

W(H)ITHER SCHOOL PHYSICAL EDUCATION PROVISION IN EUROPE: TWO DECADES OF RESEARCH EVIDENCE

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ABSTRACT

The long-standing presence of physical education (PE) in school curricula suggests that it has passed the test of time as an accepted sphere of formalised educational activity. Indeed, its significance is enshrined in its UNESCO (1978) accorded status of a 'fundamental human right' with assured opportunities for practice within education systems. Notwithstanding this status, there has been, and continues to be, world-wide, continental regional and national research evidence pointing to proposals to remove PE from the curriculum, actual and posited reductions in curriculum time allocation, perceived incidences of marginalisation, as well as inadequacies of provision of resources, quality of school PE programmes, inequalities in provision, particularly inclusion of girls and pupils with disabilities and deficiencies in school-wider community partnerships. A concern is that school PE is 'withering', i.e. it is in terminal decline. Thus, with the future in mind, the question arises: 'whither' physical education?: which direction is it going or do we wish it to go? Is the 'whither' in the direction of a 'Meat Loafesque' world of dark and insecure gloom and doom or is it a sustainably positive 'blue sky' world in which problem resolution has been secured?

This paper considers the research evidence mainly drawn from three World-wide Surveys (Hardman & Marshall, 2000; Hardman & Marshall, 2009; and Hardman, Murphy, Routen and Tones, 2013) conducted over the last two decades on the situation of PE in schools. Particular consideration is given to the general situation of school PE, curriculum time allocation, subject and teacher status, PE curriculum-related issues, resources (teaching personnel, facilities and equipment), inclusion issues (gender and disability), and school-community pathway links to PE-related activity in out-of-school settings). Concluding comments highlight the key areas of concern in school physical education-related provision and progresses to suggestions for some directions to sustain a secure future for PE as a life-long learning and lifestyle-enhancing enterprise.

Keywords: physical education, schools, research evidence, present and future directions

INTRODUCTION

National systems of physical education across Europe have evolved over the last two centuries through imported, exchanged and interchanged influences (a form of 'melting pot' development), which have variously been adopted, adapted or assimilated to create a rich diverse tapestry of similarities, differences and equivalences in terminological definition, concept, contextual setting and practice. As present day attention increasingly turns to physical and health literacy, in which healthy well-being, active lifestyle and life-long physical activity participation have significant presence, the tapestry will continue to progressively evolve, developmentally change and in some instances may well include 'back to the future' policies and practices at national levels.

The long-standing presence of physical education in school curricula suggests that it has passed the test of time as an accepted sphere of formalised educational activity. Indeed, its significance is enshrined in its UNESCO (1978) accorded status of a 'fundamental human right' with assured opportunities for practice within education systems. In recent years an expanded role has been ascribed to physical education. As a school subject, it is granted a 'broad brush' scope and potential and thus, it is in a relatively unique position with responsibility for addressing in some way and somehow many contemporary issues through its perceived distinctive features within the educational process with characteristics not offered by any other learning or school experience. Indeed, the preamble to the European Parliament's *Resolution on the Role of Sport in Education* (2007/2086NI) alludes to physical education as

"the only school subject, which seeks to prepare children for a healthy lifestyle and focuses on their overall physical and mental development, as well as imparting important social values such as fairness, self-discipline, solidarity, team spirit, tolerance and fair play... (and is perceived to be) "among the most important tools of social integration".

The European Parliament's *Resolution* represented a significant step forward in physical education policy guidance across the region. The *Resolution* in accord with accepted (though scientifically largely unproven) orthodoxy implied that physical education has the propensity to make significant and distinctive contributions to children, schools and wider society: respect for the body, integrated development of mind and body, understanding of physical activity in health promotion (general well-being, diet, nutrition and reduction in health care costs), psycho-social development (self-esteem and self-confidence), social and cognitive development and academic achievement, socialisation and social (tolerance and respect for others, co-operation and cohesion, leadership, team spirit, antidote to anti-social behaviour) skills and aesthetic, spiritual, emotional and moral (fair play, character building and codes of behaviour) development, a panacea for resolution of the obesity epidemic, inactivity crisis and sedentary lifestyles, a medium for inclusion and integration as well as for informing pupils about the physical and psychological dangers inherent in the use of doping substances, enhancement of quality of life etc. Two fundamental questions arise here.

1. Should PE be held accountable for any or all of educational outcomes or benefits it claims or is claimed on its behalf?
2. How can physical education deliver all that is claimed in its name?

Relevant to both questions is a list of associated questions. For example: how is it possible to impact on reduction of child obesity with only one or two 30-minute physical education lessons a week?; how can we develop a broad range of movement skills in large class sizes of 30 or more students, who the physical educator may see for less than 36 hours a year?; is even an hour of daily physical education enough?; and with the knowledge that the intensity, duration, and frequency of physical activity do more than anything to immediately impact on health, how can we successfully help school students experience the joy of movement in physical education classes while urging them to meet physical fitness target rates? Maybe it is an issue of 'changing minds' and, thereby, 'winning bodies'! The issues raised here, together with associated concerns already expressed and others persistently revealed in European-wide and national surveys⁵ during and since the 1990s add a novel dimension to the developing physical education tapestry in Europe. Such features of concern have also been evident in subsequent global, European continental and national physical education Surveys.

Following a Worldwide Survey of the situation of physical education in schools (Hardman and Marshall, 1999), the Berlin Physical Education World Summit's Agenda for Action (1999) precipitated an array of inter-governmental, governmental and non-governmental institutional initiatives, policies and advocacy commitments to improve access to, and provision of, quality physical education (QPE). Collectively the various initiatives raised hopes about a sustainable future for physical education. In Europe, the Council of Europe (2002)

⁵ See for example: the European Physical Education Association's (EUPEA) Survey (Loopstra and van der Gugten, 1997); two national surveys in England - National Association of Head Teachers, 1999; and Speednet, 1999; Council of Europe Physical Education/Sport Survey (2002); and European Parliament Survey (2006-2007).

and the European Parliament (2006-2007) picked up the baton and commissioned Surveys (Hardman, 2002; and Hardman, 2007) of the situation of physical education in schools in Member States, which respectively informed the Council of Europe's *Recommendations* (2003) and European Parliament's *Resolution on the Role of Sport in Education* (2007) on policy principles designed to remedy the situation in the region. However, since the Berlin Summit, the developments in school physical education policies and practices have been diverse with a plethora of developmentally positive initiatives throughout Europe juxtaposed with evidence to generate continuing disquiet about the situation. Indeed, the preamble to the European Parliament's 2007 *Resolution* recognised a decrease in "the number of PE lessons... in the past decade" across Europe in both primary and secondary schools, that there were divergences and inadequacies in provision of facilities and equipment between the Member States and that physical education teacher training programmes differed widely with "an increasingly widespread practice whereby physical education classes are taught by teachers with inadequate specialist training". There was also recognition that there was no "appropriate co-ordination aimed at reconciling school and out-of-school sporting activities, and at making better use of existing establishments, and that the link between them varied from one Member State to another". The post-Berlin Summit's *Action Agenda*, the Council of Europe's *Recommendations*, the Second World Physical Education Summit's, *Maggingen Commitment* (2005), and the European Parliament's *Resolution* are stark reference point reminders that there was, and there continues to be, a gap between "hope and happening" (Lundgren, 1983) or as Maude de Boer-Buqicchio's (then Council of Europe Deputy Secretary General) 2002 comment that "... the crux of the issue is that there is too much of a gap between the promise and the reality". Such gaps coincide with geographically widespread incidences of increasing levels of obesity, relatively sedentary life-styles and associated decreasing levels of physical activity engagement with increased drop-out rates from sport amongst young people of school age and associated rising health care costs concomitantly occurring with reductions in timetable allocation and/or perceived marginalisation of physical education in schools. The situation has added a novel dimension to the ever evolving physical education tapestry in Europe. One central European academic succinctly sums up the concerns articulated in several Surveys:

"PE in (recent years) has gone through intensive development and many changes. In spite of attempts by PE professionals, PE teachers, pupils and parents still struggle, sometimes more, sometimes less successfully with a range of problems: decreasing amount of compulsory PE; often decreasing quality of education; large PE class sizes and increasing pupils' behavioural problems; growing numbers of non-participating and 'excused' pupils from PE lessons; stagnating physical fitness and performance of youth; care of pupils with disability; inadequacies in provision and lack of PE facilities; increase in PE teachers' average age and low interest of young graduates to work in the field of PE; inadequate social and financial reward of PE teachers, low work ethic of PE teachers that results from insufficient evaluation of their work; low representation of PE teachers in schools' management positions; absence of monitoring of PE teaching – there is a limited number of inspectors; monitoring by school directors is non-existent; weak organisation (professional associations) of PE teachers; shortages in pre-graduate teachers' preparation; unfinished system of lifelong PE teachers' education; lack of financial resources for science (research) in the field of physical education and sport".

The adverse practice shortcomings and continuing threats to physical education intimated in this set of observations are not unique to this central European situation. In some circles, there is a concern that school physical education is 'withering', that is, in terminal decline. Thus, with the future in mind, the question arises: 'whither' physical education?; that is, which direction is it going or do we wish it to go? Is the 'whither' in the direction of a 'Meat Loafesque' world of dark and insecure gloom and doom or is it a sustainably positive 'blue sky' world in which problem resolution has been secured. This presentation draws from three Worldwide and several European surveys to provide an *overview perspective* of the direction in which physical education is evidently progressing in Europe. At the outset, it is necessary to emphasise the "overview perspective" reference because (i) inherent questions surrounding validity and reliability of data generated by survey questionnaires, especially in terms of nature and size of samples, and (ii) the data provided by government level agencies more often than not reflect policy principles and not realities of practice, mean that interpretations can only be cautiously tentative. However, to some extent, caution in interpretation has been alleviated by use of forms of triangulation, embracing the range of questionnaire samples' sets and the comprehensive review of research-related literature. Such forms of triangulation underpin the survey-generated data and bring a higher degree of validity and reliability to findings. Whatever, the various 'snap-shots' do provide an indication of patterns and tendencies as well as some highly specific situations. Because of time constraints, the focus of the presentation is on selected areas of the general situation of physical education in schools, curriculum time allocation, and issues related to curriculum content and pathway links to physical activity in out-of-school settings. Concluding comments highlight the key areas of concern in school physical education-related provision and refer to issues in the future sustainability of school physical education.

THE GENERAL SITUATION OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

Within general education systems, in all European countries (globally 97%), there are either legal requirements for physical education or it is a matter of general practice for both boys and girls at least at some age/stage or phase of compulsory schooling years. Physical education provision during compulsory schooling years differs across regions and countries according to age or year stage of attendance with variations in number of PE lessons per week (.5 to 6) and weeks taught per year (16-46). These variations are also seen in the EUPEA Survey (2011-2012), where ranges of 1.5-3 lessons in primary and 2-4 lessons in secondary schools are reported (Onoffre, Marques, Moreira, Holzweg, Repond & Scheuer, 2012, p.24). Overall the average number of years during which PE is taught in schools is 12 (range 8-14) with a cluster of 11 and 12 years. The start-end years' continuum together with weeks per year and associated access to physical education are significant for individual development and sustained participation in physical activity. The early years are important in developing fundamental motor skills and providing opportunities for optimal development of physical capacities during the crucial years of growth and maturation. For later age school start, it is recognised that pre-school experiences might offer similar opportunities but often they are neither compulsory nor accessible to every child. The significance of school finishing age centres on tracking physical activity engagement from adolescence to adulthood. When access to physical education programmes ends at an earlier age, pupils are vulnerable to disengaging from physical activity; consequently they do not continue with it in later life and there may be insufficient time to embed either the skills or the habits for regular engagement throughout the full lifespan.

Despite official commitment to access to school PE either through legislation or as a matter of general practice, such provision is far from assured. The disparities between state policy legal requirements and actual implementation, with clear indications of non-compliance with regulations, are particularly evident in countries where curriculum responsibility lies with education districts or individual schools, that is in contexts of localized implementation of curricula and, therefore, are subject to local interpretations. In Europe 84% of countries (globally 71%) adhere to implementation regulations and delivery but they can, and do, differ from school to school in the majority of countries. Conversely, in 16% of European countries (globally 29%), PE is not actually being implemented in accordance with legal/mandatory obligations or expectations. Of some concern here is the perceived gradual increase from 7% (2000), through 11% (2007) to 16% (2013) in the proportion of European countries, in which PE is not being implemented in accordance with regulations (refer table 1.).

Table 1 Implementation of Physical Education

Area	% 2000	% 2007	% 2012
Global	71	79	71
Europe	93	89	84

Pervasive factors contributing to the 'gap' between official policy and regulations and actual practice are seen in devolvement of responsibilities for curriculum implementation and autonomy of schools or districts, loss of time allocation to other competing prioritised subjects, lower importance of school physical education in general and non-examinable status, lack of official assessment, financial constraints, diversion of resources elsewhere, lack of or inadequate provision of facilities, equipment and teaching resources, deficiencies in numbers of qualified teaching personnel, non-committed physical education teachers either resulting in little or no physical education or low quality delivery, negative attitudes towards physical education of other significant individuals such as head teachers and adverse climatic/weather conditions. Additionally, waivers usually based on exemption from physical education classes, are granted on medical and/or in some cases on religious grounds. The exemption practice on medical grounds is widespread throughout the world, thus perhaps undermining its status within the curriculum. An issue here is that exemption is rarely sought from other subjects except, perhaps, for religious education classes in some countries.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM TIME ALLOCATION

The issue of time allocation is generally complicated both by localised control of curricula, which give rise to variations between schools and especially so where responsibility for delivery of the curriculum has been divested to individual schools (in this situation, it is unsurprising that any national policies concerning required, prescribed, recommended or aspirational guidelines remain unimplemented), and practices of offering options or electives, which provide opportunities for additional engagement in physical education and/or school sport activity. Student 'uptake' of such opportunities varies within, and between, countries and not all take advantage of the extra provision. Whatever, the options/electives available may be included in curriculum time allocation indicated in some countries' survey responses and, therefore, may not accurately represent the prescribed time allocation for all students in at least some schools in those countries where additional opportunities exist. Further complications arise in determining definitive figures for a country or educational autonomous region in individual schools, where prescribed or mandated time allocations are not implemented because of a variety of reasons, several of which are reported above and others below. However, some general tendencies can be identified. Tables 2 and 3 indicate physical education curriculum time allocation (mean) for primary and secondary schools respectively in 2000, 2007 and 2013.

Table 2 PE Curriculum Time Allocation: Primary Schools (Minutes per Week)

Area	2000	2007	2013
Europe	121	109	112
Global	116	100	103

Table 3 PE Curriculum Time Allocation: Secondary Schools (Minutes per Week)

Area	2000	2007	2013
Europe	143*	102	103
Global	117	101	100

Globally the decreases seen in both primary and secondary schools physical education time allocation between 2000 and 2007 are also evident in the 2013 secondary schools' data, however, only marginally so as educational reforms are undertaken and greater awareness of the essential need for physical activity engagement is perceived as being important in promoting more healthy and active lifestyles; concomitantly data for primary schools show a small increase in the 2013 figure over that for 2007. Reforms though are no guarantee of increases in curriculum time allocated to physical education, even when opportunities are provided.

The above reference to disparities in terms of compliance with legislated policy is mirrored in physical education curriculum time allocation, especially in local implementation contexts. In some countries, other disparities include: lack of monitoring with head-teachers not held accountable for ensuring prescribed physical education curriculum time allocation; change of status to an 'elective' subject, particularly in more senior grades of schooling; time devoted to physical activity and/or sport afternoons, counted as 'PE time'; and varying interpretations in settings where guidelines rather than mandatory requirements are provided.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM ISSUES

During the last decade, most European countries have undertaken educational reforms, in which physical education curricula are undergoing change with signs that its purpose and function are being redefined to accommodate broader health-related activity (in part to counter perceived increases in the incidence of obesity and sedentary lifestyles) and life-long educational outcomes. Thus, links between physical education and health education and with personal and social development are occurring in some countries, testimony to which are EUPEA Physical Education Survey (2010-2011) findings, which indicate that exercise and health, physical activity learning and social and personal development are the most frequently cited aims of physical education programmes in the 22 countries/education autonomous regions of Europe sample. According to 'official' documents, many countries commit to a 'broad and balanced' range of curricular activities' opportunities. One example is Northern Ireland: Article 4 of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 statutorily obliges Boards of Governors and Principals to ensure that schools offer:

"A balanced and broadly based curriculum that promotes the spiritual, emotional, moral, cultural, intellectual and physical development of pupils...and thereby of society; and prepares pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life by equipping them with appropriate knowledge, understanding and skills" (Sport Northern Ireland, 2010, p.4).

At one level, the broad and balanced curriculum would appear to be reflected in practice with the range of different activities taught within many physical education programmes and a rise in 'new' activities being incorporated into some programmes in both primary and secondary schools. Data generally reveal a curriculum presence of team and individual games and sports, gymnastics, dance, swimming, outdoor adventure, track and field athletics and other activities in both primary and secondary stages. These data are

mirrored in the European Commission's *Eurydice Report* (2013) in observations on commonly practised physical education curricular activities in European countries. Nevertheless, Surveys' evidence challenges the actual extent to which breadth and balance are provided. There remains a pre-disposition towards sports-dominated competitive performance-related activity programmes as demonstrated by the proportion of time devoted to each activity area across Europe (and this is mirrored in other regions of the world). Examination of activity areas' time allocation across the world reveals how, in practice, activities such as Games, Track & Field Athletics and Gymnastics dominate the physical activity experiences of pupils globally, thus echoing previous indications in World-wide Physical Education Surveys I and II of a performance sport discourse orientation in both primary and secondary schools. Tables 4 and 5 indicate that together these three activity areas in European countries account for 76% (globally 75%) of physical education curriculum content in primary schools and 74% (globally 76%) in secondary schools. In the 2007 Survey, these proportions were respectively 72% (globally 75%) in primary schools and 72% (globally 79%) in secondary schools).

Table 4 Proportion (%) of Curriculum Activity Area Allocation **Primary Schools**

Area	Dance	Games	Gym.	OAA	Sw.	T & F	Other
Global	7 [7]	41 [41]	15 [16]	7 [5]	4 [6]	19 [18]	7 [7]
Europe	7 [8]	40 [41]	18 [17]	6 [4]	4 [7]	18 [14]	7 [9]

Table 5 Proportion (%) of Curriculum Activity Area Allocation **Secondary Schools**

Area	Dance	Games	Gym.	OAA	Sw.	T & F	Other
Global	6 [4]	45 [43]	13 [14]	7 [4]	4 [5]	18 [22]	7 [8]
Europe	7 [5]	42 [42]	15 [13]	7 [9]	5 [6]	17 [17]	7 [8]

Such an orientation pattern is reported in the European Commission's *Eurydice Report* (2013): "Among the mandatory physical education activities in schools, games are most common... After 'games' come gymnastics, athletics..." (p.21). This pre-disposition towards a Games-dominated curriculum is well illustrated by a West European College Lecturer's comment that "... Games dominate provision to the expense of other strands (athletics, aquatics, dance, gymnastics, outdoor adventure, health-related activities)". The emphasis placed on competitive sport activities runs counter to societal trends outside of school and raises issues surrounding meaning and relevance to young people as well as quality issues of programmes provided. Amongst the post-London Olympic Games legacy euphoria, are intimations by individuals that their school physical education experiences were far more negative than positive, one example of which is: "I hated games so much that I used to hide in the lavatories, forge sick notes and, on occasion, play truant. Is it humane to force youngsters to endure physical activity they hate?" (Sunday Times, 2012).

PARTNERSHIP PATHWAYS (LINKS TO PE/SPORTS ACTIVITY IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL SETTINGS)

The Second World-wide Physical Education Survey pointed to inadequate and/or insufficient links between school between school physical education programmes and wider community physical activity provision agencies in some countries and where links of various kinds were evident, many pupils were not made aware of available pathways to out-of-school provision and/or physical activity programmes. This general scenario continues to persist. Table 6 indicates that globally in only 27% of countries are there formally arranged school-community partnership pathways in place. European region countries, as in the previous Survey, have the highest proportion (68%) of school-community partnership links (55% in 2007).

Table 6 School Physical Education–Community Links: Global/Regional (%)

Area	Yes	No	NA/NR
Global	27 [39]	20	53
Europe	68 [55]	11	21

Reasons proffered for shortfalls in school-wider community agency partnerships include: lack of teacher-outside school agency communication, infrastructural deficiencies, non-implementation of mandated requirements and financial cut-backs. Where school-wider community agencies' provision exists, as revealed in the second and third World-wide Physical Education Surveys, there are pervasive links (both formal and incidental) between schools' competitive sport activity programmes (curricular and extra-curricular), tournaments and/or development of talented young athletes from local, through district and regional to national and international level agencies. Nonetheless, despite the competitive sport emphasis of established links, some countries also have either informal or formal (or both) school-community pathways, which variously encourage participation in physical (or sport-related) activity after, or outside of, school curriculum time and, which embrace a broader 'sport for all' philosophy.

There is growing recognition that physical education cannot achieve its many ascribed outcomes in a stand-alone position and, hence, pathways to partnerships are being created in differentiated forms to achieve common goals. The foundational fabric of the physical education tapestry is undergoing sometimes discrete, but increasingly overt, philosophical shifts. Participation Pathway Partnerships is a key term for future directions in the best interests of physical education and sporting, (particularly recreational) activity in and out of schools. Bridges and pathways to community provision need to be constructed, especially to stimulate young people to participate in physical activity during their leisure time. A school's role should extend to encouraging young people to continue participation in physical activity and physical educators are strategically well placed to reach the widest range of young people with positive experiences in, and messages about, participation in physical activity. They have key roles as facilitators and intermediaries between the school and wider local communities. They should identify and develop pathways for young people to continue participating in physical activity after and outside school and ensure that information is available to young people within school on the opportunities available in the local community. As indicated by the European Commission's *Eurydice Report* (2013): "... The presence of a local community sports infrastructure may... increase opportunities for organised physical activities and enhance the quality of (schools) provision" (Eurydice, 2013, p.22).

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Arguably, the overview scenario presented above of the progression of physical education may provide a distorted regional and individual national picture of physical education in schools in Europe. There are many examples of good practice in many schools in European countries but equally there are continuing causes for serious concern. The period since the early 1990s has been marked

by 'mixed messages' with indicators of stabilization in some countries juxtaposed between positive, effective policy initiatives in other countries and reticence or little political will to act and continuing concerns in others. Many governments have committed themselves through legislation to making provision for physical education but they have been (or are being) slow in translating this into action. The 'gap' between policy and practice is seen in official documentation on principles, policies and aims and actual implementation into practice, which exposes a range of deficiencies in school physical education. Analysis of the various surveys' data reveals several issues, which are a source for concern. There are considerable inadequacies in facility and equipment supply linked with financial source constraints, especially in central and eastern Europe and in regions within southern Europe. There is evidence of general under-funding of PE/school sport as well as the low remuneration of PE/sport teachers in some countries. There is disquiet about teacher supply and quality: insufficiency and inadequacy of appropriately trained and qualified PE teachers are widely evident. Curriculum time allocation is a concern in some countries. Despite curricular reform intentions to broaden content, there remains a narrow and unjustifiable conception of the role of PE merely to provide experiences, which serve to reinforce achievement-orientated competition performance sport, thus limiting participatory options rather than expanding horizons. Also of some concern are levels of curriculum implementation and monitoring. Falling fitness standards and high youth dropout rates from physical/sporting activity engagement) are exacerbated in some countries by insufficient and/or inadequate school-community co-ordination and problems of communication.

The concerns suggest that today the physical education profession faces issues that may threaten physical education's very school existence; certainly physical education classes have become convenient targets for reductions. So what is to be done? Whatever, it is, there is urgency for all of us who care about the future of physical education to reflect on what is needed in these changing times: physical education has to change with the times. We need to re-examine the concept and context of physical education and more effectively communicate what it should look like now and in tomorrow's schools. For socialisation into physical activity engagement, there is a need to encourage thinking about the future sustainability of physical education, for which there are a number of fundamental issues, for example:

- (i) How can physical education better serve the needs of pupils and society in a dynamic, ever changing world?
- (ii) What should we be teaching in physical education?
- (iii) How can teachers structure class experiences in a more effective format?
- (iv) What changes need to be made in schools and wider community settings and professional preparation programmes?
- (v) What new challenges might we face in the future?

It is imperative that monitoring of developments in physical education throughout the European region be maintained. The Council of Europe (amongst other international agencies), has called for monitoring systems to regularly review the situation of physical education in each country. Indeed, the Council of Europe (2003) referred to the introduction of provision for a pan-European survey on physical education policies and practices every five years as a priority! "Promises" need to be converted into "reality" if a safe future for physical education in schools is to be secured. Otherwise with the intimation of a gap between "promise" and "reality", there is a risk that the well intentioned initiatives will remain more "promise" than "reality" in too many countries across Europe. Watching briefs on what is happening in physical education are inadequate: there is need for more and better quality baseline data in each country. Perhaps, there is a future participative role in this process for FIEP Europe?! Watching briefs on what is happening in physical education are inadequate: there is need for more and better quality baseline data in each country. Perhaps, there is a future participative role in this process for FIEP Europe?! With such monitoring together with national and inter-governmental commitments to policy principles and action advocacy, as well as delivery of socio-culturally relevant and individually meaningful quality physical education programmes a secure and sustainable 'blue sky' future for physical education appears to be realisable.

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