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### Moving primary physical education forward

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1 **Moving primary physical education forward: start at the beginning**

2

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11

# **Moving primary physical education forward: start at the beginning**

This paper presents selected findings from a questionnaire completed by 509 primary school teachers in Scotland. Drawing on policy enactment theory, the paper focusses on teachers' personal experiences of physical education and perceptions of the importance of physical education in their schools. More than half (56%) reported that physical education was either 'very important' or 'important', while almost 40% perceived it to be of 'limited' or 'very limited importance'. 'Staff', 'time' and 'subject status' were the main themes they drew on to explain their responses. Our findings highlight the diverse nature of the physical education professional cultures in Scottish primary schools. From this, we propose that future initiatives to support change in primary physical education should, as a starting point, acknowledge these diverse professional cultures and move beyond the simplistic one-size-fits-all change projects that have been shown to have limited impact on practice.

Keywords: professional cultures, primary physical education, policy enactment, starting points, Scotland, subject status.

## **Introduction**

Since the turn of the century, as physical education has moved to a more prominent position within primary school curricula (see e.g. Petrie and Lisahunter 2011), government initiatives to improve the quality of the subject have been predicated upon top-down, linear and one-size-fits-all approaches. In this paper, working with key tenets from policy enactment theory (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012), we question the logic of this approach by exploring the different physical education professional cultures within Scottish primary schools. We aim to identify the similarities and diversities of schools' starting points as they begin to move physical education forward in line with the recommendations of the national Physical Education Review Group (Scottish Executive 2004a).

## **Background**

Traditionally, primary education in the UK has been developed around a multi-subject curriculum taught by generalist class teachers who teach most, if not all, subjects.

1 Within this curriculum structure, literacy and numeracy are consistently considered to  
2 be the ‘core’ subject areas (Kelly 2011), while the other subjects, sometimes called  
3 ‘foundation’ subjects (Department for Education and Science 1992), usually hold  
4 more marginal positions (Pickup and Price 2007). Consequently, concerns have been  
5 voiced about the quality of children’s learning experiences in these ‘foundation’  
6 subjects, both by educationalists and specialists in science, music, modern languages  
7 and other subject areas (e.g. Alexander 2012). With physical education traditionally  
8 viewed as one of these ‘foundation’ subjects, concerns about quality learning  
9 experiences have regularly been chronicled in both the professional (e.g. Carney and  
10 Winkler 2008) and academic (e.g. Ward and Griggs 2011) literature. Furthermore,  
11 within the field of physical education, most research and literature has concentrated  
12 on the secondary school years (Kirk 2005), with primary physical education  
13 traditionally receiving substantially less attention (Tsangaridou 2012). The signs for  
14 primary physical education, however, have recently been more encouraging, as it has  
15 begun to receive increased attention in political, professional and academic arenas.  
16 This change in fortune is largely due to the growing perception that physical  
17 education experiences during the formative years have the potential to help address  
18 the concerns regularly raised about children’s health and wellbeing, physical activity  
19 levels and sport participation (Petrie and lisahunter 2011). As such, there are signs  
20 that primary physical education is beginning to take a more central position within the  
21 primary school curriculum (e.g. Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) 2009).

22 While this increased attention is to be welcomed, and indeed may secure the  
23 place of physical education in the primary curriculum for the medium and even longer  
24 term, a concurrent increase in research activity has consistently concluded that  
25 primary physical education is ‘broken’ and in need of being ‘fixed’ (Griggs 2007;

1 Morgan and Bourke 2008; Tsangaridou 2014). This ‘broken’ narrative has focussed  
2 on a number of interrelated factors that appear to inhibit primary teachers from  
3 providing children with quality learning experiences in physical education. Morgan  
4 and Bourke (2008, 2) propose that these inhibiting factors are both teacher-related and  
5 institutional factors outside of teachers’ control, and seem to be concentrated around  
6 four key barriers: “inadequate training; lack of time and interest; limited support and  
7 resources; and low levels of teacher confidence”.

8         At the teacher-level, negative perceptions of, and a lack of confidence to teach,  
9 physical education are often connected to teachers’ personal experiences as learners  
10 (Faulkner, Reeves, and Chedzoy 2004; Morgan and Hansen 2008a; Webster 2011).  
11 Concurrent with teacher socialisation literature (Lawson 1983a, 1983b), Morgan and  
12 Hansen (2008a) suggest that there is a tendency for primary teachers to replicate their  
13 personal learning experiences of physical education within their teaching practice. In  
14 particular, these authors argue that, because many teachers experienced a games and  
15 sport-oriented curriculum during their own schooling, they believe that this is what  
16 physical education should involve. Consequently, the approach to teaching and  
17 learning in physical education adopted by many generalist class teachers often reflects  
18 this perception. However, criticism has been widely levied against this dominant sport  
19 and games ideology (Jess, Atencio, and Thorburn 2011) and the negative impact it  
20 may have on the quality of children’s learning experiences (Morgan and Hansen  
21 2008a). As such, it is perhaps not surprising that primary teachers often express  
22 negative perceptions of physical education (Harris, Cale, and Musson 2011).

23         At the institutional level, further contributing factors to the negative  
24 perceptions of primary physical education are inadequate initial teacher education  
25 (ITE) and continuing professional development (CPD). Many scholars have voiced

1 concerns about the adequacy of physical education courses in primary ITE (e.g. Blair  
2 and Capel 2011; Griggs 2007, 2012; Harris, Cale, and Musson 2011; Jones and Green  
3 2015; lisahunter 2006; Tsangaridou 2014; Ward 2013; Ward and Griggs, 2011). Two  
4 of the main problems identified are the limited amount of time dedicated to the  
5 subject and the lack of opportunities to teach physical education as part of practicum  
6 (Faulkner, Reeves, and Chedzoy 2004; Morgan and Hansen 2008b; Ward and Griggs  
7 2011). In addition, as teachers' careers evolve, their CPD experiences in physical  
8 education tend to be characterised by short, one-off, off-site workshops delivered by  
9 'experts' (Armour and Duncombe 2004; Blair and Capel 2011; Harris, Cale, and  
10 Musson 2012; Jess and McEvilly 2015; Ward and Griggs 2011). However, such  
11 'quick fix' approaches to educational change (LeCompte 2009) have increasingly  
12 been discredited due to their fragmented nature, disconnection from practice within  
13 the school context, limited impact on teachers' practice, and positioning of teachers as  
14 passive recipients in the change process (Armour and Yelling 2004; Bechtel and  
15 O'Sullivan 2006; Guskey 2002). A further problematic assumption is that teachers  
16 attending these short courses are often expected to take on the role of change agents  
17 by cascading the new ideas and practices to colleagues within their own schools  
18 (Kennedy 2005).

19 Other institutional factors identified by Morgan and Hansen (2008b) as  
20 barriers to quality primary physical education include: insufficient time, lack of  
21 support, and inadequate resources. These authors emphasise how the crowded primary  
22 school curriculum, with its strong focus on numeracy and literacy, detracts time and  
23 attention away from physical education. Both DeCorby et al. (2005) and Morgan and  
24 Hansen (2007) report that, contributing to the lack of time dedicated to physical

1 education, there is often inadequate whole school planning and informed leadership to  
2 support the physical education curriculum.

3 Cumulatively, while primary physical education may be experiencing a  
4 positive moment in the spotlight, the literature base suggests that there is a  
5 considerable way to go before any significant improvement can be witnessed. In  
6 particular, the barriers to primary teachers' engagement with physical education seem  
7 to impact adversely on the quality of physical education in primary schools, as well as  
8 on the status of the subject (Pickup and Price 2007).

### 10 ***Grappling with the change process***

11 As primary physical education receives more attention, a variety of government  
12 interventions have been implemented to support teachers. In England, for example,  
13 nationally-supported schemes that have set out to support primary teachers' CPD  
14 include the National PE and School Sport Professional Development Programme  
15 (Armour and Duncombe 2004), the TOP Sport programme (Harris, Cale, and Musson  
16 2011) and the school sports partnership programme (Mackintosh 2014). Similar  
17 government-supported schemes in Scotland include the Active Schools Project (Reid  
18 and Thorburn 2011) and the Scottish Primary Physical Education Project (Elliot et al.  
19 2013). While this support is to be welcomed, progress has generally been slow and  
20 many of the concerns noted above are still evident (Elliot and Campbell 2015; Griggs  
21 2012; Harris, Cale, and Musson 2011). We suggest that this lack of progress stems  
22 largely from a limited understanding of the complex nature of the change process  
23 (Cothran 2001) and, in particular, policymakers' apparent tendency to view the  
24 implementation of educational policy as a relatively linear and straightforward  
25 process (Morrison 2003).

1           As noted earlier, this one-dimensional and linear perception has resulted in  
2 much of the physical education CPD offered to generalist class teachers aligning with  
3 the traditional ‘quick fix’, short course and de-contextualised approach to the change  
4 process. Therefore, while there may be increased interest in primary physical  
5 education across educational, sport and health arenas, we propose that there is a need  
6 to move beyond this traditional top-down, one-size-fits-all CPD approach and explore  
7 ways to support teachers and schools to more effectively engage in a long-term  
8 change process. Accordingly, we align with Harris, Cale, and Musson’s (2012, 378)  
9 proposal that effective primary physical education CPD “engages teachers and their  
10 colleagues in long-term collaborative endeavours that support transformative  
11 practice”. In addition, we take the view that this re-orientation process will not only  
12 require an acknowledgement of the complex nature of the change process, but a better  
13 understanding of, and engagement with, the change knowledge that offers the  
14 potential for teachers and schools to engage in a more strategic and long-term  
15 approach (Fullan 2004). Such an approach seeks to actively engage with the situated  
16 and emergent nature of the change process.

17           From this perspective, we contend that the foundation for any long-term  
18 progress in primary physical education needs to be built on a detailed understanding  
19 of the different starting points (Senge 1990), or ‘initial conditions’ (Mason 2008), of  
20 the teachers and schools involved. By saying this, we do not suggest that this  
21 understanding should, or even could, be used to accurately predict what may happen  
22 in the future (Mason 2008). Critically, we argue that this understanding will help  
23 those involved in the change process recognise how, at any given time, the starting  
24 points of different teachers and schools are predicated on “a specific and particular  
25 history of interactions” (Haggis 2008, 168) that come together to create unique



1 contexts that are “messy, idiosyncratic and generally mystifying” (Haggis 2008, 169).  
2 We propose that treating all teachers and primary schools as ‘broken’ fails to  
3 acknowledge the different starting points that exist across the system. We therefore  
4 take the view that gathering appropriate information from teachers themselves will  
5 allow future developments to move from a one-size-fits-all ‘quick fix’ remedy to an  
6 approach based on a more informed understanding of the teachers and schools  
7 involved in the change process. As such, we advocate for change projects that are  
8 based on shared collaborations between government policy-makers and the bottom-  
9 up, contextually-situated approaches developed by schools and teachers (Fullan  
10 1993).

11 However, with teachers traditionally having limited active participation in  
12 change projects of this nature, and with primary physical education long marginalised,  
13 we acknowledge that many primary teachers and schools are unlikely to currently  
14 have the capacity to make a significant and long-lasting contribution to effective  
15 change in primary physical education. Therefore, while current top-down CPD  
16 projects will likely continue to disappoint, we advocate a long-term view that supports  
17 a change process in primary physical education that helps teachers and schools build  
18 this capacity to cope with, negotiate and influence the change process. To do this, we  
19 suggest that the key factors presented in policy enactment theory (Ball, Maguire, and  
20 Braun 2012) can act as a useful starting point for this longitudinal project.

21

## 22 ***Enacting policy***

23 Building on the key points raised in the previous section, we propose that engagement  
24 with policy enactment theory (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012) offers an opportunity  
25 to move away from straightforward notions of linear policy implementation towards

1 more social constructivist (Vygotsky 1978), situated (Lave and Wenger 1991) and  
2 complexity-oriented (Ovens, Hopper, and Butler 2013) approaches in which teachers  
3 and schools are viewed as active participants engaged in a non-linear, collaborative  
4 and localised professional learning process. Policy enactment theory is based on the  
5 argument that policymakers have failed to recognise schools as complex phenomena  
6 that are “far more differentiated and loosely assembled than is often thought to be the  
7 case” (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 144). The linear implementation of policy in  
8 schools is inappropriate, therefore, because “policies are intimately shaped and  
9 influenced by school-specific factors which act as constraints, pressures and enablers  
10 of policy enactments” (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 19). To make better sense of  
11 this enactment process, Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2012) have conceptualised four  
12 interrelated dimensions which they propose have a strong influence on the enactment  
13 process in schools: external, material and situated contexts, and professional cultures  
14 (see Table 1).

15

16 [Table 1]

17

18 Table 1 shows that, in addition to broader external influences, schools vary in relation  
19 to their situated histories and locations, and material contexts. These immediate  
20 contextual dimensions consequently ‘afford’ teachers and schools opportunities to  
21 engage with different subject-specific tasks in different ways. The more immediate  
22 situated and material contexts within each school act as “a mediating factor in the  
23 policy enactment work done in schools – and [they are] unique to each school,  
24 however similar they may initially seem to be” (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 40).

1 Interacting with these different contextual influences, teachers and senior managers  
2 within any given school collectively create a school's professional culture in terms of  
3 its ethos, values and commitments towards all aspects of the education process. Each  
4 of these 'actors' brings different experiences and thoughts to the policy enactment  
5 process because they all have "different forms of 'training', discursive histories,  
6 epistemological worldviews and professional commitments" (Ball, Maguire, and  
7 Braun 2012, 145). Accordingly, each school develops its own "indigenous knowledge  
8 system" over time (Rogers 1995, 5), in which locally created knowledges and  
9 practices passed down over many years have a powerful influence on the adoption of  
10 new ideas and policies. With so many 'actors' working within each school, this  
11 professional culture dimension is usually "multi-faceted and muddled" (Ball,  
12 Maguire, and Braun 2012, 29).

13 In relation to this paper, we argue that the multi-faceted nature of professional  
14 cultures has a significant impact on the way primary school teachers and senior  
15 management view primary physical education, how the subject is approached, and  
16 how it connects with national policy aspirations. As such, this study seeks to  
17 investigate how, as a starting point, physical education is positioned within the  
18 professional cultures of primary schools in Scotland. Consequently, before we focus  
19 on the data generated with teachers across a range of Scottish primary schools, we  
20 provide information in relation to the external policy context in Scotland and how it  
21 currently frames physical education in primary schools.

22

### 23 ***The external context for primary physical education in Scotland***

24 In the post-devolution period (i.e. since 1999), and in response to concerns raised  
25 about the nation's health and physical activity levels (Scottish Executive 1998) and

1 the quality of primary physical education (HMIe 2001), physical activity and physical  
2 education have emerged as topics of particular policy interest in Scotland. The first  
3 national Physical Education Review Group (PERG) was set up in 2002 and, two years  
4 later, presented a vision for physical education in line with the Scottish Executive's  
5 education, social justice and lifelong learning agendas (Scottish Executive 2004b).  
6 The group's recommendations were to herald a move for physical education away  
7 from the margins of education, with the subject being recognised as "an area of the  
8 curriculum which, exceptionally, needs greater priority to support the health and well-  
9 being of young people" (Scottish Executive 2004c, 1).

10 The PERG created this context for change in primary physical education by  
11 making a number of key recommendations (Scottish Executive 2004a), including: a  
12 move to at least two hours of physical education per week for all children; an  
13 improved curriculum; every primary school having access to support from a physical  
14 education specialist teacher; and CPD opportunities to address the concern that "the  
15 levels of confidence, skills and knowledge of class teachers vary considerably"  
16 (Scottish Executive 2004a, 30). Following an extensive curriculum review between  
17 2004 and 2009, the process of implementing the PERG recommendations commenced  
18 (LTS 2009). Notably, physical education moved from the Expressive Arts subject area  
19 to the new core curriculum area of Health and Wellbeing, and became the only  
20 curriculum subject afforded a specific time allocation: two hours per week.

21 In 2006, as these new policies were being developed, the Scottish Executive  
22 Education Department commissioned the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow to  
23 develop and deliver new part-time master's level postgraduate certificate in primary  
24 physical education (PgCPPE) programmes. The programmes were specifically created  
25 in response to the PERG recommendations and set out to enable generalist primary

1 classroom teachers to develop a specialism in physical education. Between 2006 and  
2 2013, enrolment on the PgCPPE programmes was free to all registered teachers in  
3 Scotland and 1,300 teachers availed of the opportunity to participate. As this long-  
4 running CPD project has evolved, data have been generated with the participating  
5 teachers on a range of topics. This paper focusses on teachers who entered the  
6 programmes between 2006 and 2010 and, in line with the issues discussed earlier,  
7 examines two key aspects of the teachers' perceptions of the primary physical  
8 education professional cultures within their schools: their personal experiences of  
9 physical education as pupils, students and teachers, and their perceptions of the  
10 relative importance of physical education in their schools. As such, the paper seeks to  
11 explore the physical education professional cultures within Scottish primary schools  
12 in order to identify the similarities and diversities of their starting points as they began  
13 to engage with the key PERG recommendations (Scottish Executive 2004a).

14

## 15 **Methods**

16 This study was approved by the ethics committee of the Faculty of Education, the  
17 University of Glasgow. Participants were teachers beginning the PgCPPE  
18 programmes between October 2006 and September 2010. The teachers were asked to  
19 complete a baseline questionnaire featuring a variety of questions related to their  
20 experiences of physical education, including their personal physical education  
21 histories and their perceptions of the importance of physical education in their  
22 schools. Of the 917 teachers enrolled on the programmes during this period, 509  
23 responded to the questionnaire; the response rate was therefore 56%.

24 The current paper focusses on the teachers' responses to a number of questions  
25 related to factors influencing the physical education professional culture in their

1 schools. These include, firstly, questions related to their personal experiences of  
2 physical education as pupils, students and teachers and, secondly, the question, ‘What  
3 is the relative importance of physical education within your school?’ This question  
4 featured two parts. First, participants were asked to select one of the following four  
5 response options: very important; important; limited importance; very limited  
6 importance. They were then asked to provide additional comments. To analyse the  
7 comments, we divided them into five categories according to how the teachers  
8 answered the first part of the question (the fifth category being ‘Did not respond’). We  
9 used Microsoft Excel to analyse the quantitative data and produce descriptive  
10 statistics. With the qualitative data, we followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) guidelines  
11 for thematic analysis. This procedure involved reading and re-reading the teachers’  
12 comments to become familiar with the data and generate initial codes, in order to  
13 identify and define the patterns, or themes, that were evident. In the discussion that  
14 follows, responses that were categorised according to these themes have been  
15 amalgamated to highlight key similarities and differences in the primary physical  
16 education professional cultures of the primary schools. All quotations from the  
17 questionnaires feature direct spelling and grammar from the responses. To protect  
18 participants’ anonymity, we reference quotations with the number each questionnaire  
19 was assigned during data entry and analysis.

20

## 21 **Findings**

22 We begin this section by presenting background information about the PgCPPE  
23 teachers, before discussing their responses to the questions that focussed on their  
24 personal experiences of physical education as pupils, ITE students and teachers, and  
25 how they perceived physical education in the primary schools in which they worked.

1 The paper will conclude by discussing how the findings highlight that the different  
2 primary physical education professional cultures across the schools can act as the  
3 catalyst to inform a more strategic change process in the future.

#### 4 5 ***Teachers' backgrounds***

6 A significant majority of the teachers in this study were women (371, 73%). In  
7 Scotland, 92% of primary teachers are women (Scottish Government 2011), which  
8 indicates that a higher proportion of men were attracted to the PgCPPE programmes  
9 than would be representative of the primary teaching profession. Almost half of the  
10 respondents (248, 49%) belonged to the youngest cohort, 21 to 30 years, which  
11 implies that many respondents were recently qualified teachers at early stages of their  
12 careers. Indeed, 73% of the teachers (n = 372) indicated that they had been teaching  
13 for ten or fewer years. Almost all the teachers (464, 91%) had completed either a  
14 Bachelor of Primary Education degree or a Postgraduate Certificate/Diploma in  
15 Primary Education to enter the teaching profession. More than three-quarters (398,  
16 78%) were class teachers, while a small number (31, 6%) were specialist teachers of  
17 primary physical education. Most participants (318, 62%) taught Primary One to  
18 Primary Seven classes, while 2% (n = 9) taught preschool and 2% (n = 8) taught some  
19 secondary school classes. The 117 responses (23%) categorised as 'Other' included  
20 'nursery to P3', 'nursery – Primary 7 music', 'various' and 'supply teacher covering  
21 any stage as necessary'. Most of the teachers (274, 54%) were only responsible for  
22 teaching physical education to their own classes. Eighty-three (16%) taught physical  
23 education to both their own classes and other classes, while one in ten (50, 10%) was  
24 responsible for teaching physical education to all classes at their schools.

# ***Teachers' personal histories and perceptions of their teaching of physical education***

In line with key concepts from Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2012), this section explores the personal histories and views the teachers held about their teaching of physical education. As such, we seek to identify how the similarities and differences between these experiences and views are likely to influence the professional cultures within the teachers' schools.

In terms of their personal histories, a significant majority of the teachers indicated that their personal physical education experiences as pupils at primary school (408, 80%) and secondary school (392, 77%) were either 'good' or 'very good'. While this finding may differ from much of the previous research (e.g. Morgan and Bourke 2008), given the number of teachers who enrolled on these programmes, it would suggest that more primary teachers may have enjoyed their school experiences of physical education than is commonly presented in the literature. We recognise, however, that teachers who had chosen to undertake postgraduate study in physical education may have had more positive experiences in physical education than would be representative of primary teachers generally.

In addition to their school experiences, when asked about the adequacy of their ITE physical education courses, there was a clear split in perception. While more than half of the teachers (289, 57%) described their ITE as either 'very adequate' or 'adequate', almost two-fifths (201, 39%) claimed these experiences were either 'inadequate' or 'very inadequate'. Furthermore, almost three-quarters of the teachers (371, 73%) described their experiences as either 'very appropriate' or 'appropriate', whereas more than one fifth (106, 21%) described their ITE experiences as either 'inappropriate' or 'very inappropriate'. These findings suggest that the teachers in this study entered their teaching careers with varying views on their competence to teach



1 physical education. When asked to describe their physical education CPD  
2 experiences, the teachers' responses highlighted a wide range of short, off-site,  
3 activity-specific courses that, while generally well-received, were haphazard in terms  
4 of content and impact on professional learning. As such, while most participants may  
5 have indicated they had enjoyed their personal experiences of physical education as  
6 pupils, their perceptions of their experiences in ITE and during their teaching careers  
7 to date suggested diverse professional learning journeys.

8         This apparent diversity was accentuated when the teachers were asked to rate  
9 aspects of their teaching of physical education. While there was considerable  
10 agreement about some aspects of their practice (e.g. 457 (89.4%) considered  
11 themselves to be 'good' or 'very good' at teaching games), there were significant  
12 differences across a range of other features. For instance, while 219 teachers (44.8%)  
13 considered themselves to be 'good' or 'very good' at teaching gymnastics, 236  
14 (46.2%) thought they were 'not so good' or 'poor'. This finding was mirrored in  
15 dance, where 253 (50.1%) thought they were 'good' or 'very good', and 216 (42.3%)  
16 considered themselves to be 'not so good' or 'poor'. In relation to 'Individualising  
17 learning intentions', 213 (41.7%) felt 'good' or 'very good' and 276 (53.2%)  
18 considered themselves to be 'not so good' or 'poor'. Regarding 'Differentiating  
19 Tasks', 264 (51.9%) teachers perceived themselves to be 'good' or 'very good', with  
20 230 (44.2%) 'not so good' or 'poor'. When asked about 'Assessment', 292 (57.2%)  
21 teachers were positive about their teaching, with 191 (37.3%) less so. In addition,  
22 while fewer teachers reported teaching outdoor education and early years movement,  
23 there was a clear disparity between the teachers with 44.1% and 46.2% respectively  
24 feeling 'good' or 'very good' and 25.2% and 30% feeling less positive about their  
25 teaching. With such a diversity of views evident, these findings suggest that there

1 were significant differences in the ways the teachers approached the teaching of  
2 physical education.

3 Overall the findings from this section indicate that this group of teachers have  
4 a diverse range of personal and professional histories that are likely to result in  
5 significant differences in their primary physical education practices. As Ball, Maguire  
6 and Braun (2012) suggest, this diversity of thinking and practice is likely to have a  
7 significant influence on the (primary physical education) professional cultures within  
8 the teachers' schools.

### 10 *Physical education in the primary schools*

11 Acknowledging the differences in the teachers' experiences and views of their own  
12 physical education teaching, their perceptions of the subject within their current  
13 school settings provided an even more pronounced imbalance. This discrepancy was  
14 particularly noticeable in the responses to one specific question: 'What is the relative  
15 importance of physical education within your school?' While more than half of the  
16 teachers (285, 56%) indicated that physical education was either 'very important' or  
17 'important' in their schools, almost two fifths (200, 39%) considered physical  
18 education to be of 'limited importance' or 'very limited importance' in their schools  
19 (see Figure 1).

21 [Figure 1]

23 For this question, the teachers were also asked to provide additional comments to  
24 explain their responses, and more than half of them (282, 55%) did so. Analysis of  
25 these responses offers a more detailed insight into the reasons for these differing

perceptions and revealed three interrelated themes as the key influencing factors: ‘Staff’ (167, 59%), ‘Time’ (82, 29%), and ‘Subject status’ (44, 16%). We now discuss these three key themes.

### *Staff*

School staff members, both class teachers and senior management, were considered key to the way physical education was viewed in schools. In schools where the participants indicated that physical education was considered ‘important’ or ‘very important’, most of the comments about the ways staff engaged with physical education were positive. For example, in schools where physical education was deemed ‘very important’, one teacher stated that “staff realise the importance of PE and encourage children to take part at all times” (questionnaire 64), while another noted that the “HT [head teacher] also values its place in the school curriculum and attempts to provide as much PE as the timetable will allow” (questionnaire 82). Similarly, in those schools where physical education was perceived to be ‘important’, comments included:

“I think all teachers in the school realise the importance of PE and in this technological world that we live, we have an important role to encourage children to be physically active” (questionnaire 43)

“Most teachers work hard to teach 2 hours of PE” (questionnaire 151).

However, this category also included a number of less positive comments, such as:

1           “Some staff seem to lack confidence in this area” (questionnaire 135)

2

3           “Important to a group of us on the staff, but limited importance to some and  
4           particularly the head teacher” (questionnaire 92).

5

6   In those schools where physical education was considered to be less important,  
7   teachers’ remarks were consistently less positive. Comments included: “management  
8   would say ‘important’ but other staff do not show this attitude” (questionnaire 97) and  
9   “I don’t think it is particularly important to many of the staff members” (questionnaire  
10   215). In the ‘very limited importance’ category, teachers went as far as to say “Most  
11   staff not interested” (questionnaire 28) and “Staff do not believe PE should be given 2  
12   hours per week as it has impacted on other subjects” (questionnaire 174).

13           These conflicting comments indicate that, while a small majority of teachers  
14   perceived physical education to be an important feature within their schools, there  
15   were a significant number of schools where staff engagement with physical education  
16   was much less positive.

17

### 18   *Time*

19   With the two hours of physical education per week recommendation increasingly  
20   embedded within policy documentation (LTS 2009), the teachers’ comments  
21   suggested that their colleagues’ views about curriculum time for physical education  
22   had become a key indicator of physical education’s perceived importance in their  
23   schools. In the ‘very important’ and ‘important’ categories, teachers presented a range  
24   of positive comments that included:

25

1 “PE occurs every day for a minimum of 15 minutes” (questionnaire 94)  
2  
3 “This session there is a big push on more allocation of time for PE and outdoor  
4 activity” (questionnaire 334)  
5  
6 “Important in so far as all classes get 2 hours” (questionnaire 84)  
7  
8 “Staff are keen to fit in 2 hrs of P.E.” (questionnaire 387)  
9  
10 On the other hand, in the ‘limited importance’ category, the comments were less  
11 positive about or less supportive of the time issue. For example, teachers highlighted  
12 how timetabling and facilities represented significant problems:  
13  
14 “Due to packed curriculum other things take priority” (questionnaire 315)  
15  
16 “Within a cluttered timetable, PE seems to be one of the areas that can get  
17 side-tracked” (questionnaire 235)  
18  
19 “I think that the hall time allocation sometimes prevent quality PE lessons  
20 from taking place” (questionnaire 432)  
21  
22 “Teachers recognise its importance but there is so much pressure on the  
23 timetable it is difficult for them to always fit it in” (questionnaire 470)  
24

1 Furthermore, in the ‘very limited importance’ category, comments such as “The 2 hrs  
2 per week has never really been discussed and I get the impression this is not possible  
3 at our school. Too many classes for one gym” (questionnaire 243), suggest some  
4 resistance to the notion of having more physical education in some schools.

5

#### 6 *Subject status*

7 Closely linked to these comments about time pressures and curricular priorities, the  
8 perceived status of physical education was reported to have a significant influence on  
9 the importance of the subject in the schools. In schools where physical education was  
10 deemed to be ‘very important’ or ‘important’, evidence of the high status of physical  
11 education was often related to the current health agenda in Scotland with little, if any,  
12 mention of the sport focus that has long been considered the key feature of primary  
13 physical education (Griggs 2007). Comments in the ‘very important’ category  
14 included:

15

16 “As a health promoting school we see PE and physical activity as very  
17 important” (questionnaire 45)

18

19 “We’re all very aware of the need to educate children in the importance of  
20 physical activity and healthy choices” (questionnaire 488)

21

22 Likewise, a teacher from one of the schools in the ‘important’ category noted: “All  
23 teachers see importance of all round health promotion” (questionnaire 55).

24 Subsequently, and possibly because of the current policy imperatives discussed

1 earlier, the high status of physical education was often based on its perceived  
2 relationship to health and physical activity agendas.

3 Conversely, in schools where physical education was considered to be less  
4 important, the teachers indicated that the subject's status was lower. For example, one  
5 teacher noted that "Reading, writing, maths deemed more important. Literacy is a LA  
6 [local authority] priority" (questionnaire 152) while another, more cynically,  
7 commented that:

8  
9 "In my opinion attainment in numeracy and literacy, business enterprise and  
10 wall displays are priorities at my school. PE only seems to be important when  
11 tournaments come around (a chance to invite local press to take  
12 photographs!)" (questionnaire 273)

13  
14 In agreement, another teacher highlighted that "PE is very often sidelined if the hall is  
15 required for other activities" (questionnaire 307).

16 Therefore, with the raised national focus on health and physical activity, there  
17 seemed to be a considerable difference in the status of physical education across  
18 different primary schools. In alignment with much of the primary physical education  
19 literature, in those schools where physical education was perceived to be less  
20 important, it had lower status than other 'core' subject areas, while in schools where  
21 physical education was considered to be important, its higher status was aligned with  
22 the health agenda that has become a key feature of the Scottish policy landscape.

23 Overall, the findings highlight significant differences in both the physical  
24 education experiences of the teachers and the perceptions of physical education across  
25 a wide range of Scottish primary schools. As such, we suggest that the primary

1 physical education professional cultures across many of these schools will likely be  
2 quite diverse and, as schools begin to engage with the Scottish Government's policy  
3 aspirations for primary physical education, their capacity to participate in this process  
4 will be varied.

## 6 **Discussion and conclusion**

7 While it is encouraging that improvements in primary physical education have  
8 become increasingly recognised as a key feature of education, health and sport policy  
9 agendas, we have suggested in this paper that the approaches employed to bring these  
10 policy aspirations to fruition have largely been based on well-meaning but ill-  
11 informed transmission models of professional development. Little, if any,  
12 acknowledgement has been given to the complex nature of the change process at the  
13 individual levels of the teacher and the school. Drawing on the work of Ball, Maguire,  
14 and Braun (2012), we argue that there is a need to move beyond the 'quick fix'  
15 approaches that have long hampered sustainable change, and consider how key  
16 features of policy enactment theory, particularly our understanding of schools'  
17 professional cultures, can act as the catalyst for a strategic engagement with the  
18 complexity of the change process. Exploring the professional cultures of a range of  
19 primary schools may help us develop a better understanding of the diverse starting  
20 points that primary schools have as they engage with primary physical education  
21 policy aspirations. Consequently, by positioning this study in post-devolution  
22 Scotland, where primary physical education has received recent political support, we  
23 have set out to explore the readiness of primary schools across Scotland to engage  
24 with this complex change process.



1           Based on the responses from more than 500 teachers enrolled on PgCPPE  
2 programmes, the paper has investigated key factors influencing the primary physical  
3 education professional cultures across a wide range of primary schools. While our  
4 findings are in accord with much of the previous primary physical education research  
5 (e.g. Petrie 2010), a key finding is that the primary physical education professional  
6 cultures across the schools are considerably more diverse than has often been reported  
7 in the literature (e.g. Morgan and Bourke 2008). While similarities are noted, it is  
8 particularly noticeable that many of the teachers held contrasting views about their  
9 personal primary physical education professional practice and the ways that physical  
10 education was viewed within their schools. In terms of their primary physical  
11 education teaching, while large numbers considered that they were able to  
12 differentiate learning experiences in primary physical education, others were more  
13 likely to facilitate learning experiences focussed on whole class activities. In addition,  
14 when discussing their perceptions of the relative importance of physical education  
15 within their schools, the teachers reported significantly different views on the basis of  
16 staff engagement, the practicalities of teaching two hours of curriculum physical  
17 education each week, and the status of physical education in their schools. These data  
18 suggest considerable diversity in the primary physical education professional cultures  
19 in primary schools across Scotland.

20           With this diversity as a starting point, it is difficult to envisage how a  
21 traditional primary physical education CPD approach could have a significant  
22 influence on the change process in primary school settings. We would suggest,  
23 therefore, that if the primary physical education agenda is to make progress in  
24 schools, it is critical that those involved in the leadership and management of this  
25 change agenda develop a better understanding of the ‘change knowledge’ that has

1    been missing in previous efforts. This is not to suggest that traditional CPD courses do  
2    not have a place in the change process or that primary schools do not have many  
3    similarities in terms of primary physical education. However, there is enough  
4    evidence to show that traditional implementation strategies have limited impact on  
5    teachers' practice (Armour and Duncombe 2004; Deglau and O'Sullivan 2006) and,  
6    we would suggest, the primary physical education professional cultures of primary  
7    schools. As such, we strongly suggest that there is a need for a more strategic, long-  
8    term and situated approach to primary physical education development: an approach  
9    that specifically sets out to help staff and schools build the capacity to design and  
10    facilitate primary physical education learning experiences that are appropriate for all  
11    children across their primary school years. For this to happen, we acknowledge that  
12    collective school 'buy-in' to a long-term project of this nature will be a complex  
13    cognitive and emotional process and will require professional development leaders  
14    from schools, local authorities, national organisations and universities to re-think the  
15    way the professional cultures of primary schools can be supported to build primary  
16    physical education capacity over time. We argue that this re-orientation in approach is  
17    critical because, as we have highlighted in this paper, the primary physical education  
18    professional cultures in Scottish primary schools, and we suggest elsewhere, are  
19    considerably more diverse than many envisage. We simply cannot continue to spend  
20    the money and give up the time on change programmes that have little chance of  
21    moving primary physical education forward.

22

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- 26

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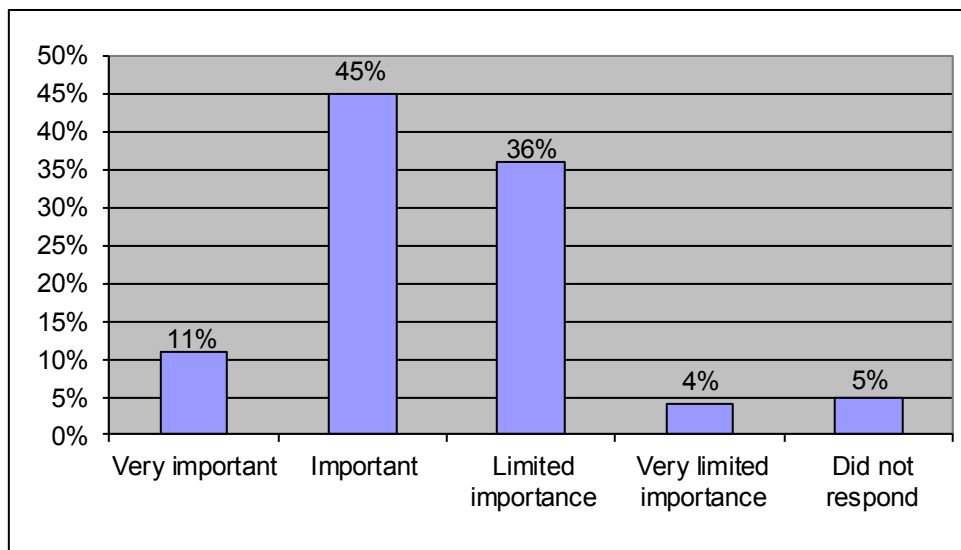
2 Table 1: The policy enactment dimensions (adapted from Ball, Maguire, and Braun  
3 2012).

<b>External contexts</b>	Degree and quality of local authority support, and pressures and expectations from broader policy context.
<b>Situated contexts</b>	Examples include local communities, school histories and pupil intakes.
<b>Material contexts</b>	Examples include staffing, budgeting, buildings, technology and infrastructure.
<b>Professional cultures</b>	Developed around teacher values, teacher commitments and experiences, and ‘policy management’ in schools.

4

5

6



7 Figure 1: What is the relative importance of PE within your school? (n = 509)

8