



A STUDY INTO CURRENT PRACTICE AND POTENTIAL MODELS FOR THE EFFECTIVE TEACHING OF PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AT KEY STAGE 3 IN THE NORTHERN IRELAND CURRICULUM

Key Findings

‘Best practice’ in Personal Development (PD) classes (formerly PSE) is characterised by:

- ◆ PD teachers suited to the role, who are enthusiastic and passionate about this area of the curriculum;
- ◆ a strong relationship between the PD teacher and the form class;
- ◆ PD teachers who can create a positive learning environment in which social and emotional issues of importance and relevance to pupils can be explored in some depth;
- ◆ classes in which pupils are consulted and encouraged to participate through the use of effective groupwork skills by the teacher;

- ◆ a high priority in the development of emotional intelligence in pupils through encouraging self-awareness, use of emotional vocabulary, empathic understanding and modelling of emotion;
- ◆ pupils who, when asked, view the classes as interesting learning opportunities, which are focused on them, fun and of value to them personally and for their life in the longer term; and
- ◆ being supported and sponsored effectively and practically by PD co-ordinators, Principals and Senior Management Team within the school.

Challenges to 'best practice' for PD classes exist where:

- ◆ there is a lack of whole school commitment;
- ◆ unsuited and untrained teachers are timetabled for PD;
- ◆ lesson flow and pupil learning is interrupted by administrative requirements arising from the dual form teacher role;
- ◆ there are timetabling and classroom environment constraints;
- ◆ there are teacher-directed lessons with little room for genuine pupil participation and few creative active learning strategies are deployed; and
- ◆ there are lack of opportunities for support or training.

INTRODUCTION

1. Previous descriptors of Personal and Social Education (PSE) are being overtaken by such recent terminology as Personal Development (PD), which is referred to in association with Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE) in the proposed curriculum for Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland Curriculum Framework CCEA).
2. There have been few published studies that investigate the effectiveness of PSE in schools.
3. Goals of PSE in the past have tended to be implicit rather than explicit and PSE has typically developed within individual schools acting on their own initiative rather than in a co-ordinated way.
4. More recently, greater attention to PSE has been paid in schools, prompted at least in part by the Inspectorate's (ETI) developing attention to the pastoral dimension of schooling through focused school inspections.
5. Access to a specific programme concentrating on personal development is now likely to be a statutory entitlement for all young people, with the potential for increases in timetabled time to be a feature of the revised school curriculum.
6. The key rationale for PD is that schools need to focus on the holistic development of pupils including their emotional health, which has hitherto been largely avoided. PSE or PD classes are a significant contributor to children's social and emotional development, which if delivered effectively underpins children's well-being, self-esteem and thereby academic development.
7. The current study seeks to explore issues of best practice within PSE (referred to within the report as PD), examining essential classroom features, teacher characteristics and competences and organizational dynamics.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

8. A qualitative, ethnographic study focusing on Personal Development (PD) at Key Stage 3 in 5 post-primary schools is described.
9. The aim of the study is to identify and analyse the characteristics of current best practice and extrapolate future training needs in this pastoral area of the curriculum before the introduction of the revised CCEA proposals for Personal Development.
10. The research question underpinning the present study is as follows:

Is it possible to identify in post-primary schools in Northern Ireland existing 'best' classroom practice in Personal Development (PD) and, where this is determined to exist, to observe, identify and analyse the essential elements of such practice in order to develop fundamental precepts and models for the support, development and training of the new proposals for PD?

11. The study aimed to identify key characteristics of effectiveness regarding:
 - ◆ essential classroom features;
 - ◆ teacher characteristics and competence; and
 - ◆ organizational dynamics.

MAIN FINDINGS

Classroom observations

12. Best classroom practice in sample schools was found to be typified by:
 - ◆ PD themes focusing on relevant pupils' life issues where levels of interest could be maintained;
 - ◆ suitable classroom environment and facilities for active learning and groupwork;

- ◆ carefully prepared PD resources materials (booklets; worksheets etc.);
- ◆ clear structure for each PD period, with careful attention to openings and closure of sessions;
- ◆ having time to develop emotional themes: the best classes observed had a double period allocated to PD;
- ◆ learning experiences characterised by inclusivity and affirmation, where teachers encouraged every pupil to contribute;
- ◆ good groupwork skills building on a negotiated group contract, which encourage maximum pupil participation;
- ◆ flexibility and spontaneity on the part of the teacher, with opportunities for pupil influence on learning objectives;
- ◆ a willingness of some teachers to power-share - to share with pupils control over lesson content and lesson process to give them a sense of achievement and to promote personal development;
- ◆ teachers with core attributes such as passion, respect for pupils, creativity and imagination, humour, sensitivity towards pupils' needs, empathy, enthusiasm and openness;
- ◆ teachers who are able to create a positive learning environment in which pupils' confidence and sense of safety and trust in the teacher and the learning process can flourish; and
- ◆ teachers who can operate comfortably in the area of emotions and can handle sensitive issues skilfully at an individual level and in a classroom context.

Challenges of Personal Development classes

13. There was no evident difference between PD topics covered across the different year groups. However, what clearly demanded teacher skill was stimulating sufficient confidence and maintaining interest with pupils in lower streams during PD classes.

14. Challenges in teaching PD were identified as:
- ◆ planning and timetabling;
 - ◆ class sizes;
 - ◆ inflexible classroom environments;
 - ◆ tensions which arise from the duality of the form teacher's role with respect to PD
 - ◆ the interference of administrative requirements during PD classes and general classroom interruptions;
 - ◆ insufficient whole-school support;
 - ◆ scarce opportunities for ITE and CPD training in PD and ongoing PD teacher support;
 - ◆ continuity of pupil experience from primary school PSE; and
 - ◆ not all teachers were suitable as teachers/facilitators of PD.

PD Teachers

15. The PD teachers identified the following as being essential aspects to their ability to deliver effective PD lessons:
- ◆ Believing in the value of PD and enjoying teaching it.
 - ◆ Genuinely liking the pupils and communicating this.
 - ◆ Understanding the wide variety of the familial and community environments that the pupils come from.
 - ◆ Choosing topics relevant to the needs and interests of the pupils that encourage engagement.
 - ◆ Creating a positive relaxed classroom atmosphere.

- ◆ Seeing themselves as facilitators of learning rather than subject experts.
- ◆ Encouraging all voices in the class.
- ◆ Being sensitive to the process of the lessons as much as the outcomes.
- ◆ Being prepared to be a learner alongside the pupils.
- ◆ Coping with difficult/sensitive/controversial issues.
- ◆ Confidence in handling the unexpected.
- ◆ Capacity to talk about themselves appropriately.

PD Co-ordinators

16. Best examples of effective PD co-ordinators were those who:

- ◆ were committed and passionate about the whole area of PD;
- ◆ were seen as a champion of PD area both inside and outside school;
- ◆ understood how this curricular area contributed to and supported other areas of the curriculum;
- ◆ were seen as supportive and knowledgeable by the PD teachers;
- ◆ were viewed as interpersonally skilful themselves;
- ◆ had an overview of what year groups were doing not just in terms of content but also what approaches the PD teachers were taking with the various classes;
- ◆ organized regular meetings (eg with Form Tutors/PD teachers) as part of their support and co-ordinating role and were sensitive to the needs and well-being of teachers in this area;

- ◆ had the courage to ask pupils' views at the beginning of the year to identify areas of need and then incorporate these in the planning of the PD curriculum;
- ◆ had an awareness of individual year groups' needs;
- ◆ had strong links with the counselling, pastoral care, special needs and child protection aspects of the school;
- ◆ brought in relevant outside agencies to provide expertise and support in specific areas and handled sensitively the integration of such additional learning resources.

Pupils' Views

17. There were no significant differences evident in views across year groups or gender on the issues raised with regard to pupils' perceptions of PD in the classroom. Although expressed differently, there was also little disparity in pupils' and PD teachers' views of the value, purposes or key characteristics that contributed to PD classes being positive learning experiences.
18. Pupils considered their PD lessons to be different from "normal lessons" and were described variously as 'fun', 'interesting', 'opportunities to get to know people better'; 'places to learn about how other people think'; 'where to learn how to listen or learn what happens in your own life and therefore begin to understand it'.
19. Pupils identified the following key characteristics of their PD teachers. Individual pupil quotes illustrate the general points:
 - ◆ Passion and enthusiasm

"PD teachers have to really like it (teaching PD)"
 - ◆ Understanding

"Probably the best teacher we have..... she understands"
"He has to understand it.....he has to know his class"

◆ Reassuring

“The PD teacher makes you feel better about yourself so then you feel more confident”

◆ Open and trustworthy

“She’s not afraid to share her personal life with us because she knows she can trust us and we can trust her.”

◆ Humour

“She looks for opportunities to be funny and this helps the mood in the classroom”.

20. In summary pupils tended to view their PD teachers positively in a variety of roles in relation to themselves:

- ◆ teacher as ally;
- ◆ teacher as confidante;
- ◆ teacher as co-learner;
- ◆ teacher as sharer; and
- ◆ teacher as confidence booster.

Organizational and Management

21. There was common agreement among PD co-ordinators and external personnel that critical to the effective delivery of PD was the tone that is set by the principal and senior management team in the school. If these people are not fully committed to PD then it was considered that little progress would actually be made. It was further argued that this type of commitment means that an appreciation and valuing of PD filters throughout the school and will be seen as part of its overall ethos, most evident in the communication and relationship between pupils and teachers and also between teachers. This commitment will be reflected in the school

development plan and timetabling, and resource implications will be carefully thought-out for the effective delivery of PD.

Principals

22. Interviews with principals from the sample of 'best practice' schools indicated that they generally viewed their role as setting the tone of interaction within the school and high on their lists of priorities was a child-centred philosophy. These principals valued PD highly and referred to its importance in building pupil self-esteem. They also felt strongly that there should be a high degree of 'fit' between the goals of the school, how pupils experience school life generally, and PD classroom practice.
23. In addition, these principals were viewed by PD teachers, PD co-ordinators and external personnel as being vital for effective delivery of PD through:
- ◆ having vision - principals having a straightforward, clear vision of what they are trying to do and acting on this vision personally;
 - ◆ translating mission statements into relationships – 'walking the talk';
 - ◆ relationship-building – positive, supportive attitudes to teachers extended to pupils and how they are treated:
 - ◆ "Relationships, that's what it's all about – PD";
 - ◆ creating a tone and ethos within the school which harmonizes with the values and approaches within PD;
 - ◆ personality – being open, approachable, friendly (and with availability for people) which sets a model;
 - ◆ orientation to pupils - being predisposed to look for the best in pupils individually, and having care and respect for the whole child, irrespective of class, gender, ability, race, religion, sexuality etc. and being an advocate for young people generally; and

- ◆ making resources available in time as well as money for PD activities and training in the knowledge that freeing up such time is beneficial in the longer term.

Summary

24. On the basis of this small-scale study of PD, there is evidence that there is much to be learned for the future development and support of this area from analyzing effective PD classroom practice in-depth. Many positive, constructive aspects of PD delivery (as well as challenges) have been identified and triangulated within the study and these exemplars are worthy of debate and development within the wider post-primary sector. There is also the potential to build training and support models from such baseline work that is likely to encourage and support PD teachers, PD co-ordinators and principals in the implementation of any new proposals for this area arising from curriculum change.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

25. There are widespread implications arising from this study that are outlined below as a series of recommendations:
- ◆ Careful selection of PD teachers is essential and appropriate recruitment and selection arrangements should be formulated.
 - ◆ Duties associated with the dual role of form teacher and PD teacher need to be separated out so that administrative tasks do not interrupt and undermine the potential value of PD sessions themselves.
 - ◆ PD sessions should take place in rooms that are conducive to informal teaching and learning methods and where classroom interruptions can be kept to a minimum.
 - ◆ PD class sizes should ideally be smaller than full class numbers approaching 30 pupils.

- ◆ Within ongoing timetabling constraints, consideration should be given to optimising the potential of PD by identifying more favourable slots during the school day.
- ◆ Effective systematic support for teachers undertaking PD work should be provided to ensure not only professional development and growing competence but also personal/emotional support and encouragement regarding what is a demanding role.
- ◆ Within schools, opportunities should be taken to reinforce the whole-school commitment to the ethos of PD through staff meetings, staff development sessions, INSET and team briefings.
- ◆ There should be more widespread use of external agencies and ELBs should have a role in helping PD co-ordinators plan strategically for partnerships with the wide range of relevant providers in the community.
- ◆ Goals, content, processes and methodology within the agreed PD framework should be standardised (but not constrained) to ensure that this important curriculum area does not develop in a piecemeal fashion with significant variations in quality. Rationale for variation (eg in content and focus) could still be made for particular educational contexts.
- ◆ A systematic approach should be developed to enable teachers, schools and the ETI to evaluate appropriately the impact of PD programmes on pupils, with careful consideration of what count as indicators in this area of the curriculum.
- ◆ The Department of Education and ELBs should monitor closely emergent trends towards statutory regulation of caring roles in the community in terms of how these developments potentially impact on PD and pastoral work in schools.
- ◆ Through the development of appropriate training, PD teachers need to acquire and develop a sufficiently strong knowledge base to enable them to discharge effectively their responsibilities within PD.

- ◆ Through training, PD teachers also need to acquire, develop and hone a range of key skills that will support pupils' learning, encourage pupil participation and thus enable the potential of PD to be maximised in the school setting. These include groupwork, facilitation skills, handling sensitive issues and creative and expressive teaching approaches.
- ◆ PD teachers should also have the opportunity, within a suitable, supportive training programme, to explore and examine themselves with regard to feelings, issues, difficulties, defences, motivation and attitudes in relation to delivering this aspect of the curriculum.
- ◆ A working group should be established to devise an appropriate training programme (or series of courses) for potential and/or fledgling PD teachers as a means of building up the knowledge, skills, personal development and the overall competence of PD teachers in the coming period. The development of specialist CPD and refresher courses should also be high on the agenda.
- ◆ Additional resources will need to be identified by the Department of Education to support the introduction of recommendations contained within this report but more importantly the potential outworking of the proposed CCEA curriculum changes for this area.

METHODOLOGY

26. Participant schools were selected for inclusion in the study as a result of collaboration with Field Officers in each of the five Education and Library Board areas.
27. Five best practice schools were identified with respect to ongoing PD work, in accordance with prescribed criteria.
28. In the study, best practice is illuminated through a combination of data collection processes comprising semi-structured individual interviews with adults who represent key players within schools and the wider education field (n=49), nine focus group sessions with 56 pupils and ten classroom observations involving 212 pupils.

29. There were seven steps in the data collection process:

- ◆ interviews with five Education and Library Board Officers on the theme of best practice in PD;
- ◆ interviews focusing on their perceptions of PD with a range of 12 educationalists, youth workers, advisors, and youth charities in Northern Ireland where PD work with young people is carried out;
- ◆ identification of sample schools and negotiation of access;
- ◆ pilot study in one school;
- ◆ exploratory discussions with principals and PD co-ordinators and preparatory meetings with PD teachers willing to be observed;
- ◆ data collection interviews with key personnel including principals, PD co-ordinators, pastoral staff and PD teachers; and
- ◆ classroom observations and follow-up discussions with PD class teachers and focus groups with pupils.

Personal Development topics in observed classes by KS3 year group

Sample School	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
A	Road Safety		Self Awareness
B	Relationships & Sexuality		Assertiveness & Aggressiveness
C		Bullying (verbal)	Joy-Riding & Justice
D	Bullying (verbal)	Emotions & Moods	
E	Achievement & Study Skills	Friendship patterns	

THE PROJECT

30. The study was undertaken for the Department of Education by The Queen's University of Belfast (Graduate School of Education). The cost of the project was £20,618.

FULL REPORT

31. The full report entitled 'A study into current practice and potential models for the effective teaching of Personal Development at Key Stage 3 in the Northern Ireland Curriculum' is available on the Department of Education website at www.deni.gov.uk/facts_figures/

This paper is a summary of the research report and as such any views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Department of Education.

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