

The Power of PE

Passion is oxygen for the soul

The power of PE. A concept so frequently discussed yet, so often, and so intuitively disregarded by so many. But for me, and for so many others like me, I feel now is the time to question why PE still isn't getting the recognition that it truly deserves. As a PE teacher, my passion for the subject stems right back to my own experience of Physical Education during my secondary school years. I was consumed by everything that PE, and the department, had to offer to me and my development as an individual - I was just completely obsessed! There wasn't a day in the week where I wouldn't be wearing my PE kit to take part in some form of physical activity, whether that be taking part in PE lessons, enjoying lunch and break time extra-curricular activities or proudly representing my school in after-school fixtures. I lived and breathed sport and a passion for PE ran through my veins, and has continued to do so ever since. It's an age-old cliché to say that the reason I became a PE teacher is categorically based upon the profound impact that my own PE teachers had upon me at school. But for me, that is exactly why, and I will forever hold an overwhelming amount of gratitude for my PE teachers because their desire for empowering young people through sport is something that has been deeply engrained into my purpose as a PE educator.

Subject hierarchy is a thing of the past, or is it?

So, with this school subject being compulsory under the statutory guidelines of the National Curriculum, at ALL key stages, why is it so massively underrepresented in many schools? We are continually presented with countless and mounting research that suggests that PE has an imperative part to play in combatting the obesity epidemic that is currently sweeping across the nation, yet why is PE so underfunded? If there is scientific evidence which fundamentally hypothesises a positive correlation between physical activity levels and academic performance, why are some teachers so convinced of the fact that PE belongs at the bottom of the school subject hierarchy? Taking students out of PE lessons to catch up on work missed in other subjects is not only insulting but completely counterintuitive. What if PE teachers were to take students out of other lessons to ensure that they were hitting their recommended physical activity guidelines per week? The concept in itself seems somewhat ludicrous but I suppose that's where the importance of PE is massively subjective and an array of differing opinions becomes very apparent.

If I were to ask someone as to why they may hold such a cynical outlook on PE, there will be a large proportion of those who will recall their negative experiences of the PE lessons that they once took part in when they were at school. They will be overwhelmed with resentment towards physical activity based on how their PE lessons may have made them feel somewhat inadequate and inferior compared to those 'naturally sporty' kids. Now, to some extent the subject of PE was once a great divider of pupils; those who were good at sport and, those who weren't, where lessons often comprised of copious amounts of cross-country running, traditional game play and rope climbing. Then again, there was also a time when maths was taught with the help of an abacus, but we all know that education in its entirety is ever-changing and ever-evolving in order to achieve optimum potential of our students. Therefore, those days of ineffective, non-inclusive PE lessons are thankfully well behind us and hopefully these negative connotations can begin to be omitted.

PE – more than just the physical

Whilst PE highlights the importance of being physically active and leading lifestyles that allow us to be healthy and ultimately happy, that is not all that PE aims to do. When employers are looking to employ new staff, what are some of the most fundamental skills that they consider to be essential? Team-work. Leadership. Decision making. Initiative. Cooperation. Communication. I could go on... Now, you'd be hard pushed to go into a PE lesson in school's today and not be overwhelmed with how naturally and profoundly these key skills are being promoted and instilled within students of all abilities. You'll find pupils leading warm-ups and thriving in a leadership role; there will be children who wouldn't ordinarily speak to one another around school, working as a perfect unit, using their effective communication skills to try and beat their opponents and students will be using their initiative and decision making skills to overcome scenarios and situations that they may have never encountered before. Think about the popular and well-researched area of 'Sports Education'. A perfect example of pupils being able to thrive and excel in areas of PE that aren't exclusively based on sporting performance, but one in which these key attributes are practiced, rehearsed and enhanced, owing to well-rounded students and individuals with very diverse skillsets.

With an increasing world-wide concern being ever more prevalent in terms of looking after one's mental health just as much as one's physical health, is it not now, more than ever, imperative that we do everything within our power to promote Physical Education for the overarching benefits to mental health and wellbeing that it can provide? We are often heavily inundated with the physical benefits to health that PE can offer but the same cannot be said for the mental advantages. You will constantly find PE teachers educating their pupils on the impact that physical activity can have on their mental health but if it's not reiterated in everyday school life, and in wider aspects of their lives, the notion can sometimes seem ineffective and easily

Steph Teale
@MissTealePE

forgotten about. Pupils may just see PE as a means of keeping physically healthy and not mentally active! The more other teachers promote and enthuse about the power of PE, the more likely that attitudes and relationships with the subject are ultimately going to change. No more fighting to try and get our voices heard, no more disregarding and branding our subject as 'only PE' and no more battling over subject importance! Aren't all subjects important in their own unique ways? After all, isn't that why we have such a wide-ranging collection of subjects on the curriculum anyway, to shape and mould holistic, community contributors with an all-encompassing desire to thrive and succeed in whichever path they choose to take!

PE at the heart of school life

Students go to school to learn and to be given the opportunity to succeed in whichever way they wish. Academic attainability is the underlying, overall purpose of education and so it should be, after all this is what sets students in good stead for future education or employment and ultimately equates to a school's success. But, could it be said that the importance for grades can sometimes overtake and overwhelm students into becoming all too consumed and wellbeing and physical health are almost put onto the backburner? We've all been there, we were all pupils once and we were continually bombarded with the rhetoric of the importance of studying and revising that we would often lose sight of any other aspects of our lives, or at least I did! I knew the importance of doing well at school and therefore this profuse desire to achieve my potential far outweighed the importance of anything else.

Fast-forward 10+ years and as adults we are incessantly reminded of the importance of maintaining an effective work-life balance. Why can the same concept not be widely commended for the pupils in our schools? We already know that physical activity is shown to improve our mental wellbeing and academic attainment and poor wellbeing results in the exact opposite. So, what I struggle to get my head around is, if we know that PE brings about these fundamental advantages, why in year 11 is PE provision reduced or in some instances, cut completely? Ensuring positive mental health and wellbeing that these pupils are so desperately in need of during such a prevalent time in their lives through PE is absolutely paramount. Just think about the power of PE as a cascade of positives that would be completely absurd to continue to ignore in education. Instil PE at the heart of school life and academic attainability will flourish as a result.

Life before the global pandemic

Let us think back to pre-Covid school life and the mindsets that were ever-evident in the midst of 'normal life'. We can all pretend that the importance and power of PE wasn't often overlooked and perhaps undervalued but unfortunately, in many instances this outlook was fairly prevalent. But, could it just be that a global pandemic may have been the turning point that PE was so desperate for? Could it be that this pandemic has open minds to the overwhelming and undeniable benefits of taking part in regular physical activity? During a time when hundreds of thousands of children up and down the country joined in with PE with Joe Wick's on a **daily** basis, how is it that school children ordinarily only take part in two hours of PE a week? Ensuring that our children were still taking part regular physical activity was one of the first things that teachers, influencers, politicians alike were recommending and instructing. If there is this much importance placed on physical activity whilst we are all locked down in our homes, long may it continue with such high importance as we return to some level of normality. What was the first thing that the government allowed us to do with the easing of lockdown? You were allowed to go and exercise, so if the need for physical activity is so high in ensuring good physical and mental health of the population during such unprecedented times, why was PE not held in the same esteem previously? I hope that this pandemic has been an eye-opener to many past PE-pessimists and has shown that the need for PE is not something to be overlooked but instead, something that has phenomenal repercussions to the health and wellbeing of our young people, and ultimately, our country as a whole.

The power of PE.

The power of PE. A concept so frequently discussed yet, so often, and so intuitively disregarded by so many. Could it be that if we were to coherently enthuse about the true impact that PE can have upon people, mindsets would begin to change? The more teachers and people who are in a position to influence the thinking and mindsets of our young people galvanise about the power of PE, the more likely that attitudes and relationships with the subject are going to change. Us PE teachers will fulfil the ambition to perpetuate the increasing awareness of achieving healthy active lifestyles and we will continue to do so regardless of the misinformed and ignorant opinions that are thrown at us along the way; but the more the Power of PE is talked about and instilled into the heart of school life, the more this school subject will be seen for all the life-changing and ultimately life-extending benefits that it has to offer. Changing the opinions of teachers and removing the subject hierarchy within schools is the first step in overcoming subject bias and negative attitudes being forced upon PE teachers when we try to educate our students. I truly believe that the power of PE should hold a much more dominant stance in the future of education.