The Value Of Teaching Physical Education Within The Primary Curriculum

As primary education has moved further towards the academic, the value in subjects such as physical education has been questioned. Many may believe that its influence for later life is limited and there is not much more to offer than helping children fight off obesity. Splitting the values of P.E into groups will help to explain its crucial role on the national curriculum.

Firstly an obvious grouping of its merit can be seen its aid in physical health, this includes things such as fighting obesity. This is crucial in today's society as in 2015/16, over 1 in 3 children in Year 6 and over 1 in 5 children in Reception were measured as obese or overweight (Statistics team NHS digital 2017). It is important to try and reduce this as obesity in childhood can add up to health problems in the future. In adults, obesity is linked with the increased risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes -high blood sugar- certain cancers, and other chronic conditions (NIH 2013). Physical education not only maintains children's fitness whilst they are in school but helps to spark a good relationship with keeping fit and a healthy lifestyle which will continue to serve them as the children enter adulthood. Exciting P.E lessons can help foster a love for sports and ensure that good habits are kept up. These lessons can be done through creative approaches such as mirroring them to present sporting events such as teamed football tournaments if the world cup is current or linking them to pop culture by making fictional games from movies come true such as an adapted game of Quidditch from the Harry potter franchise.

Physical education at a young age also helps to develop fundamental movement skills which allows children to develop physical literacy. These are the skills that support children’s coordination and movement.The opportune moment for children to develop these skills seises at age 8, after this age children will find it difficult to develop and apply the foundations for everyday movement (Early Childhood Ireland 2013).

This is not just important for physical growth but also according to Sheelagh Quinn (n.d quoted in L. Almond K. Ezzeldin, 2013, p.54) “Having these skills is an essential part of enjoyable participation and a lifelong interest in an active lifestyle”. This links with purpose of study within the National curriculum in P.E as it states “It should provide opportunities for pupils to become physically confident in a way which supports their health and fitness” (department for education, 2013).

Social value is another grouping of why physical education is an important addition to the national curriculum. With globalisation increasing, today’s society has the possibility to be hostile and unwelcoming to people unlike ourselves. However, more and more, sport is being used as a tool that promotes specific values that encourage understanding, tolerance and peace thus bringing divided societies together. Its inherent values can be used to improve the wellbeing of whole communities (D. Meir, 2014, p.51). This can also have great significance in a primary school as often children can foster negative views from their parents towards other children that are different than them. Arguably no other lesson helps to promote team building and support for one another to the same extent. Bringing children together to appreciate one another can be done through games in which the children have to work together. The role of the

teacher can also be changed to promote specific values rather than only being concerned with technical development (D. Meir, 2014, p.51).

On a more individual level children learn basic social skills that will benefit them in all aspects of life, according to Bert Biglin (2013, p.45) “Children have the opportunity at all levels of ability to play hard, compete fairly and honestly, appreciate their own and others’ skill and effort, cooperate with others and learn to except winning and losing graciously”. Each of these is a valuable life skill that is often neglected within other subjects. The National curriculum also supports teamwork within P.E as it states that “Pupils should be taught to: participate in team games”.

Physical education is also very inclusive and offers opportunities for all abilities and all children, whether through being a valued team member or having the important role of referee, skills can be gained from different roles which can be transferred to other aspects of life.

The value of physical education can also be seen within the way it helps children develop mentally. Competitive games and working in teams helps builds a child's cognitive development as they have to solve how to be an effective team member as well as strategize to any game that is played. Teachers can aid this by choosing strategy games, these can also be made more fun by putting a theme to them such as code cracking or a Pirate quest with a puzzle to solve, each involving exercise. Through these activities children learn more and more about themselves and their strengths and weaknesses. One of the ways children can realise this is through marking their progress and beating personal bests, this is supported in the National curriculum as it states that children should be able to “compare their performances with previous ones and demonstrate improvement to achieve their personal best” (department for education, 2013). This is also backed up by Bert Biglin (2013, p.45) who states “It becomes a part of a child's education that they start to come to terms with their individual strengths and weaknesses: that is the recognition that individuals have, or are capable of having, different levels of skills, aptitudes and abilities.”

Physical education also helps to build confidence in children as they are given the chance to strategize, win games and explore the role they play within a team. Margaret Talbot (n.d, cited in Psychology Today, 2014) once wrote that “sports, dance and other challenging physical activities are distinctively powerful ways of helping young people learn to ‘be themselves”. This is important for children as they grow up and start to find their identity.

Furthermore, preparation for adulthood can be used to group other values that physical education has to offer. Children can take away strengths such as problem solving, as well as other hidden skills such as considering consequences of their actions and being a team player. P.E also gives children the opportunity to take on leadership roles which can help to improve communication skills, develop motivational skills and provide a platform for them to develop confidence (SportScotland, 2017). All these skills allow children to grow up and be more prepared for adult life, according to Les Duggan and Mark Solomons (2015, p.26) “Physical Educationalists have always known that character and building personal resilience are key components of producing successful people.”

In conclusion, the value of physical education can be grouped into 4 main groups, although more points could be made, the physical, social, mental, and preparatory values justify its place in the primary curriculum and give a glimpse into its merit and worth.