotion in secondary physical education (PE), which, by virtue of being a "foundation" subject, is often viewed as a primary vehicle for the delivery of the physical activity dimensions of health (DoH, 1999; Green, 2000a). The paper aims to help shape a more adequate appreciation of the reality (rather than the rhetoric) of health promotion through the medium of secondary school PE. It juxtaposes claims being made for health promotion through PE with PE teachers' philosophies (Armour, 1997; Evans, 1992; Flew, 1984).

The research presented here aimed to juxtapose PE teachers' thoughts and practices with conventional "academic" conceptions of PE. An additional aim of the research was to examine the extent to which health promotion had become a central feature of PE teachers' philosophies and practices. The findings from the study are set alongside a breadth of work on health promotion and PE, in order to stimulate a long overdue debate about the nature of the subject and teachers' perceptions of health promotion through PE.

### *Health promotion and secondary school PE*

The last five years have witnessed a concerted effort on the part of the British government to utilise schools as a vehicle for health promotion. The 1997 White Paper, *Excellence in Schools* (DfEE, 1997) alongside the Health Education Authority's *Young and Active* policy

statement (HEA, 1998) and the Chief Medical Officer's call for a re-direction of public health policy towards sport and exercise (Donaldson, 2000), signaled the government's intention to help all schools become healthy schools (DoH, 1999). A plethora of publications and attendant developments related to the healthy schools programme (DfEE, 1999a, b, c) have served to underline the government's intention to establish schools as "a key setting for health promotion work" within their broader strategies for improving the health of the nation (Harris and Penney, 2000, p. 252). The educational process in general and PE in particular have, according to Harris and Penney (2000, p. 252), been described as "critical in educating and providing opportunities for young people to become independently active for life". Indeed, the alleged association between "healthy" and "active" schools, PE and school sport is evident in a variety of claims to be found in government publications (e.g. DoH, 1999; National Audit Office, 2001).

This purported association between PE (including school sport) and the promotion of health via physical activity has been elaborated in the recently developed National Healthy Schools Standard. The Standard emphasises the promotion of physical activity and "healthy schools", making reference to a variety of academic sources. These obviate the ostensible importance of PE in promoting young people's "physical activity related knowledge and understanding, attitudes, activity and fitness levels through the implementation of ... health-related exercise programmes" (DfEE, 2000). The taken-for-granted link between physical activity and PE is explicitly addressed within standard 3.5 of the National Healthy Schools Standard (DfEE, 2000). Incorporated within the four minimum criteria for physical activity by which a school's achievement in this regard is to be assessed is that of two hours of physical activity a week, incorporating extracurricular as well as curricular PE. In addition, the Standard's criteria refer explicitly as well as implicitly to the involvement in PE of a range of non-PE personnel and organizations, for example, sports development officers and national governing body (NGB) coaches, and non-PE roles, such as school sports coordinators.

Physical activity has come to be viewed as "a desirable health-related behaviour" (Harris, 1998, p. 3) and physical education as the most suitable vehicle for the promotion of active, healthy lifestyles among young people (McKenzie, 2001). This concern for the promotion of health through PE has manifested itself in the form of one development in particular: that of health-related exercise.

#### *Health-related exercise and PE*

Health-related exercise (HRE) has emerged and developed to become an integral part of PE (Colquhoun, 1992; Kirk, 1992; Harris, 1997; McGeorge, 1997; Harris and Penney, 2000). When measured in terms of the journal space it occupies, both academic and professional, HRE has assumed increasing prominence in PE discourse. As well as having become "a prominent feature of most physical education (initial teacher) training courses" (Caldecott, 1992, p. 36), HRE is to be found in an ever-increasing majority of secondary school PE curricula (Harris, 1994a; Gale, 2000). At various points over the last decade, numerous commentators (Harris, 1994a; Gale, 2000) have highlighted the dramatic growth of interest in HRE within secondary PE. Colquhoun (1991, p. 5) has written of an "explosion" of interest from the PE profession in teaching health-related issues since the early 1980s.

Harris (1994a) cites the inclusion of "blocks" of HRE work in approximately two-thirds of secondary schools to be a particularly significant indication of the "success" of HRE during this period. She highlights findings suggesting that "Most heads of physical education departments viewed health-related exercise positively" (p. 6), considering

HRE to be a priority for in-service training. More recently, and on the basis of her study of the nature and extent of physical activity promotion in secondary schools, Gale has felt able to describe HRE as having become "an established part of the (PE) curriculum" (Gale, 2000, p. 72). Gale (2000, p. 72) views the growth of HRE as indicative of a number of "encouraging developments" with regard to the promotion of health via physical activity in secondary schools over the course of the last decade. She notes that whilst "schools varied in the amount and nature of physical activity opportunities they provided", many teachers were "working hard" to promote physical activity in schools, usually within PE and typically in the form of HRE (Gale, 2000, p. 71).

This well-documented "explosion" of interest in, and delivery of, HRE is widely claimed to be intimately related to a substantial change in priorities among those involved with PE at all levels: what Colquhoun has referred to as "a refocusing of the subject towards health-based issues" (Colquhoun, 1992, p. 7; emphasis added). Fox (1992), Harris (1997; 2000), McGeorge (1997), Gilliver (1999) and Shephard and Trudeau (2000) appear typical of those who advocate viewing HRE as the "*foundation* of the modern physical education curriculum" (Jones and Bate, 1990, p. 5; emphasis added), if not its sole purpose. Some observers (Kirk, 1992) even argue that HRE has become the defining manifestation of a movement in PE away from programmes primarily concerned with sports performance (and especially competitive team games) towards those focusing upon lifetime involvement in "health-enhancing" exercise. The 1980s and 1990s have been seen as representing something of a "sea-change" in the prominence of health promotion, and especially HRE, in both the theory and practice of PE.

Nonetheless, and despite the rise to ideological prominence since the late 1970s (Kirk, 1992; Green, 1994) of a health ideology, it is a moot point whether or not the significance of health promotion within PE has been reflected in the UK's National Curriculum for Physical Education (NCPE). Permeation of HRE throughout the various "activity areas" featured has been a statutory requirement of NCPE since its inception in 1992. Indeed, "knowledge and understanding of fitness and health" is central to the programmes of study at each key stage in the recently revised NCPE 2000 (DfEE and QCA, 1999).

Much has been, and continues to be, claimed politically, academically and professionally for the role of PE in health promotion. At the same time, many of these claims sit uneasily alongside recent governmental emphasis upon re-establishing sport at the heart of PE curricula. Against this backdrop, the study set out to establish whether or not there has, in fact, been a "sea-change" in PE teachers' views regarding the nature and purposes of their subject. In doing so, it sought to address issues to do with the place of health promotion in teachers' "philosophies" and how, in their eyes, health promotion was and could best be achieved through PE.

## **Methodology**

### **The sample**

The study investigated PE teachers' "philosophies" from a sociological perspective. It was based on semi-structured interviews conducted with 35 PE teachers from 17 schools in the Northwest of England in late June/early July of the summer 1998 term. The sampling frame for the study was all male and female PE teachers at 25 secondary schools in the state education system in two unitary authorities (formerly one county council). A purposive sampling method, a non-probability method and one commonly employed in qualitative research (Bowling, 1997), was utilised. This form of sample

selection is used to identify particular people or groups of people, in this case PE teachers, who are broadly known to the researcher and with a specific purpose in mind. That purpose "reflects the particular qualities of the people ... chosen and their relevance to the topic of the investigation" (Denscombe, 1998, p. 15). The various schools and PE departments were chosen to represent the city, new towns and rural locations typical of the region. The area was fairly typical of non-metropolitan areas in the UK with a variety of urban, suburban and rural communities as well as a broad economic base, albeit with a relatively small ethnic minority population. This purposive sampling frame resulted in a sample that was a convenience sample, insofar as it was constituted of PE teachers at those schools, located variously in a small city, two towns and several villages, that were "first to hand" (Denscombe, 1998, p. 16). The resultant sample consisted of those teachers who responded to the first round of interview requests. There were eight schools which did not reply to the original invitation.

This configuration of purposive and convenience sampling threw up what, in the absence of available official data, might be plausibly regarded as a suitable cross-section of PE teachers for the purposes of the study. The sample consisted of 15 male and 20 female teachers from 17 schools, of which 15 (eight male/seven female) were heads of department (HoD) and 20 (seven male/13 female) were main grade teachers of PE. Of the teachers (of whom three were HoDs) 13 were 30 years of age or younger; six (two HoDs) were between 31 and 40; 15 were between 41 and 50 years (nine HoDs) and one (HoD) was over 50.

### **The interviews**

Interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and focused upon PE teachers' "philosophies"; that is to say, their aphoristic or everyday thoughts on the nature and purposes of PE and the relationship between these "philosophies" and teachers' practices. Interviews were structured around several key themes, prominent amongst which was the theme of "health promotion and HRE in PE". Interviewees required very little prompting. They were evidently keen to talk at length around the theme of health, HRE and PE in response to the initial request for their views on the nature and purposes of their subject.

### **Analysis**

Qualitative approaches typically involve an attempt to identify the central features of, and patterns within, interviewees' responses via a categorisation of content. Content analysis is the relatively detached and systematic deconstruction of texts, whether in the form of the printed or spoken word. Texts can be interpreted on a number of levels but an overriding concern is the attempt to comprehend the perspective of the interviewee. The interview data from the study were arranged into what might be termed "common clusters" or "categories of meaning" based upon the core themes of the interviews. Among the broad areas of enquiry which provided the structure for the interviews were teachers' views regarding what PE should be about; the relationship between teachers' "philosophies" and their professed practice and their perceptions of context. The data were broken down into units for analysis (Denscombe, 1998) via the continual and ongoing revisiting of interview transcriptions and field notes in order to refine the categories of meaning subsequently employed to explain the data. The original categories were amended to incorporate areas of concern or interest that emerged during the interviews, one notable dimension of which was HRE and health promotion.

## Findings

### Health promotion and the teachers' "philosophies" of PE

The teachers in the study frequently expressed a desire to encourage allegedly "healthy", "active" lifestyles through the medium of PE. Many appeared to view health as the current issue confronting PE teachers:

... the health and participation part [of PE] ... and getting them to realise why they're doing it and why it's important ... with regard to what it's actually doing within your body ... an awareness of the health aspect. Quite a big thing is made about the health side of things ... I see it as important. It affects the nation basically. It affects me because ... I have to pay for people who are unwell... if we can cut down the costs of the NHS, etc. etc., then that will all have benefits [for] everybody.

For some, health even appeared to overshadow the "traditional" PE curriculum (with its emphasis on team games), and the associated sporting ideology, as the contemporary *raison d'être* for PE:

... we teach netball, hockey ... bringing in all your motor skills and that's important, as is the team aspect, but to me the health-related [aspect] is more important.

For many respondents, then, health promotion was indeed considered either implicitly or explicitly the function of PE:

I think it's our duty really that children should be as active as possible and, obviously, we're trying to encourage children to become more involved in sport, in *later* life, and so we introduce them to sports, individual and team sports, so that they ... have a lot of enjoyment in later life, socially. And the only way they can do this is if they are fit enough also to participate in these sports (emphases added).

Because we've got the vehicle for it [health promotion], really; that we can try to promote this to children: the way to stay healthy, the way to a healthy lifestyle, things like that.

For many of the teachers in the study, health promotion as a, even *the*, justification for PE was intimately related to a taken-for-granted conviction that children and young people "nowadays are less fit" than they were in the past:

... the level of fitness [among youngsters] is so much poorer than years ago. And that is a legacy of the fact that the PE departments aren't doing their jobs ... the pupils are less fit, the pupils don't run any more, or don't run enough within their physical education lessons, so the heart rate never goes up to a level that will get many fit. And unfortunately that's how it's going.

Frequently associated with these views were beliefs that "times have changed" for the worse in terms of sporting involvement in relation to a supposed "golden age" of sporting activity:

... 20 years ago people were that much more [active], they could cope with anything like that a lot better ... I think the natural fitness of children is not what it was; they are ferried about from place to place.

The teachers commonly emphasised fitness through sport:

We are always talking to them about the importance of doing some kind of activity ... to get as much activity as we can out of them [in] the timetable, then offer them lots of extracurricular clubs that they can come and take part in.

A number of the teachers clearly perceived the problem facing PE, in health promotion terms at least, as primarily one of improving the fitness levels of their young charges.

### **HRE programmes in practice**

The stipulated requirement that HRE should be a permeating theme in NCPE did not appear to have left its mark on many of these PE teachers' thinking, let alone their practice. Various teachers in the study, "delivered (HRE) as a 'block' shared with ... (e.g. orienteering)". Despite being aware of the requirement for permeation of HRE throughout the six activity areas of NCPE, there was little evidence in the study that the teachers had, in practice, made any substantial move away from the traditional delivery of HRE in concentrated "blocks" (e.g. as a weekly lesson delivered, in its own right, over a period of several weeks and usually in the form of fitness-oriented activities). Where HRE featured in the teachers' purported practice it did so, for the most part, "in a block of work", typically of several weeks' duration, and, in line with many of the teachers' commonsense perceptions regarding the nature of the "problem", was more usually referred to as health-related *fitness* (HRF) rather than as health-related *exercise* (HRE). Frequently, HRE took the form of variations on the theme of "circuits". One teacher in the study commented that, "It's only been more recently that I have taught health and fitness and that's just been circuits and going on a run".

There was little evidence of the teachers permeating activity areas, other than gymnastics and athletic activities, with HRE knowledge, skills and activities. Indeed, many teachers in the study pointed to the difficulties of delivering HRE as a permeating theme; particularly in the activity area that typically constitutes half or more of many schools' PE programmes; namely, games. Teachers in the study tended to treat health promotion as an implicit rather than explicit dimension of the delivery of many activity areas and particularly games. For example, when asked if she managed to tease out or emphasize HRE as a permeating theme in compliance with NCPE, one teacher responded for many when she commented, "Not sure, really". Despite this, many teachers expressed the view that the "health" theme permeated their work as a matter of course:

I don't focus on it in the sense that I don't say, "Well ... this area is where we are going to hit health" ... But to me *it's something that is always there when we do any activity* (emphasis added).

There was, it was claimed, what amounted to a kind of *de facto* permeation:

We don't do specific units on health-related fitness. We do some work within the GCSE on health-related fitness but no specific unit as such. When we do things like aerobics it's definitely associated with health-related *fitness*. Swimming also, I would say.

The teachers appeared not to have thought very much, if at all, about whether the health promotion aspect or other of their "philosophies" was evident in their practice or not; they simply assumed, or took it for granted, that it was.

## **Sport in schools and health promotion**

The teachers emphasised sport as the primary vehicle for health promotion, often over and above any contribution that HRE was deemed capable of making. For many of the PE teachers whose "philosophies" incorporated, at least in part, a commitment to a health ideology, sport appeared frequently to be perceived as the main vehicle for health promotion:

My view of PE is that, on the very basic level, I'm here to improve fitness, strength and promote health with all the kids ... my fundamental job is to raise levels of fitness and skill expertise in whatever area I'm working in ... *we're talking about why we need sport*, what they will get out of it as an individual, as a purely health-related thing, and how we want them to go on and be involved in sport for the rest of their lives (emphasis added).

The teachers frequently expressed the idea that PE in the form of sport and team games "does children good" and saw sport as being in the interests of both the physical and mental health of the individual:

I feel sport has a role to play on that ... fitness side of things ... And, again, it's the social side ... if you're committed to a sport and you are 14 or 15, you are far less likely to get involved with streetcorner gangs, far less likely to get involved with drugs and that side of things ... so it has a lot of good things that stop pupils getting involved with things that perhaps they shouldn't.

Many of the teachers were keen to show their concern with sport as a desirable vehicle for public health as much as the "health of the individual":

I think in general what it should offer is for pupils of all abilities to take part in some form of physical education ... [The] first reason I'll give is obviously the health of the nation, basically, and the health of the individual. A lot of kids nowadays ... are using ... things, other than sport, for their enjoyment in pastimes ... What we can do is try and offer a variety of sports so that somebody somewhere finds a sport they are interested in.

## **Education for leisure**

It was evident from a number of the teachers' comments that they perceived themselves as having responded to wider social trends regarding developments in youth culture:

... they [the pupils] have got other things to be interested in.  
... there's so many other things around now that we have to compete with ... which are offering ... adrenaline rushes ... So, I think we have to try and say, "Yes, we can achieve a high and an adrenaline rush from sports, as well as those other things, but on top of that we can offer you extra things and relationships of belonging, of physical wellbeing".

Various respondents appeared to perceive sport and PE as competing with alternative attractions:

... it's [PE] about ... participation ... hopefully ... that they try, that they want to do something outside ... in sport, in activities, in being active rather than sitting around and watching television ...

In addition, the teachers' responses suggested that they were aware of the desirability of encouraging enjoyment and competence in a breadth of sports. Such a perspective was

expressed in the following terms by two respondents:

... so that when they become adults ... they would have experienced and enjoyed a *cross-section* of sports, so that they are ... capable [enough] to go on and say, "Yes, I enjoyed that, I want to keep that going ... I know where I can go" and they can carry on playing (emphasis added).

I think it's important that our kids, when they actually leave school and they go [to] work ... *they feel able to join in with these things; they have a basic level of skills*, so that they don't think, "That's not for me" and "I don't know anything about it" (emphasis added).

I'm looking for when they leave school, [that they] continue ... some form of physical activity ... they've got enjoyment [from PE] in school... [and] want some form of activity to ensure they are healthy when they leave. That's my prime aim, I would say.

It was noticeable that the teachers frequently assumed that this continuing participation would be achieved through sport and sports clubs.

Many of the teachers commented upon their ostensible desire to encourage all pupils to acquire a commitment to physical activity in general and sport in particular. "Sport for all" was a particularly prominent "philosophy" in relation to teachers' views of girls. The teachers (and especially the female teachers) appeared particularly concerned with girls' health and fitness:

... in the last two or three years we've seen an increase, especially in the girls ... not wanting to do it. And the reason they don't want to do it is because they are unfit and overweight. ... [for girls] I'd drop athletics ... I'd do it a lot more as health-related, fitness orientated ... Why are we making them run around the track 3 3/4 times? ... they walk it... and that is a way of putting them off ... there [are] better ways of getting them interested in getting fit.

For many of the teachers, "activity choice" (or "options", as it is more commonly known) was viewed as an essential "tool of the trade" in terms of promoting commitment to a wide sporting repertoire and active lifestyles and, thus, health promotion. Nonetheless, it was noteworthy that, committed to "activity choice" as they professed to be, many teachers still viewed it as following on (chronologically and developmentally) from sports skill development. They saw the early years of secondary PE (years 7, 8 and 9: Key Stage 3) as focusing upon teaching "the basics"; in other words, the acquisition of "key" sporting (but also physical) skills that would, in their view, allow a more "recreational", leisure oriented emphasis in Key Stage 4 (years 10 and 11):

I suppose in Key Stage 3 we offer a more narrow curriculum in the more traditional type activities ... developing their skill ... Then, perhaps in Key Stage 4, we'd give them a wider choice of activities, things like they could take up when they leave school, things like that... to give them the opportunity to experience what there is available.

... first, second and third year (years 7, 8 and 9): they do netball, hockey, gym and dance, very traditional, very middle-of-the road type of things. Whereas (years 10 and 11) ... they go to the multi-gym, which is something they could actually go and do themselves. They get to have a go at badminton ... I think it is seen as more *recreation* ... let them just go and play, just go and do it (emphasis added).

In practice the choice of activities was far more likely to be of additional sports rather than physical recreation activities as such. This was the case even though many of the

teachers in this study were acutely aware that the staple PE diet, of sport and particularly team games, was not popular with many children:

... we might not be meeting the enthusiasm [of] certain pupils in certain sports. I mean, I'm not naive [enough] to think that everyone likes hockey, cricket, rounders, tennis or whatever we offer.

Thus, "activity choice" in PE was perceived by many of the teachers as a catalyst for encouraging the kinds of enjoyment and commitment likely to lead to longer term adherence to physical activity and, ultimately, to "active" and "healthy" lifestyles. Frequently, the teachers commented that, in their experience, offering pupils an element of "activity choice" had a positive effect on participation rates, especially with older pupils and girls. Once again, this was particularly the case in schools located in relatively deprived social areas: "the participation rate was brilliant ... our participation rate, our enjoyment rate, the success of the kids".

## Discussion

### Health promotion and teachers' "philosophies" of PE: the role of sport

The views of a good many PE teachers in the present study were heavily tinted with, and sometimes dominated by, health-related ideological justifications for PE. A commonsense "paramedical" role for PE, revolving around taken-for-granted assumptions regarding the relationship between sports performance, fitness and health (Waddington *et al*, 1997), had clearly infused these teachers' "philosophies". This is consistent with the claims of Gale (2000) and others (Harris, 1997; McGeorge, 1997; Harris and Penney, 2000).

It was noticeable that for almost all of the teachers who spoke of the value of HRE, sport was still seen as the main vehicle for health promotion via PE; not least because exercise was equated with fitness and fitness was, in turn, frequently equated with sport. The health "message" had, in many teachers' minds, become entwined with the lobby for sport in schools. It seems, then, that the sporting ideology that continues to infuse PE teachers' "philosophies" is particularly resistant to change. Indeed, the view that "sport is good for you" in a variety of ways, and especially in terms of health promotion, remains tantamount to orthodoxy among PE teachers.

### HRE programmes in practice

As we have said, it has been claimed that there has been a shift in emphasis in PE away from health-related *fitness* towards health-related *exercise* (Penney and Evans, 1999). However, this claim is difficult to square with the findings of this study and some other available evidence. The teaching of health in PE in England throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s typically featured a focus upon fitness testing (Harris, 1997), and that this continues to be the case is supported by both the findings reported here and Gale's (2000) recent study. The current findings call into question claims of a "sea-change" in the direction of an ideology of health and health promotion within PE. It seems that change, such as it is, may well be taking place alongside a great deal of continuity and that any change that may have occurred in the ideologies and practices of PE teachers in the last 15-20 years (Evans, 1992; Kirk, 1992) may not be as great nor as transformative as one might want, or be inclined, to believe. Sport, and especially team games, appears to remain at the heart of many teachers' "philosophies" (albeit frequently alongside other justificatory ideologies) and practice, and continues to form the centrepiece of curricular and extracurricular PE in secondary schools.

The continued popularity of the term "health-related fitness" at the school subject level suggests that PE teachers often confound the terms health and fitness, with the concomitant distortions in practice that oversimplification can bring. PE teachers in the present study continued to treat fitness and exercise as synonymous (Harris, 1994b), tending also to favour fitness-oriented activities, as well as fitness testing, in HRE lessons. Such fitness-oriented approaches persist despite the notable lack of evidence that fitness testing, in particular, increases activity levels (Harris, 1998), the likelihood that "low-fit children are demotivated by fitness tests" and the realisation that "Many pupils dislike exhausting and painful forms of exercise" (Harris, 1998, p. 20). Teachers' perceptions in this regard stand in marked contrast to the available evidence which suggests that it is young people's levels of physical activity, rather than physical fitness as such, which give cause for concern (Armstrong *et al*, 1998).

### **The block vs the permeation model**

Teachers in this study reported that they commonly taught using the "traditional" fitness-oriented, discrete "block" or unit of work form of delivery. This is in contrast to the results from Gale's (2000) study, wherein "the most common method of delivering HRE, adopted by one third of the schools, was through a combination of approaches", made up of the aforementioned blocks alongside integration through the activity areas and "widiin other areas of the school curriculum" (Gale, 2000, p. 76). The present study supports the findings of Harris (1994a) and Harris and Penney (2000) who observed that the teaching of HRE "remained characterized by variation in practices" (Harris and Penney, 2000, p. 250), and that many teachers still prefer to deliver it in discrete blocks.

The popularity of the "block" approach may be partly for pragmatic reasons, for example, ease of timetabling and delivery, but it may also be a means of allaying concerns among teachers regarding the identification of suitable opportunities for, as well as the delivery of, HRE material in some activity areas, such as games (Harris and Gale, 1997; Green and Lamb, 2000). It may also have some real advantages. Whilst HRE is meant to pervade all activity areas of NCPE, advocates of the role of PE in health promotion (e.g. Penney and Evans, 1999) have suggested that the favoured "permeation model" of HRE in the NCPE has served to marginalise health promotion. Penney and Evans (1999) also echo widespread concern among the "health lobby" with regard to the "potential loss" or disappearance of cross-curricular and permeating themes such as health promotion in practice.

### **Sport in schools and health promotion**

It would appear that, despite the growth in popularity of health promotion as a rationale for PE among teachers and HRE as its most common manifestation, traditional team games and sports remain at the heart of the PE curriculum (Roberts, 1995, 1996a, b; Penney and Evans, 1999). As Roberts noted, in the mid-1990s, "Neither PE teachers nor their colleagues (have) turned against Britain's traditional team sports" (Roberts, 1995, p. 339); games have maintained their prominent place on virtually all secondary PE curricula (Roberts, 1996a) as well as within extracurricular PE (Penney and Harris, 1997). It would, then, be a mistake to suggest that the traditionally dominant position of sport and games within PE has been radically weakened, or even undermined, by the emergence of the promotion of health or, for that matter, HRE.

In so far as they appear in schools at all, health-related activities appear largely confined to curricular PE, rarely being found in extracurricular PE. Extracurricular PE not only remains a significant dimension of PE in the minds of many teachers (Bass and Gale, 1999; Penney and Harris, 1997; Green, 2000b), it also continues to be dominated by traditional team games and sport, often to the exclusion of any health-related forms of

exercise (Bass and Gale, 1999). It is interesting to observe, however, that recent research (Fairclough *et al.*, forthcoming) calls this finding into question, claiming that "lifetime activities" are significantly more available as extracurricular activities than those provided in the curriculum itself, or, for that matter has hitherto been thought to be the case.

### **Education for leisure**

Various teachers in this study appeared to perceive sport and PE as competing with alternative attractions. This is consistent with the findings of Roberts (1995, 1996b, 1997, 1999) and Scraton (1992), who claim that since the 1970s teachers have been increasingly aware of, and have responded to, wider social trends regarding developments in youth culture. It supports Roberts' (1996b) claim that one of the reasons that PE has, over the last decade or so, been what he terms "a success story" in terms of young people's participation in a range of activities is that PE teachers have been "in tune" with young people's changing leisure lifestyles and circumstances.

In the light of the "healthy" and "active" schools policies, it is interesting to note that the lifestyle activities which, it is claimed, may have a greater impact upon adult physical activity levels "are in the minority within English physical education programmes" (Fairclough *et al.*, forthcoming, pp. 5, 6). PE curricula often devote over 50 per cent of available time to team games and sport. Many teachers retain a desire to provide older pupils with a degree of "activity choice" in PE (Green, 2000a), on what Roberts (1996a, b) would view as the correct assumption that active lifestyles are likely to be facilitated by a broad cross-section of involvement. However, ironically, such choice has been steadily diminished by the emergence and development of a prescriptive NCPE.

### **Conclusion: policy implications**

PE teachers are supposedly the vehicle through which "healthy" and "active" school policies are, at least in part, delivered. PE teachers are portrayed as nodal points at which several strands of health promotion policy in schools converge and as occupying central positions in the health and active schools policy networks. Their views as well as their practices regarding the promotion of health through PE are, then, highly relevant, as is the consistency and realism of policies towards health and activity that they are expected to implement.

It is apparent that the "gaps", between "policy" and "practice" in relation to health promotion in PE (Harris and Penney (2000, p. 250) remain. Such gaps appear more likely to become hardened rather than diminished when one considers that a sporting ideology remains strong. This ideology is apparent, not only in PE teachers' "philosophies" but also in much governmental policy, such as the repeated expressions of commitment to "reviving" competitive sport in PE (Carvel, 1999; Hencke, 2000; DCMS, 2001) and the DfEE and DCMS collaboration in "targeting" talented youngsters in pursuit of sporting "excellence" (DCMS, 2001). This remains the case, despite the stated intention to position HRE more centrally (in the latest revision of NCPE (DfEE and QCA, 1999)) and to promote "active" and "healthy" lifestyles (DoH, 1999; DfEE, 2000). In this regard, successive sports ministers' commitment to "changing the ethos of school sport" (Davies, 1999, p. 40), when placed alongside the government's evident concern for school sport as a vehicle for promoting active lifestyles, suggest that the constraints operating at the national and local level of PE teachers' networks (constraining them towards a sporting ideology) will limit any room for manoeuvre

towards any alternative position even more in the near future.

"Healthy schools" policy purports to promote a multi-agency or team-working approach to health, and encouraging schools towards developing partnerships with external agencies is also a feature of government policy towards PE (e.g. Carvel, 1999; Hencke, 2000). However, the links PE is being encouraged to pursue most assiduously are, for the most part, with sporting agencies. As Roberts (1996b, p. 113) observes, "making (sports) clubs more prominent" and concentrating on sport and team games in the PE curricula "will almost certainly lead to a flight from sport by Britain's young people".

The government appears to be exercising a lack of foresight, not least in terms of consideration of the ways in which apparently complementary policies might actually work against each other. It seems likely that the discourse of government policies, and even the policies themselves, simply reflect the preeminence of a sporting ideology at the national political level and, for that matter, amongst ministers central to the shaping of policy. In effect, this serves to constrain PE teachers towards the promotion of sport rather than the promotion of "healthy" and "active" schools.

In complex societies policy implementation is complicated. As de Swaan (2001) points out, it has become so complicated that, frequently, policy measures have effects quite different from those intended. Indeed, policies sometimes fail to have any effect at all. This, we would argue, is especially likely to be the case in an arena, physical education, where "tradition" has long been a vehicle for legitimising the status quo. At the level of policy, the healthy schools programme, in general, and the NHSS, in particular, reflect the work of the DfEE and the DoH working together. Another key player in school and PE policy communities, the DCMS, has not been directly involved. In the absence of a more coherent and consensual policy regarding physical activity and sport in relation to "healthy" and "active" schools, there appears very little likelihood of influencing PE teachers' thoughts and practices; strongly attached, as they often are, to a sporting ideology.

In the light of our findings we have to agree with Penney and Evans' (1999, p. 131) view that: "There remain tensions and contradictions between the discourses of sport and health in relation to physical education". Our findings lend support for Matthews' (2000) observation that: ... research findings and inspection reports indicate that a committed, comprehensive and coherent approach to health issues is rarely a feature of school physical education programmes in England and Wales. Confusion prevails regarding the complex and varied relationships between PE, sport, health and fitness.

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