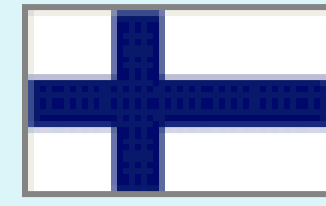


FINLAND



Structure

The Finnish education system is divided into pre-primary education, which is voluntary; basic education (comprehensive school or *peruskulu*), for students aged 7-16; and upper secondary education (general education or vocational education, grades 10 – 12); followed by higher education, either at universities or technical schools/polytechnics. After being ruled by Sweden for 600 years, Finland was ceded to Russia 1809. In 1917 Finland declared independence, but fell into civil war. After three more wars Finland was a struggling country and in 1963, parliament decided to focus on public schooling as the way to improve the social and economic climate. The first National Curriculum was developed in the early 1970s. There is still a national curriculum but it has undergone revision and is now a set of “broad guidelines”. During the 1980s the government handed over supervision of the schools to town councils, with teachers and principals responsible for curricular decisions. Government initiatives have provided free education (even higher education), support for special education, and equality in the classroom (no ability grouping; students with special needs are placed in the least restrictive environment). During this same period, a massive community-based initiative that provided competitive incentives to towns led to a dramatic increase in fitness among the Finnish population .

Underlying Concepts

Physical education is a core subject in Finnish schools. According to the National Curriculum document, the goals are to positively impact the physical, psychological and social abilities of students, promote well-being, and develop understanding of the importance of exercise.

Key Aspects of Learning

In the first stage of Primary Education (grades 1-4), competition is de-emphasized and learning objectives include **development of diverse motor skills, learning safe and healthy exercise, development of independence and cooperative skills, and fair play**. Core Content includes:

Ball Sports Exercise in the Natural Environment Expressive Movement and Dance
Gymnastics (floor and apparatus) Locomotor and Manipulative Skills
Low Organized Games Winter Exercise

The second stage of Primary Education (grades 5-9) focuses on the differing needs and interests of boys and girls and the development of independence and community spirit. **Objectives** include **refinement of basic motor skills, development of safe and healthy practices, valuing physical activity for health, development and refinement of independence, cooperative and fair play skills**. Core Content:

Ball Sports Expressive Movement and Dance Gymnastics (floor and apparatus) Knowledge of Exercise
Orienteering and Hiking Personal Fitness Swimming and Water Rescue Winter Exercise

Upper secondary education (grades 10-12), includes the promotion of healthy, active lifestyles and understanding the significance of exercise to physical, mental and social well-being. **Objectives** include **developing skills in exercise and sports, valuing sport and exercise participation, assessing and monitoring fitness, respect (for others, nature), and independence and group/collaborative skills**. Content includes:

Compulsory courses – Skill and Conditioning, Individual and Group Training
Specialization courses – Recreation and Exercise, Training Together, and Fitness Exercise

Assessment

Finnish schools conduct little to no standardized testing. For grades 1-4, students are assessed based on “Description of Good Performance”. An assessment score of 5 indicates students have achieved acceptable performance levels. For grades 5-9, students are assessed based on a set of “Final Assessment Criteria”. These assessments are based on performance in a variety of activities that address the objectives of the grade levels. For the second stage of basic education, an assessment score of 8 indicates acceptable performance. For upper secondary education assessment is based on participation, behaviour and attitude as well as knowledge, skills, and functional abilities.

Implementation

Physical education is a compulsory and graded school subject. Students receive a minimum total of 56 lessons per school year, approximately two lessons per week. Research has indicated that although physical education is a popular subject among students and aims to develop independent and cooperative skills and build self esteem, it still engenders at least as many negative feelings as positive ones.

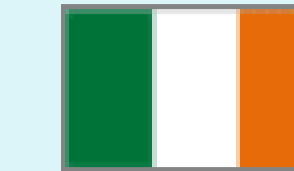
Professional Preparation and Development

Teachers in Finland are required to hold a Masters degree. The degree structure incorporates Educational/main subject studies, pedagogical studies, subject matter didactic studies, minor subject studies, and language and communication studies. Physical education programming usually occurs in separate departments or institutes. Professional development is organized at the municipal level, with financial support from the government. There is also a Professional Development exam designed for teachers to develop their professional competencies. LIITO, the professional pedagogical organization that promotes Health and Physical Education in Finland, organizes annual training days, an annual Autumn seminar, and international seminars.

References

- Fat to Fit: How Finland Did It (2005). *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/befit/story/0,15652,1385645,00html>.
- Finnish National Board of Education (2004; Amendments and Additions: 1/1/2011). *National Core Curriculum for Basic Education* Retrieved from http://www.oph.fi/english/sources_of_information/core_curricula_and_qualification_requirements/basic_education.
- Finnish National Board of Education (2003). *National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools*. Retrieved from http://www.oph.fi/english/sources_of_information/core_curricula_and_qualification_requirements/general_upper_secondary_education.
- Finnish National Board of Education (2011). *Overview of the Education System*. Retrieved from http://www.oph.fi/english/education/overview_of_the_education_system.
- Hancock, L (2011). A+ For Finland. *Smithsonian*, 42 (5), 95-102.
- Kansanen, P (2001). Teacher Education in Finland: Current Models and New Developments. In Moon, B., Vlăsceanu, L., & Barrows, C. (Eds.), *Institutional approaches to teacher education within higher education in Europe: Current models and new developments (pp. 85-108)*. Bucharest: Unesco – Cepes Retrieved from <http://www.helsinki.fi/~pkansane/Cepes.pdf>.
- Lauritsalo, K., Sääkslahti, A., & Rasku-Puttonen, H. (2008). *Experiences Of PE In Finnish Schools Among The Web Age Generation*. Poster presented at the 2008 AIESEP Conference, Sapporo, Japan. Retrieved from http://www.aiesep.ulg.ac.be/upload/aiesep_sapporo_poster_2.pdf.
- LIITO: Association Of Physical And Health Educators In Finland. Retrieved from <http://www.liito.fi/english.shtml>.
- Ministry of Education and Culture (Finland). *Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.minedu.fi/OPM?koulutus/?lang=en>.
- Opiskelu-Paikka (2012). *Finnish Education System*. Retrieved from <http://www.opiskelupaikka.fi/In-English-education-system>.

IRELAND



Structure

The education system in Ireland is under the jurisdiction of the Department of Education and Skills (DES). The DES sets broad educational policies, funding and direction. The Irish education system comprises of three levels, Primary, Secondary – Junior Cycle, Secondary – Senior Cycle. Education in Ireland is free and compulsory for all children in Ireland from the ages of six to 15 or until students have completed three years of secondary level education. Curriculum at all three levels of schooling is determined at the national level by the DES.

Primary school consists of eight years for children aged 4 to 12 although it is not compulsory until the age of 6. The Secondary – Junior Cycle, children approximately aged 12 to 15, builds on the education received at primary level and culminates with the Junior Certificate Examination. The Secondary – Senior Cycle extends the junior cycle experiences and culminates with the Leaving Certificate Examination. Students normally begin this cycle aged 15–17 years of age and the Leaving Certificate Examination is taken after two years of study usually at the ages of 17-19. Some students participate in an optional Transitional Year between the junior and senior cycles. The content of this experience is a school level choice based on local needs, but can include activities such as work experience placements, project work, or specialized courses.

Underlying Concepts

The Physical Education Curriculum provides learning opportunities through movement and promotes active and healthy lifestyles. It also attempts to provide a balance of activities for children and encourages schools to adopt a flexible approach in planning for physical education experiences. The program aims to contribute to the child's **personal** and **social development** through **a diversity of experience, co-operative activity, acceptance of success and failure**, and the **achievement of personal physical goals**.

Key Aspects of Learning

The curriculum is presented in seven curriculum areas, some of which are further subdivided into subjects. These are: Language (Gaeilge and English); Mathematics; Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (History, Geography and Science); Arts Education (Visual Arts, Music and Drama); **Physical Education**; and Social, Personal and Health Education.

The **Primary School Curriculum** is considered as a base for future success. A fundamental goal of the curriculum is to develop in children an appreciation of the value and practice of lifelong learning. Within the Primary School Curriculum, the physical education program aims to develop movement skills through participation in the following strands...

Athletics (Running, Jumping, Throwing) Aquatics Dance Games (Invasion, Net and Fielding)
Gymnastics Outdoor and Adventure Activities

At the **Secondary – Junior Cycle** level, children are exposed to programming that applies a holistic approach to the concept of physical activity for young people. The program recognises the physical, mental, emotional, and social dimensions of human movement, and emphasises the contribution of physical activity to the promotion of individual and group wellbeing. Students are expected to experience...

Adventure Activities Athletics (Running, Jumping, Throwing) Aquatics Dance
Games (Invasion, Net and Fielding) Gymnastics Health-Related Activity

At the **Secondary –Senior Cycle** level, the program is organised around the central theme of physical activity. The intention is to further examine physical activity in the context of the student's maturation into adulthood. Although the Senior Cycle continues to emphasize participation in the same activity areas as the Junior Cycle, the inclusion of a theoretical component is regarded as a key feature in developing the an active, healthy lifestyle. The theoretical aspects comprise of...

Aesthetic and Artistic Kinesiological Psychosocial

Overall, the general aim of the program is to contribute to the preparation of the student for a life of autonomous wellbeing.

Development

A new examinable physical education course is presently being developed for the Senior Cycle. A key feature is the commitment to the integration of practical experiences and theoretical understanding. A teaching and learning model which integrates the practical activities with those theoretical perspectives is being developed for discussion.

Assessment

There are no formal examinations at the end of the Primary cycle. Although the Junior Certificate Examination consists of a series of examinations and students taking around ten examined subjects, **physical education is a non-examined subject**. However, at the teacher level, assessment is expected to be an integral part of the physical education teaching/learning process. Suggested assessment strategies range from formal and informal teacher assessments, peer assessment by students, to self-assessment by students.

Implementation

It is recommended that students receive two hours per week of physical education. However, it is suggested that many schools may offer substantially less than this suggested minimum.

Professional Preparation and Development

Teachers in Ireland are expected to have either a Bachelor of Education degree or a Post Graduate Diploma in Education. At the Primary level, classroom teachers teach physical education, very few specialists are utilized until the Secondary Junior and Senior Cycle levels. National in-service has been provided for program implementation. The introduction of the revised programs at the Primary and Junior Cycle levels was accompanied with professional development and continuing support to teachers on implementation issues.

References

- Enterprise Ireland. Primary Education in Ireland. Retrieved from <http://www.educationireland.ie/index.php/primary-education>
- MacPhail, A., & Halbert, J. (2005). The implementation of a revised physical education syllabus in Ireland: circumstances, rewards and costs. *European Physical Education Review*, 11(3), 287-308.
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. *Curriculum On-Line, Junior Cycle: Physical Education*. Retrieved from http://www.curriculumonline.ie/en/PostPrimary_Curriculum/Junior_Cycle_Curriculum/Junior_Certificate_Subjects/Physical_Education/
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. *Curriculum On-Line, Primary School Curriculum : Physical Education*. Retrieved from http://www.curriculumonline.ie/en/Primary_School_Curriculum/Physical_Education/Physical_Education.html