

# INTEGRATED LEARNING EXPERIENCES IN EXAMINABLE PHYSICAL EDUCATION

## A CO-CONSTRUCTED TEACHING TEMPLATE

### Introduction

All examinable physical education courses/ programmes have two distinct forms of knowledge: theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge. These forms of knowledge are organised in curriculum documentation, in many cases through a learning outcomes approach. Research on the teaching of examinable physical education has highlighted how there is a divide in how these forms of knowledge are taught, with theoretical knowledge being taught in the classroom and practical knowledge being taught in the gym/ physical education hall. While our examples in this article focus on Leaving Certificate Physical Education (LCPE – examinable physical education in Ireland), these teaching resources can be applied to all examinable physical education courses/ programmes.

There have been calls for the upskilling of physical education teachers' theoretical pedagogical content knowledge: "[G]ood pedagogical practice used in practical physical education was often not transferred to the classroom" (Casey & O'Donovan, 2014, p.355-356). We suggest that integrated learning experiences can bring together theoretical *and* practical knowledge in the same practical space. So, what is an integrated learning experience? Shoemaker's (1989: 5) definition of an integrated course points in this direction:

*"An integrated course [learning experience] is one that is organized in such a way that it cuts across subject-matter lines, bringing together various aspects of the particular subject in an interaction with other areas of study in order to achieve the stated objectives and outcomes of the programme. It views learning and teaching in a holistic way and reflects on issues in the real world making courses [learning experiences] meaningful within their particular as well as wider contexts."*

Shoemaker's quote captures how we position an integrated learning experience. It cuts across subject-matter lines (e.g., biophysical and socio-cultural knowledges), brings together various aspects of the particular subject (e.g., learning in, through and about movement), and makes the learning experience meaningful to the learner. We believe that while integration as a pedagogical tool can work in many physical education contexts, we have found it particularly valuable in effectively delivering the more intense and in-depth practical and theoretical knowledge usually associated with examination physical education. Scanlon and colleagues' (2022) research on teaching of examinable physical education found that the teachers followed a 'one-way street' approach to integrated learning experiences. That is, the teachers teach the theoretical knowledge in the classroom before applying or reinforcing such knowledge through practical experience or students are introduced to the practical knowledge first before the teaching of theoretical knowledge. The authors suggest that something that is eagerly strived for is an (integrated) learning experience where the theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge overlap and are taught in the same (integrated) learning experience. In other words, the theoretical and practical knowledge overlap and intertwine in the same integrated learning experience.

### Community of learners of teachers (Joanna and Croíthe) and teacher educators (Dylan and Ann)

The question begs, how do we get there, to teach in a more considered and deliberate way of managing the intertwined nature of theoretical and practical knowledge? And what does this look like? And in particular, what do integrated learning experiences look like in an accountable high-stakes examination context? In an attempt to answer these



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questions, through a collaborative community of learners, we, two teacher educators and two practising physical education teachers, worked together to explore the notion of integrated learning experiences and constructed teaching resources for the teaching of such experiences. This project began with the teachers (Joanna and Croídhe) observing their LCPE lessons and describing such observations to Ann and Dylan. We, the research team, then constructed the teaching resources through collaborative dialogue. We were all critical friends to each other. The result of this project was a teaching template which embeds integrated learning experiences, formative assessment, curriculum and instructional models, reflection and so on.

### Teaching template

The teaching template was designed to assist in planning for the teaching of integrated learning experiences. Working through Figure 1, we start at the top *Strand(s) and topic(s) in focus* which relate to the content from the curriculum specification. Given integrated learning experiences encapsulate multiple forms of knowledge, they are constructed on numerous learning outcomes/topics. The number of learning outcomes/topics and which they are can be entered in the second row *How many topics/learning outcomes are to be addressed?* and *Learning outcomes to be addressed*. As our reflections highlight later in this article, planning for integrated learning experiences can be time-consuming (at least at first) and, as such, documenting the time spent planning is important for teachers and can be

entered in the following row. *Assessment* relates to a rich task, i.e., an authentic assessment and an organisational framework used for the design of the teaching template. This rich task can/should be related to the formal curriculum assessment so that the integrated learning experiences are instructionally aligned and operate through a backwards design, i.e., we start with the curriculum (learning outcomes/topics), move on to designing the assessment, then plan the instruction (integrated learning experiences) (Lund & Tannehill, 2014). Under *Suggested integrated learning experience/activities*, a mapping exercise can occur whereby the teacher would input the particular learning outcomes/topics and explore how these could be taught in the same practical experience. This requires creative and innovative thinking and working backwards from the formative assessment (*How will students show evidence of their learning?*). Using supportive instructional strategies (*Curriculum and instructional model(s)*) may assist in this creative and innovative thinking process. (We provide an example of how this can play out in the next section of this article.) On the right-hand side of this section, there is a space for any other related learning outcomes/topics that may arise in the planning. Finally, there is a column for *Reflection* – reflection on the planning process and the teaching template will help future planning and teaching of integrated learning experiences. Figure 2 provides a worked example of the teaching template using learning outcomes from the LCPE curriculum. This can be adopted and adapted to any (examinable) physical education curriculum in teaching integrated learning experiences.

**Figure 1:** The constructed teaching template for integrated learning experiences.

<b>Strand(s) and topic(s) in focus</b>			
<b>How many topics / learning outcomes are to be addressed?</b>	<b>Learning outcomes to be addressed:</b>		
<b>Time spent planning:</b>			
<b>Assessment:</b>			
<b>Suggested integrated learning experience/ activities:</b>	<b>How will students show evidence of their learning? (formative feedback)</b>	<b>Curriculum and instructional model(s):</b>	<b>Related learning outcomes:</b>
<b>Reflection:</b>			

### Worked teaching template

In Figure 2, the teaching template is planned for a 3-4-week period. We chose ten learning outcomes across two strands and two topics. The ten learning outcomes are listed. The highlighted colours show how we have grouped the learning outcomes into separate but related learning experiences. We used one learning outcome (3.4, highlighted in orange) as a rich task assessment. The rich task for the LCPE students is to organise an event or a competition for incoming first years of post-primary school (approx. 12 years old) and we will unpack a number of learning outcomes on our journey to this rich task. We found the table we compiled to be very useful in planning this journey. As seen in Figure 2, it includes a space for the suggested integrated learning experiences whereby learning outcomes are grouped (noted by the learning outcome number and highlighted colour). The first learning experience of this journey (green) is that the students will engage in observation of first-year physical activity patterns, survey construction and dissemination, and data collection from the first-year cohort. Working across from this, the students will design a promotion and tip sheet based on the results of their survey to provide evidence of this learning. The Cultural Studies curriculum and instructional model and, in particular, community mapping help to frame our instructional approach. Community mapping explores how the context in which the participants reside influences their physical activity patterns. The students are doing (practical application) while learning/thinking (theoretical knowledge) in the same learning experience.

In the second learning experience (blue), students engage in a flipped learning/homework task whereby they research the demands of a coach in terms of interpersonal skills. The students then engage in a mini-games setup whereby students take roles of players and coaches and model their findings. Other students conduct peer-assessment using a sheet

identifying interpersonal skills. These games are recorded, and students will watch them and conduct a self-assessment on how they demonstrated (or not) the identified interpersonal skills. The students will show evidence of their learning in this learning experience through the peer- and self- assessment sheets. Aspects of the curriculum and instructional model Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR) may assist our instructional strategies in organising and encouraging students to take responsibility for their learning. Elements of Sport Education may also help here given its focus on the roles of coaches, referees and other officials.

The third learning experience (red) sees a guest speaker being invited to speak to the students on prompting and supporting others' participation in physical activity. Students evidence their learning through a question and answer session and by recording key messages related to the characteristics of the guest speaker (related to the learning outcome). Learning outcome 5.2.5 is the heading for the homework task which brings together all of the learning from the previous learning experiences. This can be done through a presentation, essay or Padlet. These three learning experiences prepare students for the rich task (3.4, highlighted in orange) – students have learned the required theoretical and practical knowledge to engage in the rich task.

As described here, and seen in Figure 2, not all of the three learning experiences are integrated learning experiences, but they build into the rich task (i.e., integrated learning experiences alongside learning experiences build into an integrated learning rich task). If we look at the chosen learning outcomes, it may have been presumed that all of these should/can be taught in a theory lesson in a classroom, but we have demonstrated how theoretical and practical knowledge can be taught in the same integrated learning experience. We reflect on this in the next section of the article.



**Figure 2:** Worked example of the teaching template.

<b>Strand(s) and topic(s) in focus</b>	Strand 1 (Towards optimum performance) and Strand 2 (Contemporary issues in physical activity) Topic 3: Structures, strategies, roles and conventions and Topic 5: Promoting physical activity		
<b>How many topics / learning outcomes are to be addressed?</b> 10 learning outcomes across two strands and two topics	<b>Learning outcomes to be addressed:</b> <b>3.2</b> Roles and relationships – Investigate the demands of different roles in terms of the physical personal and technical qualities needed for a successful performance <b>3.5.1</b> Role of coach/choreographer – discuss the demands of non-playing roles including desirable interpersonal skills <b>3.5.4</b> Demonstrate effective communication skills that support positive interaction between coach/choreographer and performer <b>3.5.9</b> Role of coach/choreographer – analyse their own performance in the role of coach/choreographer using a coach/choreographer they admire as a point of reference <b>3.6</b> Role of official – evaluate their role as an official using an official they admire as the reference point <b>5.2.4</b> Analyse physical activity participation patterns in a specific group in your school community <b>5.2.5</b> Evaluate different approaches to physical activity promotion <b>5.3.4</b> Physical activity promotion – discuss the characteristics of significant people who promote and support others’ participation in physical activity <b>5.3.3</b> Design a physical activity promotion and adherence tip sheet for a specific group <b>3.4</b> Rule, rituals and conventions – organise an event/performance in which the particular rules, roles, rituals and conventions of the activity are respected		
<b>Time spent planning:</b>	1 hour spent planning for a 3-4 week plan		
<b>Assessment:</b>	<b>Rich task (3.4):</b> Organise an event/performance in which the particular rules, roles, rituals and conventions of the activity are respected		
<b>Suggested integrated learning experience / activities:</b>	<b>How will students show evidence of their learning? (formative feedback)</b>	<b>Curriculum and instructional model(s):</b>	<b>Related learning outcomes:</b>
<p><b>5.2.4/5.3.3:</b> Students will observe first year physical activity patterns. Students will construct a survey on physical activity patterns. Survey dissemination and data collection of first year cohort to design promotion and tip sheet.</p> <p><b>3.5.1/3.6:</b> Flipped learning of role task based on the learning outcomes – ‘Choose a coach and list the demands of non-playing roles including desirable interpersonal skills, e.g., what does Pep Guardiola do?’ (homework task)</p> <p><b>3.2/3.4.5:</b> Mini-games approach based on learning outcomes with peer assessment (peer assessment sheet based on homework task and 3.4.5) – the mini-games will be recorded.</p> <p><b>3.5.9:</b> Self-assessment by watching the recording and filling out self-assessment sheet.</p> <p><b>5.3.4:</b> Guest speaker speaking to the learning outcome</p> <p><b>5.2.5:</b> Homework task accumulating from all previous learning outcomes (presentation / short essay)</p>	<p>Promotion and tip sheet based on survey</p> <p>Peer-learning sheet Self-assessment sheet</p> <p>Q&amp;As – questions on index cards and key messages/padlet for homework – collective interview (flipped learning)/Kahoot</p>	<p>Cultural Studies (Community Mapping) – how the context in which they live alter PA patterns</p> <p>TPSR – responsibility on the students</p> <p>Sport Education – role of coach, official, referee</p>	
<b>Reflection:</b>			

## Reflections from constructing and working with the integrated learning experiences teaching template

In this section we have captured our reflections and our advice in constructing and working with the integrated learning experiences teaching template. We hope these will help teachers in their planning and teaching integrated learning experiences.

### 1. Integrated learning experiences take additional and more considered planning

Integrated learning experiences are a challenge – it is tough! By working through this process, we have a heightened appreciation of the time it takes to deliver a high-quality (integrated) learning experience. We suggest starting with your strengths – be that the activity specifics or broader learning emphasis. Then work through the teaching template with the learning outcomes at the forefront. It is important to capture the process involved in considering the teaching template, i.e., the sequenced/stepped process to planning. This will help as you begin to use the teaching template more regularly.

### 2. Integrated learning experiences need to be flexible and adaptable to reflect school realities

Constructing this teaching template was a nice reminder of the ever-changing organisation that is a school. The planning for and use of the teaching template must be flexible and adaptable. At times, we felt like we were trying to fit too much into the allocated time and, in some cases, lost the depth and quality of learning and understanding. Start small and start smart!

### 3. Integrated learning experiences require student independent learning

Even with all the planning, this approach relies heavily on students having the ability to work and learn independently. As such, these integrated learning experiences may be more beneficial for students who have experience in working independently. In saying that, the curriculum and instructional models encourage a level of independence and student-centred learning which may assist in the integrated learning experiences.

### 4. The curriculum and instructional models may assist in teaching integrated learning experiences

We suggest that the curriculum and instructional models may be the missing link to integrated learning experiences. For those not as familiar with these models, we have listed them in Table 1 and suggest this Lund and Tannehill's book, along with other online resources, to further your knowledge on these. As seen in our worked example, we used aspects of the curriculum and instructional models to assist us in our planning and teaching of integrated learning experiences. In comparison to more conventional ways of teaching the curriculum and instructional models,

*"...focus on specific, relevant and challenging outcomes that allocate more time for learners to be engaged with learning and that strive toward relevant and challenging outcomes...[the models] involve the students to varying degrees as active learners, allowing them to be fully involved in their own physical education learning experience" (Lund & Tannehill, 2015, p.166-167).*

With integration in mind, the curriculum and instructional models allow the marrying of the theoretical and practical components in physical activity spaces. Through our planning, Joanna and Croidhe believed the use of these models questioned their teaching and allowed them to focus on the learning process rather than the product.

### 5. Blending complementary pedagogical approaches

For LCPE (which consists of 128 learning outcomes across ten topics), the professional development services for teachers in Ireland advocated a non-linear approach to teaching the learning outcomes. This involved constructing a learning experience based on numerous learning outcomes across different topics in the curriculum. As we worked through choosing learning outcomes and particular teaching approaches, we unintentionally focused on a non-linear approach and not on integrated learning experiences. There was a conflict between teaching using an integrated approach (i.e., integrated learning experiences) or teaching in a way that allows the specification, in particular the assessment requirements, to be covered sufficiently (i.e., a non-linear approach). There was also conflict between pedagogical approaches, for example, an integrated



**Table 1:** Curriculum and instructional models.

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION MODELS	
<p><b>Sport Education:</b> “Intended to provide authentic and rich sport opportunities to all students within the context of physical education, helping them develop as skilled and competent sport participants with the skills and understanding of strategies necessary to participate in sport successfully.” (Tannehill, van der Mars &amp; MacPhail, 2015, p.179)</p>	<p><b>Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR):</b> “Based on the belief that the most important thing we can teach students is helping them take responsibility for their own development and well-being and supporting that of others through shared power and gradually shifting responsibility for their learning from the teacher to the student.” (Tannehill, van der Mars &amp; MacPhail, 2015, p.179)</p>
<p><b>Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU):</b> A model that “would focus student attention on the problems posed by game situations and the solutions to those problems.” (Lund &amp; Tannehill, 2015, p.277)</p>	<p><b>Student-Centred Inquiry as Curriculum:</b> “Designed to change schools and physical education to facilitate the learning of all young people through engaging students, seeking their input, listening to and responding to their ideas, and inviting them to participate in the design of the curriculum as a means of empowering them to take responsibility for their own learning.” (Tannehill, van der Mars &amp; MacPhail, 2015, p.179)</p>
<p><b>Adventure Education:</b> “Involves activities that encourage holistic student involvement (physical, cognitive, social and emotional) in a task that involves challenges and an uncertainty of the final outcome. Activities are sequenced to ensure student safety while allowing them to take ownership of their learning.” (Lund &amp; Tannehill, 2015, p.230)</p>	<p><b>Outdoor Education:</b> Is a model whereby “much of the learning that occurs in an outdoor setting is experiential, with activity (the ‘do’ aspect of learning) supporting more formal instruction.” (p.257) It places emphasis on skill development and “focuses more on explicit knowledge and skills that are pertinent to a specific outdoor activity.” (Lund &amp; Tannehill, 2015, p.257).</p>
<p><b>Cultural Studies:</b> “Developed to meet the needs and interest of students from various backgrounds, cultures, socioeconomic levels and communities. The intent is to develop young people as questioning, curious and critical participants in sport and physical activity.” (Tannehill, van der Mars &amp; MacPhail, 2015, p.178)</p>	<p><b>Health and Wellness models:</b> “Focused primarily on giving students the knowledge and skills to make independent decisions on physical activity, and the desire to choose to develop and maintain lifetime physical activity as opposed to a sedentary lifestyle.” (Tannehill, van der Mars &amp; MacPhail, 2015, p.178)</p>

learning approach versus didactic teacher-led pedagogy. We had to overcome this and, in some cases, blend the pedagogical approaches. Again, we encourage teachers to start with what they are comfortable with pedagogically then start to blend pedagogical approaches if needed – it is not a one or the other scenario. We also found ourselves battling with particular learning outcomes that were not conducive to an integrated learning experience, for example, the two highlighted in red (5.3.4 and 5.2.5) in Figure 2. We concluded that not all of the learning outcomes needed to be taught using an integrated approach, particularly when the rich task allowed this to happen organically.

## Conclusion

It is our hope that this article will guide you in constructing integrated learning experiences. Our reflections highlight that this is a difficult but worthwhile process and ultimately benefits the teaching and learning experience for you and your students. It is challenging to think differently and creatively but stick with it. We believe this constructed resource will help with this process. Finally, through our conversations, we believe, to a certain extent, that there is a need to unlearn how we have been taught to teach theory and practice and that the only way to do this is to work with and learn from others in a community of learners.

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